

Northwest 101

Chapter 101

Hes a nobody. Hes one of the sailors who will disappear when we reach Serlio. So, whats so special about him? Why are you only sensitive about Ed when I also quarrel with Marenzio for example?

Shes right.

Cesar realised that hed gone too far with Lil. He began to doubt her affection on a whim, which eventually led him to pay attention to her every move. The whole situation made him anxious, but it wasnt fair to take it out on her.

Im sorry, Liloa.

Lil nodded her head. After Cesar hugged her, he left the captains room.

The fact that I keep getting sensitive isnt good for me nor Liloa, who is clearly having a hard time dealing with my doubts At some point, Edgars play took a turn for the worst and started doing far more damage than I expected.

Cesar had no intention of just watching Ed quietly anymore.

Ed, who was laying on his bed with his back against the headboard, picked his ear and asked for clarity.

Im sorry, what?

Without skipping a beat, Cesar repeated what he had said before.

I told you to not deceive Liloa any further. Stop feeding her bullshit and stop your hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy?

I know what youve been saying to seduce her.

Ed folded his arms and laughed into the empty space.

Hahaha..!

He then shut his mouth and smirked at Cesar.

Oh please enlighten me, how did I seduce her?

Dont be pathetic, you can drop this courteous charade with me.

What is this? Do you see your lover as a fool who falls for some random bullshit?

Anyone can say what Liloa wants to hear. That everyone is the same regardless of social rank, that slaves should be freed or that you can help her do what she wants to do. Isnt that why you helped her without asking anything in return, to tell her that?

Not at all.

Youre just taking the easy way out, I could have done the same if I wanted to.

She can actually do anything without someones help.

I told you to stop pretending in front of me.

But its true.

Cesar had a disgruntled expression on his face that he couldnt shake off. Apparently, Cesar really thought that Ed was only pretending in front of Lil. Ed recalled his memories, wondering when his reputation dropped that low.

Do I really look like someone desperate enough to cast aside his beliefs and win someone over with false pretences?..

So youre willingly giving up parts of yourself for a woman?

Captain. Youre talking nonsense. Do you think Liloa covets your position?

Covet?

Do you think shell eventually end up stealing your position as a man?

Even though Cesar didnt answer, there was a reluctant look on his face.

Do you really think women cant do anything on their own?

Liloa is a woman, and men and women are different. Dont blind her by covering up the obvious.

Different you say, can you even define that difference?

Liloa is in enough danger as it is. This life has always been unpredictable, so how did you even come up with the idea of dragging an injured woman into the sea?

Anyone who hears you would think of her as a glass doll. Diving into the sea is not going to ruin her life, so whats the point in worrying? Shell steadily recover day by day.

Dont talk about Liloa recklessly. I dont treat her like a glass doll, and I dont think she should be treated like one.

But your behaviour contradicts what youre saying. If you say its okay, it should be okay. So, whats stopping you from walking your talk? Its not like youre looking after a child.

Because someone has to protect her.

Ed was beginning to get bored with their conversation. Cesar suddenly came in and delivered a sermon, but there was a limit to accepting such a sermon given Eds feelings for Lil. Ed doesnt want Lil to be unhappy, however part of that happiness was to stay with her current lover for a long time.

How terrible will it be if they think theyre getting along great only to discover that their relationship is deteriorating?

Thats why Cesars actions and words were scrutinised. Ed concluded that Cesars conservative attitude was simply the beginning of their misfortune.

Why do you consider Liloa as weak? From what Ive seen she clearly isnt.

Its my duty to protect her.

She doesnt want that kind of protection if the sole reason is because you see her as weak and fragile. Wasnt that how you treated her during and after the battle with the Marian?

Its only natural for me to worry about her.

Its a problem that youre worried about her because shes a woman, instead of seeing her as a person. You arent worried about her because shes made of muscle and bone but because you see her as a weak woman, right?

As a migraine started to rise, Cesar began to massage his temples. It might have been subtle, but Ed noticed his fatigue.

Weve been talking about Liloa for a while now, but I dont sense any connection between the two of them at all.

Ed tilted his head slightly.

So why is he still on this ship or better why is she still here?

Dont twist my words.

Ed suddenly seemed to realise what the biggest conflict between Cesar and Lil was.

Seeing Cesar making such a fuss about Liloas injury, there is no way he voluntarily approved the life of piracy. Its also clear that Cesar isnt interested in freeing the slaves or working with the Southern League

Ed then recalled the time when Lil was drinking and sobbing alone.

Theres only one ending to this tragedy.

Ed clasped his palms together.

First of all, I would like to say that I have respect for you. I feel like Im witnessing the height of affection.

Cesar was trying to figure out what kind of scheme Ed was plotting. It was clear from Cesars body language, with his arms crossed and his back against the door, that he paid no attention to Eds compliment. Either way, Ed continued to say what he wanted to say. His priority was Lil, and he was willing to help if she was still living in hell.

Its incredible that youve been enduring this for years on end for Liloa. But dont think that just because your happiness isnt here, hers isnt here either. If she did find her happiness on this ship, then thats what it is.

Did you mislead Liloa with those words?

No. How can you or I judge the happiness of others? Only you know your own happiness. Happiness is something that can only bloom in the soil rich of stability. By creating a family or even doing small things. While the happiness of the majority is said to bloom like this, there are flowers that bloom from cliff sides or buds that sprout through the snow.

You really dont know how to value people. Hearing you say this clearly states you dont care about Liloa at all Did you just compare her with a mere flower on a cliffside?

The forms of caring about someone can vary. Dont mistake your happiness for hers. Liloa seems to very well know what to do to be happy. She is not a woman, but Liloa. Dont lock her up in the frame of a woman known for only this or that.

I have never, nor do I intend to do so. If I thought of Liloa as an ordinary woman, do you think I would have followed her here? Dont make careless assumptions.

Ed groaned and laid his body straight on his back.

Its clear that this discussion will only be running in circles as neither of us has any intention of backing down on our statement I cant believe he thinks that her happiness is the least important thing in this arduous relationship.

Ed, stretched out on the bed, looked somewhere at the ceiling and muttered.

If you continue to think like that, you wont be able to see the blind spot You and Liloa will suffer terribly

Cesar no longer felt the need to waste more words on this conversation. He sensed a terrible arrogance in Eds eagerness to intervene in a relationship between a man and a woman that only the two of them knew.

That and Edgars smug attitude as if he knows Liloa well.

Cesar left the cabin without saying a word.

Ed pressed his hat down and went up the stairs to the upper deck. The rain, which could be heard raging from the moment he walked through the artillery deck, had become considerably louder. Due to the rain falling sideways, he had to block the incoming water from his face with his hand, despite wearing a hat. The floor of the upper deck was littered with buckets to collect rainwater and on the bow side of the ship, near the figurehead, was a bathing party in full swing.

The schedule is likely to be delayed for a few days due to the weather and the shelled hull that needs to be repaired. Even if this is the case, its not a major setback because well have enough water. Of course, assuming that this rain does not turn into a storm

Ed looked up at the sailors tidying up the bow. Seeing them moving cautiously in the rain, it seemed that several people were injured. He then turned towards the captains room. As the hull, riding the waves, swayed, several buckets rolled from left to right. Eds shin was hit by an incoming bucket, fuelling his already high discontent.

I told her to come find me if the medicine would wear off or if the pain would become too much So, why am I the one who needs to drag his precious body through this weather if shes the one who didnt visit me on time?

Muttering a curse, Ed kicked the bucket that hit him exactly in the shin.

Boom. Thurr

The bucket that rolled with a dull sound came to a stop against someones calf. Ed looked up to that certain someone without much thought.

Captain?

Ed used his forearms to wipe the rainwater from his eyes. After taking a closer look, he confirmed it was indeed Lil and he ran up to her.

No, with all this rain Captain? Captain! What are you doing here?

Ed grabbed Lil by the shoulder and shook her. Whenever she shook, rainwater that had accumulated all over her body flowed down. Lil was completely soaked. Her lips were blue and her body temperature was ridiculously low. Ed couldn't even imagine how long she had been standing there.

Are you crazy?

It hurts

Where?!

Ed soon realised that his question was of no use.

Since she didn't take the medicine on time, she must have been suffering from the pain for at least a few hours now.

Lil had wounds on her sides, forehead, hands and arms, along with large and small bruises. And standing in this downpour was only making things worse.

Ed shouted, putting his hat on her.

Come inside at once!

However, Lil didn't budge. Although she didn't take a single step nor took off his hat, she couldn't hold out against the hands that turned her shoulders. Ed grabbed Lil, who seemed to have lost her soul and entered the captain's room. He removed his raincoat and tossed it on the floor before walking around the room and setting his bag down.

Where are the towels?

As expected, there was no answer. Ed stared at Lil, who was sitting absent-mindedly in a chair next to the door, before opening a chest under the bed which he thought was supposed to be a closet. Fortunately, there were indeed clothes and some towels in it. Taking three or four of them, he approached her.

Why the hell did you do that?

Ed scrubbed her hair with a dry towel. He knew she was completely out of her mind as she didn't respond to his kindness. When her hair wasn't soaked anymore, he handed a dry robe to her.

Go wash up and change your clothes. How can I examine you like this.

Do it now before I undress you myself.

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Sighing deeply, Lil snatched the robe from Ed without much strength. When she left to change, Ed dragged a chair from the desk and sat on the side of the bed. After a while, Lil sat on the bed and repeated what she said a while ago like a broken organ.

It hurts.

Knitting his brows, Ed took her hand.

Of course, it hurts. Did you think it wouldn't start to hurt when you've endured it for hours? Not to mention that your body is exhausted.

It didn't hurt in the sea.

That's because you were on painkillers and no ordinary ones either.

Ed clicked his tongue like an old man as he took her temperature. He then gathered all items that could be of use to keep Lil warm such as blankets and coats, from the chest and poured them onto her.

Your stamina also took a hit you seem to have overworked yourself. Although it was me who dragged you into the sea by force I really think you'd better take a rest today.

Where's the bandage I gave you?

Lil moved her head towards the window. Ed leaned over and pulled the bandage lying on the windowsill.

I can't believe you tried to dry this precious thing like this.

Grumbling, Ed stretched the bandage tightly and shook his head in disappointment.

Your robe

Lil had already pulled her robe down her shoulders before Ed could finish talking. Ed raised his eyebrows when the great man, who had been raging at him just yesterday, acted in such an obedient manner. Lil, on the other hand, remained calm, it seemed that her embarrassment had faded into indifference. Ed talked to her while wrapping a bandage over her torso.

When I saw you yesterday, you were just as excited as I was.

You've seen a mermaid, a mermaid!

Oh, that's

For a short moment, Lil smiled faintly as if recalling a good memory before it died out again. Her lips twitched lifelessly. Ed thought it would be better if he didn't try to be funny. Nevertheless, he couldn't give up on a story that would cheer her up. In his experience as a doctor, the patient's mental health played a very important role in their recovery.

She has even hung pearls on your hair and given us a ride on her horse. Just reminiscing makes you feel overwhelmed and solemn about the wonders of the world, doesn't it?

Yeah.

As if she knew his words were sincere, a smile appeared on her lips and this time, it didn't fade away. Ed was encouraged when she finally showed a positive reaction.

Isn't it amazing? Like humans riding horses, they move by animals just the same. Well, without horseshoes and reins of course.

Yeah

After wrapping her in bandages, Ed carefully adjusted her robe.

You are truly an extraordinary person. Although rare races are no different from ordinary humans, it's really hard to think they're exactly the same as us. One could easily and unconsciously assume that they are inferior to human civilization. The typical prejudice is that their intelligence will be low and they follow barbaric customs. Some people look down on buildings made out of clay rather

than stone, even though there isn't any evidence that confirms that stone houses are superior to clay ones.

Rare races

Lil remembered the days when the Ruwa tribe from Western Continent was the most discussed topic in Sesbron. Even when they all perished due to a mysterious disease, some of the nobility were unable to let go of their obsession to own the beautiful race and sought out a substitute for a long time. Of course, the Duke of Mireille was among them. In addition to the unique race, the duke held a large number of slaves purchased from many different continents. In that period Mortus voice always hunted her there. Lil lost herself in her past

flashback

Lil could not stand it and started shouting.

They're still humans! What else is this child's blood that he's spilling if not human?!

The duke was sitting under an ornate awning, watching the ceremonial whipping. Lil also sat beside the duke and watched it. No, she was forced to watch it. As usual, Mireille insulted her by comparing her voice with the barking of a dog whenever she said something he didn't want to hear.

Barking again? Are you telling me that you and I are the same? Or even worse, that that child and I are the same?

Mireille waved his hand with a sigh. An attendant gave him a cigarette and lit it.

When will you use your human voice? Why can you not understand that you and I are different? Women are not only physically weak, but they're also unable to think rationally. Always struggling with those annoying emotions.

Tsk, what kind of freak are you if you can not even complete the most basic of tasks? How hard is it to stay quietly by my side and execute the virtue of obedience when we're among people?

end flashback

Whipping is a common practice. On that day, Mireille decided to attend it on a whim, but it was normally seen as just another trivial routine. All kinds of cruel things happen on a daily basis, not only in the duchy, but everywhere in Sesbron. Sexual torture, in particular, persisted as if it were natural for female slaves. This is all because the majority of slaves are immigrants, and at the time, mixed blood was the obsession

Lil suddenly raised her head. When a terrible premonition captured her, a hoarse voice came out.

Ed. Jacques Poussin was originally ordered to capture a male and female pair. But the Duke said it'd also be okay if it was just a female

Any form of expression faded from her paling face.

It'd be fine as they could at least mate what does that mean

I'll tell you later, focus on your treatment for now.

No. I want to hear it right now.

Ed hesitated noticeably. Lil intended to wait until he told her and put the ointment he offered down.

It may have sounded romantic when I read it in fairytales, but its weird to suddenly call it mating.

As youve guessed, mermaids and humans can produce children. According to the records, the children who inherited the blood of the two races were generally in the form of a mermaid, but theyd be more human-like in appearance and skin.

Then, could Bell Rock

Yes, Bell Rock was of mixed blood. Thats why shes best known to humans and portrayed with a human-like face. Throughout ancient times, exchanges between mermaids and humans occurred in certain periods.

Does the Duke know about that?

Most likely, thats why he said itd be okay if only a female was captured. Ancient times arent just a distant era anymore. If youd like, you can dig up as much as you want about it.

Lils face looked disgruntled, causing Ed to immediately regret his decision.

As expected, it wouldve been better to tell Liloa later.

He began to busily move his hands, applying ointment to her bruised wounds and then wrapped them in a flax cloth. He quickly finished the treatment and assisted her to lie down.

But youve shattered his ambition, havent you? What are you still worrying about? Bellus is smart, so shell definitely take measures to prevent another capture. In addition, unlike other races, they live underwater, so hunting them down would be impossible.

Lil slowly turned her head and stared into space. An empty voice murmured.

Theres no end

Ed eventually broke the silence and replied while examining Lils forehead.

It will stop someday. Just like you said.

When will when will it be

You can speed it up.

Lil let out a hollow laugh. She once had such a dream. Shortly after entering Lebrun, Lil had nothing to fear. It felt like she could grasp the future with both hands and pull it into reality. But in the end, there was nothing she could do.

No, there was nothing I was allowed to do

Lil thought that Ed suspected that she was an Imperial citizen and that that was the reason he could say that much. Suddenly, she wondered if Ed would still make such a suggestion if he knew her real gender.

Lil looked at the top of his head as he was busy examining the bruise on her knee.

Regardless of who I am?

What?

I

..?

Even if Im actually a woman

Anything

Would you still treat me in the same way?

Would you still say its an honour to meet me?

Ed knew what she was trying to say without the need to actually hear it. It was a question he could answer most confidently.

Of course.

How can you be so sure?

Eds heart raced, for hed been waiting for this moment. There were definitely women in the past with strong determination like Lil. However, on the spot where their seeds failed to sow and withered, Lils sprouted. Ed had already taken a sneak at Lils delicate bud. It was in Panichi, where she spoke her thoughts for the first time, visibly embarrassed when hearing her own voice. Even though Ed wasnt a farmer himself, he did get to see her buds every now and then. It felt like an honour, especially when the life of such young sprouts was precarious.

Everyone knows that seeds sown in barren soil have stronger roots.

Captain, do you think the fragile sprouts that grew through adversity are insignificant or do you think they are full of greatness?

Lies just stop it.

..!

Somehow, Ed got the impression that Lil was crying. From the start, she found it ridiculous to shed tears in front of him, but now she only found it uncomfortable. Ed slowly checked up on her more closely.

No, she had been holding back.

The moment he started to look up at her, Ed saw black hair down to her waist. Lil Schweizs hair, as far as he knew, was only a little above the shoulders. Lils wet, wavy hair, on the other hand, was flowing over her robe. Some locks fell on the back of her hands which were resting on her lap. Ed noticed that her hands were similar to the ones he saw at Count Darlans house. Hands and arms forged from her naturally thin skeleton. Doubt began to creep into his mind. His heart was racing impatiently, not knowing what was happening. He raised his gaze a little higher, only to see that the robe she was wearing was much looser than it had been before.

How can this be?

Ignoring Lils swelling chest inside the robe, Ed first checked her necklace.

Through the hem, a necklace with an unchanging presence could be seen. Its red light flashed dimly. Ed initially thought Lil might have taken off her necklace, but upon this confirmation, his mind was thrown into uncontrollable confusion.

Her necklace is still there

Terrified, he lifted his head.

You're not really in the position to be boasting with such pretences

Ed held his breath as he tried to look away. Meanwhile, Lil whose eyelashes were wet either due to the rain or tears, laughed. The woman laughed.

How

A beautiful voice that he had heard before rang.

But let's be fooled and believe you.

..!

Ed dropped the medicine bottle he was holding. It was hard to breathe as if his airway had been cut off. His lips kept moving in order to say something, but in the end, no voice came out.

The woman then spoke with a confused face whether she was laughing or crying.

Because I've already believed too much to not believe again

END OF VOLUME 3

Chapter 103

Side story 2 Edgars Chapter 1: The Forest

Southwestern tip of the Anatole Sea.

The waves of the ocean rippled like the shell of an enormous dragon. Amid this banquet of dark blue scales glistening in the sun, was a small fleet that dared to climb the dragons back.

The scene seemed peaceful at first as the sea was calm and majestic. However, the fleet had suffered from mucosal bleeding for months. Scurvy. Its unwanted companion on long-distance voyages. Groans constantly filled the deck below. The crew, weary of the deaths that happened one after the other, were looking up at the watchtower. Their first and foremost priority was to find land. With the entire fleet clinging to life, it might have been obvious to send the most experienced watchman up, yet the highest watchtower on this flotilla* was manned by a young boy.

In addition, the boy wasn't a full-fledged watchman either. Originally, the boy, who had pushed the watchman to a lower tower and occupied the main watchtower by himself, was wearing a cap with an officer's mark.

No, he's sixteen, so he's too old to still be called a boy.

However, even for a young man, he had an ambiguous face. In a way, he looked younger than his peers. His attire was also casual without a trace of a uniform, if it weren't for his hat, anyone would have considered him a young sailor.

Complaints about it flowed around deck. Despite this, the youngster continued to stretch his neck and stared straight ahead. He was wearing something that resembled an enormous, thick spectacles over his eyes, and as the wind blew, his bangs scattered in front of his face. He swept his hair back irritably. Suddenly, he saw a shadow through his locks. A figure drifted between the mist on the horizon. The boy examined it calmly. Soon after, when he was certain, a voice that was still in its teens yelled excitedly.

I can see the Southern Island! Southwest, about 100 morts!

Another watchman from the watchtower below shouted.

What?! Sir Edgar! Are you sure?

Call Grandpa!

When the watchman below didnt respond, Edgar dipped his head over the railing to inspect. The watchman surreptitiously peered southwest towards the island, as if he needed to confirm it himself. To Edgar, who was still wearing those weird-looking glasses, the top of the suspicious watchmans head appeared to be so close that he thought he could reach it if he stretched his hand. What Edgar was holding were revolutionary telescopic spectacles that he invented himself. Edgar locked his sight on the watchmans crown, counting the latters few remaining hairs. From this distance, the human hairs appeared to be as thick as a snakes body. The watchman eventually raised his head, presumably wondering why Edgar was so quiet.

Aaaack!

Edgar let out a strange laugh upon seeing the watchmans surprised face and wide-open eyes. The watchman hurriedly began to lower the mast line, but didnt forget to glance at Edgar now and then as if he were looking at a madman. Edgar still had his eyes, which looked like those of a dragonfly due to the device, fixed on him. The watchman shrugged his shoulders.

Last night, several sailors were shocked, saying something about witnessing a giant dragonfly. Im starting to doubt if they truly saw a monster or just this kid.

Crazy

The watchman continued climbing down to the deck, while trying to ignore the youngster still staring at him.

Ive heard stories about the Marquess of Roahns grandson, but as expected, hearing it a hundred times didnt prepare me for experiencing it once. The eccentricity of the Marquess family is well known among Sesbrons residents, but this grandson is said to easily beat his grandfather in that department

The watchman muttered quietly, in case Edgar would hear.

I cant believe he likes those dragonfly eyes so much

He kept thinking about it all the way to the captains office. When he knocked on the door, the door burst open instead of hearing the command to enter. The wind caused by opening it so fast was enough to blow his hat off. The watchman quickly bent down to pick up his hat as two large boots entered his field of vision. The watchman then slowly raised his body and eyes. A man, two heads taller than him, could be seen twisting his dark moustache in the doorway. The marquess spoke before the watchman could even pull himself together.

Whats going on?

The watchman quickly sprang to his feet in order to greet him. In return, the marquess nodded his head while chewing on his smokeless pipe.

Sir Edgar claims to have discovered the Southern Island, Marquess.

Where is he?

He is occupying the main masts watchtower without permission.

Hmm Looks like the light gathered well.

Pardon?

Ignoring the question, the Marquess motioned for him to move. Fearing to be crushed and killed, the watchman hurriedly fled to the side of the door. He kept his gaze on the marquess as the latter passed by, producing a dull breeze. Even though the watchman saw the marquess every day for the past few months, he couldnt adjust to such a sight, mainly due to the old mans huge body. He was aware that most people from the Northern Continent had slimmer physiques and were at least a head or two taller than those from the Empire. But even among them, the Marquess of Roahn seemed to stand out. It was because he was both tall and broad.

The watchman pondered once more how a slim person like Edgar could be a descendant from such a massive body. The marquess grandchild bore little resemblance to him. Of course, everyone knew that the Marquess wife was an Empire native and that Edgar grew up with the Marquess love due to him resembling his late grandmother so much. But still, the watchman couldnt help but notice how little the pair of grandfather and grandson looked alike.

The Marquess approached the main mast while holding Edgars coat. In his huge palms, the piece of fabric was reduced to the size of a handkerchief.

Knox!

Edgar, who was at the top of the main mast, looked down at his grandfather with the same dragonfly eyes.

Come down. Youll catch a cold.

Grandpa. I can see the Southern Island!

Thats great, now come down.

I cant believe its real!

Knox!

From above, the dragonfly boy began to descend the mast line. No matter the circumstances, the Marquess was the only person who could make Edgar move.

The Western Continent. Duasuhai.

A foreign world, with a strange ecosystem and various races.

When Eichendorff crossed the Monferrand Strait from the Northern Continent to the Central Continent, the quick-witted King of Alsace recognized the possibilities of obtaining another continent. The king began amassing a fortune through monopolistic commerce with ships from and to the Northern Continent. Alsace grew affluent by leaps and bounds, and gradually acquired and incorporated neighbouring kingdoms through battles and mergers. The large number of slaves he seized from that created a valuable labour force for the galleys. With this, all the elements needed to prepare for an expedition towards a new continent were falling into place.

Thus, the Western Continent was discovered and named the land of gold as gold poured out quite literally. With the kingdom possessing a vast territory, consisting of the West, part of the Western Continent and the Anatole sea between them, the king no longer considered himself a King who merely ruled a narrow and useless land. No, he reigned as king over all kings and his kingdom eventually became an empire ruled by an emperor.

However, the Empire desired control over the entire Western Continent. So, a fleet was sent up the strong stream of the river going inland from the Northern Island of the Western Continent. Despite the current, the expedition's biggest challenge was navigating through the waterfalls and rapids. Furthermore, there was a tribe that commanded enormous birds beyond there, so it wasn't easy to conquer. The sailors were basically sitting ducks if they were attacked while crossing the river.

That's how, after the first appearance of Eichendorff, 80 years of stagnation followed.

Unable to endure such sluggishness, the explorers and navy of the Empire turned their bows to the so-called Southern Island of the Western Continent, visible beyond the southern coast of the Northern Island. Leading the expedition was Glock Eichendorff-Retiro, Marquess of Roahn and heiress of Eichendorff's blood.

The Marquess brought along his grandson, whom he had raised since the age of ten on his flagship, *The Adventure*. In addition to his grandson's likeness to his deceased wife, he treasured him even more because the kid shared his passion for adventure. The Marquess was an eccentric and turbulent old man, but after Edgar's parents died, he made sure that the boy could freely grow within his guardianship. This upbringing made Edgar into a troublemaker who did all sorts of strange things.

And the strange thing he came up with today was to explore the coastal jungle.

Edgar had been keeping his eye on this location for some days now. Because the rainforest was perilous, it was ranked last in the expedition's priorities. Furthermore, because it was the first landing, the expedition had no intention of naming the lands and rivers after the emperor just yet. Of course, when the time comes, a sinister woodland would be nothing more than a cold dinner. But Edgar knew that the true treasure trove was that rainforest. There were tens of thousands of animals and plants here, which all could be used for new medicines. He was a dedicated medical student who was eager to learn about new treatments. Also, his expectations were high for this expedition due to the several accomplishments in the Northern Islands' forests.

Standing on the beach, Edgar inhaled deeply for no apparent reason and carefully inspected the entrance of the jungle. The tree at the edge of the jungle looked about 600 meters away. The closer he came, the thicker the humidity got.

When he walked through the jungle, Edgar felt convinced that he was already familiar with this vegetation because he had encountered it on the Northern Island. However, some of the tracks were a bit odd. It looked like a hole was pierced through the dense woodland and created a path. Something massive seems to have broken through the forest. Edgar followed the track, stepping over remnants of splintered trees everywhere. He felt fortunate to come across a pre-planned path, for he didn't have to cut the vine to continue his way forward. That luck, however, was simply for his convenience, as he didn't enjoy the idea that an animal able to make such a mess was close by. The jungle's predators were not human, so he was little more than a wee creature here.

Side story 2 Edgars Chapter 1: The Forest

Edgar raised his head a little. The sunlight barely penetrated the layers of leaves. Dense tree trunks were wrapped in drooping vines like rags. The sound of rustling leaves and chirping birds could be heard constantly. Monkeys and birds hanging from tall tree branches observed the strange being walking on his two legs. When a monkey reached out its long arm and broke a branch, the fruit hanging from it fell. The red fruit burst at his feet. A bit startled by the sudden movement, Ed looked down. Poisonous creatures such as snakes and scorpions roamed the ground. They were probably the most dangerous predators out here. The sudden realisation made him swallow his dried saliva.

The smell of decaying leaves permeated the jungle. Edgars entire body has been soaked with sweat for quite some time now as he had been walking for over half a day without yielding any results. The sun was going to set. Even during the day, the sky was barely visible, so at night the area would be completely submerged in darkness. He was in a hurry to find a place to hide. He turned his body to look around, hoping to find a suitable cave or clearing. At that moment

Paahhwoooooo!

An unfamiliar roar echoed through the forest. Birds sitting on branches flapped their wings and took off. All the while the rustling sounds of leaves signalled that small unseen creatures were fleeing away. Edgar calmly looked around, not knowing what he had heard.

Paahhwoooooo!

Thump! Thump!

The ground under his feet vibrated. It was the gait of a four-legged animal.

Is it a bear? No, it sounds much heavier and clunky than that. One, two

While counting, Edgar had an epiphany. The vibration that was getting closer was so powerful that it was beyond comprehension. Encountering only one of those creatures would be terrifying enough, thus knowing the actual number of creatures was pointless. He heard the snapping and breaking of wood. One of the beasts approached slowly, stepping on and crushing the fallen trees. Edgar recalled the path at the beginning of the jungle.

The endless wreckage of trees

The owner of the road was coming.

Judging by the size that pierced the forest, it was highly likely that it was a giant animal. Edgar, who wanted to conceal his presence as much as possible, started to move quick but stealthily in the opposite direction.

It would be nice if I could hide my body, but I cant see a single cave nearby.

He pushed forward frantically, cutting through leaves the size of his torso. Suddenly, Ed could only hear the rustling of large blades of grass. He stopped abruptly. The leaves that were in contact with his body fluttered, before falling still. At this point, the prey could only hear his own breathing. There were no vibrations.

This isnt good.

Edgar involuntarily looked back. Green leaves three times the size of his face filled his vision. With bated breath, he slowly pushed away the leaves. Another blade of grass slapped his forehead. Edgar grabbed it by the edge to take it off. But, all of a sudden, the fine patterns of the leaf veins seemed to shudder

Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump!

Ouch! Wack! Aaaaaaagh!

Edgar sprinted with all his might.

Its only a matter of time before I get caught up

He hurriedly clung to the strongest-looking tree in front of him.

Shit, its heavy, but I cant afford to lose my backpack.

Although the tree was slippery because of the vines attached to it, they also made it easier to climb as the loops served as a footrest. The chimpanzee at the top of the tree looked down at him, grabbed another tree with his long arms, and quickly disappeared. Edgar was sure. The predator was coming this way.

Paahhwoooooo!

Boom!

The tree shook violently. Edgar couldnt withstand the shock and his foot slipped, fortunately he was quick enough to grab a branch.

Boom!

This time, the impact was even stronger. Staggering, Edgar tightened his legs around the tree and looked down. It was a grey-coloured creature with large ears and a nose that he had never seen before. Even from above, the animal was the size of a house. The weird-looking beast had an incredibly long thick nose and a pair of white horns which he used to ram the tree.

Boom!

Broken stems and fruits fell over his head, in response Edgar hunched his shoulders. The monster roared loudly at him.

That Whats that?!

Boom!

Despite his disbelief, Edgar grabbed a vine and climbed up. But the higher he went, the thinner the tree became. It was obvious that if he went even higher, the tree wouldnt be able to support his weight.

The tree looked really strong from above ground, but with that creatures immense force, it will only be a matter of time before the trunk breaks

Edgar turned his gaze to the nearest tree. Unfortunately, his arms couldnt reach that far. There were no surrounding vines that could act as ropes either. It began to dawn on him that there was no way out.

Boom!

Death shook his body more intensely than ever.

Paahhwooooooo!

A second roar overlapped the first one. Creatures from all over were coming this way, bumping into trees.

Thump! Thump!

The tree, which had seemed so strong, was swaying like a mere aspen.

Boom!

His slipping foot lost its support and his body sank in a flash. Edgar broke some vines when he gripped them for dear life.

Thussss.

Out of luck, a vine that was pulled from the tree got caught on a branch. Edgar lifted himself up and breathlessly held the tree like a sloth. Upon regaining himself, he looked down. Two more houses appeared.

Huh, one of them looks a bit weird Is it carrying something on its back?!

Even with his view turned, Edgar was confident that he wasn't mistaken. On the back of that giant animal sat a beautiful creature. Although he was knocking on death's door, his eyes gleamed with curiosity. The creature on the beast's back had silver-red skin, long white hair, and its attractive eyes shone brightly amid the night. The creature's delicate red eyes were fixed on him. Edgar completely forgot about the urgency of his situation and exclaimed.

A fa..Fairy?!

Boom!

The giant beast hit the wooden pole again. The shock was so heavy that his bones vibrated and he almost lost his mind. As he tried to find the fairy in his fluctuating vision, something whitish appeared at the corner of his eye. By instinct, a rescue request burst out.

He, help me Aaahh!

CRACKKK!

As soon as he heard the trunk break, his body tilted forward. In the end, Edgar closed his eyes, accepting his fate of dying from falling out of a tree.

Edgar opened his eyes sparsely. As if on a boat, his body moved up and down. He soon lost consciousness again before he could inspect if it was indeed the sea.

After a while, he reopened his eyes. His vision was hazy this time. He had no idea where he was, but his body was no longer floating. He got the impression that he was lying on a flat surface, inside a cool structure. He could also freely move his fingers and toes.

He slowly regained his focus. The building was a stone structure elaborately made by human hands. Candlesticks and rugs adorned the walls. Edgar turned his head from one side to the other.

Chanjamka!

Chanjanukha!

Creatures with pink skin huddled together and shouted. Edgars eyes widened in surprise. Several pairs of red eyes were looking at him. He recognized at once that they were the same as the fairy riding on the monsters back. The forest fairies seemed to have a similar appearance to that of a ten-year-old human. Their pale hair was braided and tied in all kinds of fancy ways, and they wore thin white robes that covered their whole body, also similar to humans.

Azabu!

A small hand popped out and pulled his hair. Edgar, whose scalp was tingled, said just one word.

Ah.

Normally, an exclamation of pain would be enough to make people stop, but it didnt work this time. As if they all had been waiting, another hand came out and pinched his cheek, while the following hand moved back and forth between his nostril and his teeth.

Its true that they saved me as I requested, however, the longer I lie here, the more I feel my gratitude disappearing

Swijika!

Awooo, swijika!

Two fairies went even further, crawling on top of him and peering inside his clothes. Being surrounded by little, wiggling creatures was neither terrifying nor unpleasant.

Didnt I once read about a fairy half the size of a human who lived in ancient times? Is that why theyre so small? Because theyre fairies?

In the end, he left them be.

A fantasy No, as I dont seem to have any energy, it is more likely to be just a dream Its definitely a dream. What better explanation can there be for the combination of monsters and fairies than a dream?

He thought of focusing on his dreams to wake up comfortably.

To dream, I have to close my eyes first

Chapter 105

Paahhwoooooo!

Edgars eyes, which were about to close, flashed open. He reflexively raised himself, causing the two fairies on top of his stomach and chest to slip down. One of the fallen fairies screamed loudly and ran outside with tears in her eyes.

Tsk. Thats what you get for climbing on someones body.

Edgar snorted while staring at the fairys tiny back.

As the situation progressed, the rest of the fairies began to pay closer attention to him. It seemed that they were more afraid of him than of the roar outside.

Judging from their reactions, they even seem to completely ignore the monsters cry

But as soon as he thought about it

Paahhwoooooo!

Im not hallucinating

The air was vibrating so intensely that it couldnt possibly be a delusion. Edgar dragged himself out of bed. A lot of eyes were on him, following him like a newborn would follow its mother. He didnt have to worry about finding the exit because it was a building with no doors, only arches. As wind was scarce in a jungle, the structures didnt have any constructive purposes, so the architecture could be open and light. Edgar stepped out into the open space beyond the door that was no door. It wasnt until Edgar emphasised the word open space that he realised something was off. There was a wide-open plain right in front of his eyes. A flat levelled land in the middle of the jungle. No rotten leaves or fallen trees in sight, and the meadows were neither wet nor slick. What was even more shocking was the herd of grey monsters strolling around. Flapping their huge ears and rolling their weird-looking noses. Their enormous horns, which were used to ram the tree he had climbed in, looked threatening even from a distance. When his legs trembled, Edgar leaned against the stone wall with a groan.

Habari!

Suddenly, a voice rang close to his ear. Edgar involuntarily looked to the side.

Ack! Ughh really!

There was a face directly in front of him. A face with delicate pink skin that he still had to get used to. Feeling uncomfortable, Edgar straightened out his shaking knees. This fairy, however, was about the same height as him.

It seems that not all fairies are the size of a human child.

Looking down, he noticed the fairy that had fled weeping before, was now hiding behind the leg of the larger fairy. Only then did Edgar assume he was looking at another human race.

Habari?

It wasnt one of the foreign languages he could speak. Hearing them speak in their own language, amplified his suspicion and he concluded that he was indeed in the presence of another race.

I dont know what you mean.

The fairy appeared bewildered.

Seeing his widened eyes and his hesitation to move, he must be at a loss for words.

Edgar was taken aback by the human expression. Even though the larger fairys physique was no different from that of a human, Edgar had difficulty recognizing the stranger as one, maybe due to his unique skin tone.

But, thats probably the same for the fairy.

Edgar subtly took in his surroundings. A swarm of bystanders was gradually gathering around them.

Unatoka wafi?

Apparently, only these fairies live here. They all have pinkish faces and white hair. Neither residents from the Northern nor the Southern Island of the Western Continent resemble them. Its a completely new race

In an attempt to communicate, Edgar sat down on the ground and picked up a branch. He then scribbled several lines in several languages, including his own Imperial language, in the dirt.

Do you recognise anything from here?

The fairy tilted his head, sat down next to him, and also grabbed a branch from nearby. Before long, fine dust erupted from the blunt tip. The sand paintings flowed like a river from top to bottom telling the story of life. Edgars mouth fell open seeing the elaborate depiction. It started with the moment the fairy rescued him it seems that the fairy riding one of the monsters was the larger fairy next to him after that several illustrations were pasted together. Lastly, the fairy drew the sky, the river, and the ground. While checking his appearance from time to time, the fairy drew a portrait resembling Edgar next to it. It seemed to ask where he came from.

Edgar drew a crooked central continent.

I came from the Central Continent. No, from your point of view, its the Eastern Continent, right? Well, in my home country we actually call it the Southern Continent. So its safe to say you guys call it the Eastern Continent Do you understand? I came from the East over the sea.

He drew waves on the ground in a way a five-year-old would. The fairies gathered around him began to mutter, frowning at his incredibly bad drawing skills. Edgar was also on the verge of admitting to himself that it was the biggest rubbish of his life. He never considered himself to be a lousy artist, but the twigs made for poor brushes and a dirty floor as their canvas didnt help either. In the end, he irritably threw the branch away and turned to the fairy.

I guess you dont have a written language. All right.

He pointed to his chest.

Edgar.

He then turned his finger to the fairy and raised his eyebrows. In response, the fairy opened his eyes wide and raised his eyebrows too. Seeing the expression, Edgar shook his head with an exaggerated smile. The fairy tilted his head after him with a confused face, but then

Chippo.

Edgar rejoiced and asked.

Chippo?

Chippo.

The fairy nodded. Edgar pointed to himself with a cheerful response.

Edgar.

Chippo then clapped his hands and laughed. Edgar was shocked to hear both laughter and clapping at the same time. He never imagined that such a combination would be so widespread.

Chippo then continued while pointing his finger at Edgar.

Jina raco ni nani?

What? Jina raco ni nani?

Eh! Jina raco ni nani?

Jina Ah, Edgar.

Edgar pointed at himself and pretended to know.

Edgar.

Chippo smiled brightly. The fairies around them pointed at Edgar and murmured.

Edgar

Edgar

As they did, Edgar realised there were more people around them than he had assumed at first. Feeling a bit embarrassed by his sudden outburst, he quickly put on a straight face.

For a moment, I got carried away by this mysterious exchange of words.

He stood solemnly and looked around the group of fairies. He managed a broad smile before, but he actually wasn't a friendly person by nature. Edgar coughed against his fist and soon reverted to the role of objective observer and studied them.

First of all, it seems that it's their first time to see an outsider. Regardless if they're an adult or a child, they are looking at me like I'm some kind of rare monkey. Nevertheless, it's pretty naive of them to not sense any hostility.

The young ones even poked his bare feet with some branches.

The clothes and appearance of each of them are different, but overall, all of them look very appealing. Perhaps because of their skin or hair colour. It's dazzling to see them under the unobscured sunlight.

After turning his head, Edgar stood up. He decided that it would be better to look around the village than to sit here when they couldn't even communicate. When he walked away, a few of the children followed closely behind him.

Even though it wasn't large, he spent several hours exploring the unfamiliar terrain. He didn't know if there were other villages like this in the jungle. But he estimated that there were around 200 fairies living in this village.

A village filled with flat plains in the middle of a jungle. He looked around once more. Buildings were made with rocks cut into a specific size and their outer walls were ornamented with a harmony of detailed intaglios and embossments.

I have never seen anything like this before. No, I can't even comprehend how a stone this large can exist in a jungle without a quarry.

The most impressive piece of architecture was the temple-like building in front of him. A magnificent structure stood in the centre of the plaza where Edgar was. The temple was so high, that the entrance wasn't even visible from the ground and dozens of grey beasts slowly roamed around it as if they were its guardians. Some of the monsters carried a fairy on its back.

In ancient times, people used to pray to the gods and offer them food.

Edgar was particularly keen on the religious structure. Although this tribe could simply worship another random person, Edgar couldn't help but associate the temple with the ancient unknown because he kept thinking of them as fairies. Edgar had little interest in new races or myths, but he didn't want to waste this one-of-a-kind experience. Furthermore, even from a distance, the temple was magnificent and shined brightly in the sun as if it was polished every day.

Chapter 106

I don't know how long the history of this race is, but it's clear that they have some kind of traditions related to the temple.

Edgar proceeded carefully to the temple, avoiding the grey monsters. Chippo, who was seen riding a monster from afar, waved his hand. Edgar nervously returned the hand gesture.

This tiny race rides those monsters as if they're horses. No, horses are kept in stables; these grey beasts are treated more like pet dogs rather than horses, akin to how dogs roam the front yard without a leash.

Edgar's wild imagination started to believe that the fairies possessed some kind of hidden ability.

Like being able to communicate with animals or control them with magic.

A faint string sound could be heard as he moved closer to the temple. As he expected, there was no door; instead, thin layers of fabric, comparable to muslin, were hung over the entrance. In front of it, white flower petals were laid at the foot of the stairs. Footprints were imprinted on them as if they'd been sprinkled to be stepped on. Edgar walked on the little petals and climbed the stairs. The melancholy string music flowed like thin vapour between the muslins. He wanted to hear some more, but it vanished without a trace. Unconsciously led by the faint music, he ascended the last steps.

The rolled-up muslin brushed against the side of his ear and revealed the bright interior of the temple.

No, actually, it's the innermost part, resembling an altar, that's particularly bright.

Edgar strolled gently along an aisle with colonnades on both sides. Four slim pillars encircled the round altar, subtly ornamented with muslin drapes. Edgar slightly raised his gaze. The sun was pouring in through the open ceiling above the altar, and the misty curtains flooded with circular rays of light.

The brightness made it seem like he was in a different world. And the closer he got, the louder the music spread. A beautiful tune that he'd never heard before warmed his heart.

I never thought that a celestial melody could be so ecstatic.

Soft rays of light trickled down the muslin. Beyond the flowing hem, someone's faint figure could be seen playing an instrument. The string instrument, which had the length of the musician's body, was leaning on their knee. The musician, who drew a bow horizontally, suddenly stopped. Edgar could not only feel the petals crushing under him, but also clearly hear it. He froze in place.

All the noises faded away. The figure, who was sitting, wanted to look outside and stood up hesitantly. She—it was definitely a she—lingered around the altar, perhaps because of the uninvited

guest, while holding her instrument. As she was still nothing more than a silhouette behind the muslin, Edgars patience reached its limit. Completely ignorant of his disrespect, he walked up to the altar. No, it was better to say that he didnt care much. His only interest was the scenery within as if possessed. He removed the muslin that had been covering the mystical figure at once.

There was a fairy.

But she was unlike any fairy Edgar had ever encountered. Her eyelashes, topped with the midday light, were shining white, and her pupils beneath them were wide and surprised. She looked like an innocent rabbit caught in the hands of a hunter. Silver hair flowed around her round shoulders and she wore a flower crown on top of her head, which suited her very well. Edgar was shocked by her intense beauty. His mind went blank as if hed been hit by something he couldnt handle. He also didnt know how long hed been standing like that as he only came back to his senses when he noticed her trembling with anxiety. On the contrary to the guy who confidently raised the muslin before, was he now stammering in a fading voice.

Jina raco ni nani?

She seemed quite embarrassed by the sight and behaviour of a rogue shed never seen before. In fact, nothing about what she was looking at was familiar. A being who walked on his own two feet, but has a yellowish-white face, green eyes, and hair the colour of dry leaves. Not to forget the unique way he was dressed. However, soon after, she noticed some children poking their heads out from behind him, and her nervous movements loosened. With her cheeks flushed red, she replied while plucking at the hem of her dress.

Murasha.

Edgar didnt know what to say next.

Shes so beautiful.

He didnt know any meaningful words to convey his thoughts.

Edgar was left with fluttering nostrils and helplessly pointed at the instrument she was holding.

Jina raco ni nani?

Murasha opened her eyes wide before she smiled softly. It was then that Edgar knew. What he had just said was obviously only related to a persons name. But he wanted to keep talking. He wanted to speak to her but didnt know how to, so he just babbled about what he had heard.

Murasha gave a belated reply.

Surihe.

Not only did her voice sound sweet, but it was also incredibly refreshing.

Edgar has intermingled with them for roughly a year and a half now. The reason was the ointment administered to his wound caused by his fall from the tree. At first, he was terrified by the fact that a foreign substance was applied to his living flesh, for he had never imagined that proper medicine could exist in such a small civilization. However, the ointment that was placed on his scraped skin

caused no infection or side effects. The entire jungle was filled with beneficial medicine. Edgar began to explore new medication and in exchange, he offered his scientific expertise regarding extraction and mixing. Their symbiotic relationship was satisfactory for both parties.

They called themselves Ruwa. It wasn't long before Edgar realised that they weren't fairies, but humans just like him.

The Ruwa tribe, which didn't have a written language, had an excellent memory and could verbally express themselves well. It was natural for them to express everything without writing. Although drawings might have served as an alternative to letters, drawing was merely a means, much richer meanings existed in their vocabulary. Just as there were scribes in the empire, there were sages here as well. The tribal sage taught the children as he made for an excellent instructor, and the elderly man who had lived the most years served as the clans chief and priest. Teachers and the elders, particularly the elderly, were held in high regard here. As a result, the language includes the concept of respecting one's elders.

Murasha was two years younger than Edgar. And he really liked that fact.

Today is worse than yesterday!

Murasha muttered. She learnt the imperial language as rapidly as Edgar did the Ruwa tongue. In addition to living in close proximity every day, every member of the Ruwa tribe has a memory as exceptional as Edgar's. Murasha was no exception. Whenever Edgar spoke to her, however, he always used the Ruwa language since he mischievously enjoyed the honorific terms that couldn't be heard in the imperial language. However, the way they talked using the Ruwa's honorifics didn't last long, and when it reached the point where they knew each other for more than a year, Murasha stopped paying attention to the fact that he was older than her.

Pats!

Edgar grabbed the back of the hand she had slapped down and made a fuss.

Ah. It hurts!

To give his act a bit more drama, Edgar put on a distressed face and held the back of his hand in front of her. Murasha squinted at him at first, but eventually rubbed the back of his hand, which seemed to be fine. Edgar liked her soft fingertips. Although he wanted to take his hand out due to the slight itching sensation, he didn't want to let go of this moment.

Nonetheless, Murasha returned to being a stern teacher and handed the bow to him. The sun was setting over the sea. The sandy beach where they were settled had already begun to glow red, so this would be their last practice for the day.

Now, hold it again.

Edgar held the bow in a strange manner. He looked down at her while she was pressing his hand in the correct position with her index finger. Their faces were incredibly close. So close that they'd touch if Edgar would just bend a little. His heart was pounding in his throat.

Oh. This feels weird. It's weird how I'm feeling this again.

In fact, he always felt this unusual whenever he met Murasha. It was like this for as long as he could remember. And as his recollection was near-perfect, it was safe to say he felt strange since the first time he met her.

I havent eaten anything spicy, but just thinking about her makes the area around my chest feel hot and I get sweaty all over my body

He always had trouble swallowing since his saliva kept collecting for no apparent reason. Of course, in this state, he couldnt play the instrument properly. Even though he pretended not to know at times, he stuttered and played like a slug

Chapter 107

Just being with her made his whole body tingle and he couldnt be at peace even for a second. This resulted in Edgar shifting his position every few minutes. But no matter how many times he changed his posture, he couldnt sit still and after a while, his body wanted to toss and turn again. However, that was nothing compared to longing to be by her side. Edgar only wanted to get closer to her. His discomfort had never been a stumbling block. Similar to now, with their arms touching, all of his muscles were tense and tingling, but he never wanted to let go no matter what

Keeek!

It was the sound of a bow sliding over the strings. Edgar, who lost his focus while turning the bow, looked back at her awkwardly. Aside from being distracted, the Surihe instrument was quite difficult to play. The resonator itself was small, approximately the size of a fist, with four strings on the narrow band that served as a fingerboard. It was an instrument easy for Murasha to hold, but for Edgar, whose fingers were twice as thick as hers, was it almost impossible to only press down one string.

Wed better stop here for today.

It was fortunate that Murasha was a responsible and skilled teacher. Shes been taking on his troublemaking for over a year. Even today, when the sun went down without Edgar finishing a single song.

He felt a bit sorry for her, so he looked at her as she snatched away her Surihe, his arms drooped like a heavy quilt.

Im sorry.

But Murasha didnt answer. Edgar buried his face in her lap. As if whining, the apologies flowed out in hums. Murasha yelled and grabbed his shoulder with her delicate hand.

Wake up!

No.

He shook his head while remaining buried in the width of her skirt. Murasha struggled to push him away for a while but soon gave up, making Edgar smile broadly. Eventually, Murasha pinched his cheek as if he was becoming annoying. In response, the young man carefully rubbed the cheek that her hand had touched as if he had received a kiss. When he glanced up, he saw Murasha looking down on him with puffed out cheeks. He spoke with a sly smile on his lips.

If I lie down and rest like this, Ill do well the next day.

Lies.

Geez, you got me.

He grabbed the soft hand that was resting at the hem of his shirt again and rubbed it against his cheek. Murasha pouted at first but eventually stroked his face as she couldn't help it.

Murasha's kind and compassionate touch made his heart skip a beat. Edgar's expectations would grow every time this happened. He pondered if she, who tolerates his constant rudeness, also has affection for him

Im not going.

The Marquess looked dumbfoundedly at Edgar, who completely rebuffed him. It had been a while since Sesbron issued the order to withdraw from the Western Continent, and it's been a month since he has been waiting for Edgar, who always appears out of nowhere and then quickly disappears into the forest or god knows where. As it seemed that he was in the middle of his research, the marquess didn't bother sending anyone.

You're going, whether you like it or not.

No! Im not going!

Whats wrong? Is it because of the forest?

Its not like that. Anyway, if you want to leave, go alone.

What kind of honey did you find there?

Edgar acted like a spoiled kid, with his neck bent over the backrest of the sofa he was sitting on.

Oh, I don't know! Im not going! Im not going! I swear on my life Im not going!

Knox!

Edgar stomped his feet after hearing what his grandfather had called him.

Argh, Grandpa! How long are you going to call me Knox? The day after tomorrow Ill be eighteen! Its Edgar, Edgar!

Thats what I mean, you rascal. Youll be eighteen soon, so get married and have children. What are you staying here for?

Edgar stopped his tantrum.

Marriage?

Thats right. Hurry up, move to Sesbron, and find a suitable lady

Edgar, dazed by the sound of marriage, could no longer hear the Marquess words. It was because Murasha immediately came to mind. He thought it was funny that after hearing the word marriage his mind drifted to her as though it was the most natural thing.

Yeah. The Ruwa tribe celebrates coming of age at sixteen, and Murasha turns sixteen soon. The meaning of coming of age isnt different from that of the Empire

He even attended a Ruwa tribe wedding ceremony a while back.

After donning the whitest linen and a corolla of little grass flowers

You punk!

..!

Startled, Edgar went out of his reverie. The marquess had been watching him, wiggling his eyebrows and moustache.

What were you thinking?

Something that rarely happened, happened. Edgar was at a loss for words and blushed. Puzzled by the reaction, The Marquess widened his eyes upon realising something. He questioned Edgar with a sly smile.

Who is it? Huh? Who did you think of?

Edgar, who had been sitting stupidly, jumped to his feet. He leapt over the sofa and ran away, leaving the Marquess unable to question him any further. The Marquess loud voice came from behind.

Stop!

But Edgar was much quicker. After leaving the Marquess room, he sprinted without looking back.

Edgar had grown a lot in a year and a half and had long since developed a body capable of avoiding being seized by the Marquess. Until sixteen, all he could do was hang around and struggle whenever the older Retiro grabbed him by the back of his collar. But he was now at least one head taller than he was back then. And that wasnt all. His voice turned deep and charming, and his body had grown significantly larger.

In other words, he had become a man. And as Edgar stayed with Murasha, he realised that he was a man, a man who meant more than just having a friend between his legs.

Edgar grinned again and again whenever he was reminded of Murasha. Unlike himself, who had grown up a lot, she remained the same. When they first met, the crown of her head was near his lips. Now it was far below his shoulders. From this height, he could observe whatever she did. It also became much easier for him to hide his flustered expression. Edgar wasnt obsessed with his growth, but he was happy with it.

Before he knew it, Edgar arrived at the edge of the jungle. The entrance to the jungle, which started after the white sandy beach of the sea ended, was covered with fallen tree trunks and leaves. Occasionally there was a bush, or some half-broken trees standing in a strange position. However, in the midst of this familiar sight, a foreign substance passed into his field of vision He abruptly stopped. Smoke was billowing through a pile of fallen leaves.

A fire?

Making a bonfire outside the village wasnt one of the Ruwa tribes practices. This tropical environment was humid all year round during the day and nightfall was the time to return to the village. They all had to gather in the village before sunset since the jungle was also dangerous to them. As a result, making a fire outside the village to maintain their body warmth was extremely

rare. Also, fire wasn't used as a light source because fluorescent plant stems trapped in balsam were used to illuminate their surroundings.

Edgar picked up some of the leaves and sniffed them. Instantly recognising it was covered with lard used in the Empire. Uneasiness ran up his spine. Without a second thought, he started to run. He took a shortcut and had to make his way through the muddy path that had been swept away by rainwater. Protruding rocks and barks scraped his skin, but he didn't mind. Rather, the anxiety that slowly began to claw its way inside was far more agonising.

He was well aware of how the Empire treated other races. He knew what would happen to foreigners captured by a pioneering fleet of the upper class, the navy, or explorers. They were either killed or enslaved. And to make matters worse, they wouldn't be killed off easily.

The Ruwas stayed away from battles. Whereas the natives of the Western Continents Northern Island worshipped strong warriors and regarded them as their leaders, the Ruwa tribes seniors with more years of wisdom earned authority. Since they don't value power, there were no youngsters aspired to be fighters and so the majority of them naturally grew up with a kind disposition. The Ruwa tribe would be easy prey for the expedition team that even managed to subjugate the belligerent eastern tribes of the Northern Island.

Edgar actually predicted such a situation and warned the priest that it wouldn't be long.

{ There are ruthless outsiders out there, so you have to be prepared for them. If you encounter them, don't even think about fighting them, don't think about welcoming them in either. Prepare for an escape and run away. }

The priest, however, couldn't comprehend him at all and instead kicked his ass for talking nonsense.

But in the end

Along with the flock of birds that roared overhead, flames raged in front of Edgar's eyes. The peaceful village was nowhere to be found. Screams higher than the flames boiled from all sides. Edgar's heart beat violently as if it was about to jump out.

A shout was heard in the imperial tongue.

Catch it! Don't kill it! Capture it!

Don't kill it! This is money! Money I say!

Chapter 108

Headnote: warning for violence and gore.

Edgar knew it too. If the Ruwa tribe draws the attention of the Empire's upper class, they will be turned into sex slaves rather than field slaves.

It isn't too difficult to predict

He ran away from the plaza after he got a sense of the situation.

Seeing that there are so many highly ranked officers present in the raid, it seems like this is a planned attack.

Rape was more common than slaughter on the plaza which had fires raging everywhere. The Ruwa tribe were caught beneath them, men and women of all ages.

Edgar closed his eyes at the terrible sight and thought only of Murasha.

I have to find her.

Thankfully, Murasha's house wasn't far. Edgar ran, hoping she wasn't already on the plaza.

It's around the time they teach the children at home

His breath was high up his throat and he prayed to a god he didn't believe in. Hoping that this was all a terrible dream, that nothing had happened and that it had been a normal day like any other Murasha!

It was quieter in her area, the tragedy could only be heard from afar for now. With his sword drawn, Edgar crossed the backyard and entered the house. The first thing he saw in the living room was a big bloodstain and blood smears similar to drag marks.

These are clear signs of excessive bleeding

He rushed further inside, clutching the hilt of the sword. When a faint sob was heard, Edgar turned toward the kitchen.

In the middle of the darkness, he noticed a vague figure in the corner. Although she couldn't be seen clearly, Edgar was certain it was her. A while back he had dug out a space in the wall for her to hide in if something horrific like this would ever happen.

She must have remembered it based on the way she hunched and concealed herself in front of it.

He dashed over to Murasha and hugged her. Startled by the sudden intruder, she screamed and struggled violently. Edgar hastily covered her mouth and made eye contact, it was then that he noticed her petrified crimson eyes.

Shh, it's me.

Ed, Edgar?

Edgar nodded silently. Only then did her crimson eyes well up with tears and she buried her face covered in blood and tears into his arms. Not only her face, but also her clothes and hair were stained with red. Edgar, who was holding her shoulders, tried to hoist her up.

We have to get out of here.

I can't

..?

Murasha shoved him away and flailed her hands over the wall while looking at him. She was frantically waving her hands in front of the movable part, which from the outside didn't even look like there was a space hidden behind it.

The door won't close

It was natural that it couldn't be locked from the outside because its latch was on the inside. Edgar pushed the fake wall aside. The dragmarks, which started from the living room and continued under the wall, stopped at a body. Judging from the dried blood, the dead body had been dragged from the living room and pushed into the wall. Edgar looked at the open eyes and a hollow mouth. The body had a very familiar face

Murashas mother.

Edgar closed the door and covered Murashas unfocused eyes. Despite her struggles from condemnation, he lifted her. Murasha flailed her hands and feet for a moment, but quickly became limp. Edgar left the building while wrapping his arms over the fainted girls back.

Screams and imperial language could be heard nearby. The area that had been unoccupied when he ran in was suddenly crowded, and he was forced to return to the plaza.

The closer they got to the centre, the intenser the heat became. The red blaze of the fire was at its peak in the middle of the plaza. The source was the burning temple, with corpses scattered in front of it. Edgar, who thought it was fortunate that there were no high-ranked officers at the plaza anymore, found a figure standing tall in front of the temple.

It was the priest.

The man, with a body struck with dozens of arrows, shouted something like a curse.

Everyone will die! Everyones going to die!

As though in answer, the flames behind him shook ferociously. The priest appeared to be consumed by lunacy as he stood with his back to the blazing flames rising out of the massive temple. Edgar met his glowing red eyes, which were streaming with blood. The old man pursed his lips, looking like he was speaking to him. But instead of words, he spat forth blood. At the same time, the flames from the temples entrance enveloped the priest in an instant

In the end, Edgar managed to board the fleet leaving the Western Continent. It was only a matter of time before Murasha was discovered by the Marquess as the latter came searching for his grandson in haste. Surprised, the marquess commented on the situation.

{ A man who had never been interested in slavery, suddenly brings in a sex slave even before he got married? }

When even the Marquess referred to her as Edgars slave, Edgar grew enraged. He remembered when they were living on the Northern Island, and how, although not paying much attention to the race there, knowing about their plight made him sad. Edgar, furious with his grandfather, exclaimed angrily at him that he would marry Murasha. His emotions were at its peak and he cried out that no one would see her as his slave if she was married to him. Hearing all that, it was only natural for the Marquess to go into a fit of rage himself.

But Edgar had no time to worry about his grandfather because Murasha started to get sick.

He initially assumed it was due to the long journey. She had never sailed or even seen a ship before, so crossing the ocean on her first voyage was naturally challenging for her. Her condition, however, didnt improve even after several months in Roahn. Quality food, great clothes, pleasant surroundings, and Edgars care. Nothing could restore Murashas health. After two months in Roahn she even became bedridden. As Edgar was a doctor himself, he nursed her all hours of the day and night

Edgar stared blankly at the faint face that seemed to be fading under the candlelight.

Murasha.

Her eyes were narrowed. Those eyes, which always glittered like jewels, had long since lost their lustre. The worn-out vitality wandered in search of something. Edgar tightly held her hand which over time had turned into nothing more than a bundle of skin and bones. With difficulty, her lips formed a smile.

Edgar.

..!

Edgar was relieved to see that Murasha remembered him this time.

How many days have passed?

It has been four days.

Recently, she started to lose consciousness only to wake up three to four days later. The pain experienced each time she awoke varied. At times, she complained of dizziness or searched for her deceased mother at others, and in some cases, she couldnt even recall Edgar at all.

While stroking her brow, Edgar spoke.

Im going to visit a place called Sesbron. I have something important to do there. It wont take long. And Ill probably come back with some good news. In the meantime, Levi will be here for you

Murasha couldnt fathom his last words and proceeded to close her eyes. Edgar paused for a moment before continuing.

So dont be surprised, dont look for me dont worry.

Suddenly, her figure became blurry like it had been soaked in water. Edgar frowned as he held back his tears. His fear that one day he wouldnt be able to see her opening her eyes again, trampled on his heart. Feeling suffocated for a while, he struggled to move away from her.

Servants had prepared a horse in front of the stables. Sesbron wasnt a short distance from Roahn, but Edgar planned to run nonstop. It had been two days since he learned that the members of the Ruwa tribe, which had been transported to Sesbron, were mysteriously dying one by one. The thread of deaths appeared to be an epidemic, and locals in Sesbron were terrified that a sex slave, who had mixed their body with its master, might carry an infectious disease.

But it certainly wasnt an epidemic. Edgar wasnt only close with Murasha, but with all the people of the Ruwa tribe.

An epidemic, I had never seen or heard of it. However, I dont give a damn what those locals are saying.

Edgar intended to do autopsies on the piled-up bodies.

They died after losing their strength, without any trauma. After carefully piecing together the information, I learned that the symptoms are similar to those of Murasha. That means Murasha has a treatable disease rather than a psychological ailment.

Edgars heart swelled with hope.

He arrived at his residence in Sesbron within a week. Edgar had sent word to Sesbron beforehand, so upon his arrival, he could immediately head down to the basement. The bodies were laid one by one on narrow, hard wooden tables. The cellar was damp, full of rotting carcasses and creatures that

were led by the decomposition. Despite all that, Edgar spent several nights in the cellar without leaving

After falling asleep on his chair, he soon awoke and raised his heavy body. Although he was mentally and physically exhausted, what he did was fruitful. And that thought kept him going. Edgar removed the white cloth from the body next in line. The cloth that had been clinging to the dried blood fell off.

All the bodies that I have examined so far have traces of whipping on their backs and thighs, but this body is particularly beaten all over Brutal, sharp scars not only on the torso but also his arms, neck, face

Edgars throat choked. He groaned upon seeing the face.

Chippo

Chapter 109

Headnote: warning for gore and mentioning of self harm.

Edgar gasped in surprise at the sound of his own voice. The smell of Chippos rotting corpse filled his nose and mouth. It was as if his face was buried in the dead flesh. The stench, which was normal with rotting corpses, suddenly became unbearable with Chippos carcass.

Edgar backed away and covered his mouth in an attempt to block the smell. But by doing so, he accidentally bumped his back against the corpse lying on the bed behind him. After regaining his balance, Edgar blankly looked around him. His unfocused view was strangely distorted. Only then did his mind, which had been maddened and blinded by his goal the past few days, come back. Edgar tilted his head in thought.

Somewhere in the jungle, Chippo is still roaming on top of an elephant.

He nodded his head as if agreeing with himself.

Thats right, there cant be a Chippo in a place like this. Perhaps by now, Chippo wouldve found another me hanging from a tree while trying to calm an elephant running somewhere. The person will then shout, A fairy?! and Chippo would first carefully observe the creature he has never seen before. He would soon realise that its a creature thats calling for help. The friendly Chippo will then save the other me from a falling tree.

Isnt that right?..

Instead of an answer, a bug crawled out of the dead face. A face which they didnt even bother to close its eyes off. As Edgars focus blurred, he looked across the room. Among the dozens of corpses were multiple children. His first autopsy, the farthest corpse from where he stood, was also a youngster Suddenly, his fingertips, drained of blood, began to tremble. Every Ruwa child has followed him around the village at least once. Every child at some point made fun of him for being ugly, and for doing so, every child was tickled by him as their little punishment at one time or another.

Edgar lowered his weeping eyes. In front of him lay the braided-haired child who always clung to his leg and pleaded for a ride on his shoulders. But, after seeing the childs guts and blood gushing out of his wide open abdomen, the sound of him whining as he yanked on Edgars pants faded away.

Edgar couldnt take the nausea any longer and poured out his disgust. His nose and eyes, stimulated by his gastric juices, became sour and hot. He collapsed and fell to his knees. He hadnt eaten anything, and yet his body continued to vomit. He could no longer bear it as he hated himself so much. That feeling made him sick to the stomach and he kept spewing out his guts

The Retiro residence became the centre of heated gossip.

The nobility of Sesbron began whispering about a rare opportunity. The latest topic circulated around the grandson of the Marquess, currently staying in the mansion in the capital. The young master was claimed to be the heir. The young master, who had initially aimed to undertake officer training at Lebrun, unexpectedly joined the Imperial Clairaut and accompanied his grandfathers expeditions.

Nobles who wished to make a fortune by investing in the marquess voyages sent invitations or paid daily visits in the hope to meet Edgar. However, they were only welcomed by frightening ghost stories. The rumour that the heir was obsessed with cutting open the bellies of various races quickly spread across Sesbron. In fact, servants could be seen moving corpses into and out of the residence, indicating that the harsh treatment towards the other races didnt stop even after their persecution. In Sesbron was neither the concept of an autopsy nor the study of anatomy, conventional. So, the young Retiro heir, closely associated with the sliced up bodies, including those of uncommon races, was regarded as horrifying and disgusting.

When this news reached Roahn, the Marquess began to worry about his grandsons future. But he couldnt lift a single finger. A doctor with a sick lover was a person who got crazier by the day. The thought that they couldnt cure the person they care about the most, even though they had been able to save so many people with their hands, was maddening. And that was exactly what Edgar was going through. Even as he rotted away because of the guilt and rebuke, he was obsessed with something that an ordinary person couldnt understand and immersed himself in all sorts of research and experiments.

Edgar slowly walked into a hell. Its been more than six months since that hell began to chew him up. The Marquess attempted to clear Edgars laboratory from the Retiro estate and locked him out. But when that happened Edgar didnt hesitate to harm himself and the situation was quickly rectified. Edgar was well aware that the Marquess adored him above everything else. But the moment the exhausted Marquess begged, Edgar pleaded back.

{ Why cant you understand me, who loves her so much? }

Everyone who knew Edgar saw that he was behaving out of the ordinary. He not only caught animals and collected plants, but he also began travelling up mountains. His insanity towards an unknown cure became more serious as time passed. Nonetheless, the Marquess had no choice but to lend his full support. He couldnt help but hope that a medicine would be discovered soon and that this ordeal would end.

Meanwhile, the remainder of the Ruwa tribe perished. And since the Sesbron residents still believed it to be an epidemic, the Ruwans had to be burned. Their entirely burned carcasses could no longer be autopsied. So Edgar could only hang on to the data gathered in the first few months.

The Ruwans died from cell proliferation of unknown causes. These strange cells, which metastasize regardless of organs, proliferated immensely even outside of the body.

Therefore, culturing wasn't difficult, and for that reason, even without a body, his research could be continued. Edgar was hopeful.

Murasha can be saved if the cause of the cell transformation is discovered

He groaned and rubbed her sunken cheek.

If I can find that out, you'll

Murasha slowly opened her eyes. It was a sunny day. She spoke while bathing in the bright sunlight.

Let me hear the Cembalo*.

She was no longer able to lift the Surihe. And even if she could, her Surihe was left behind on the Western Continent. Still, she wanted to listen to music. She had spent her entire life playing music dedicated to God, so it seemed natural that she would seek music even as she withered.

Edgar started tapping on the Cembalo that he had placed by the bed. He was always indifferent to music, but the marquess insisted that he would learn it from an early age, claiming it was a keepsake from his grandmother. Whenever the marquess got the chance, he would sit down and listen to Edgar play the song he wanted. Thanks to the marquess, Edgar knew how to play well enough to give a performance.

Edgar almost bursted out in tears the first time she asked if there was music here too. It was the only meaningful thing he could give her. He endured for the sake of seeing her live again. If he didn't have anything to offer, he might have truly gone insane.

Murasha, who was silently listening to the melody, recited.

I want to see the forest.

Again?

Lately, they've been visiting the nearby forest. He initially had hopes that Murasha's symptoms would improve when she asked to be taken to the woods, but nothing changed. She was still unable to walk and would periodically lose consciousness.

As there was no forest near his residence, they had to go to the nearby hunting ground. Edgar always took Murasha there, even though he was worried that the carriage would be uncomfortable or if it would put too much strain on her body. Still, whenever she got to the forest, she seemed happy. Edgar looked down at her as she leaned against him with her feet dipped in the lake. The forest wind blew her tousled hair.

Is it her instinct to find the forest, or is it a feeling of longing for her hometown?

While staring at Murasha, who had her eyes closed, Edgar decided to confirm the hypothesis. An unreliable hypothesis. But that was all he had now. Murasha was the last of the Ruwa tribe. She was the only one who could be studied. Animal experiments took longer, and Edgar had a long-held suspicion that Murasha's time was running out.

The oxygen concentrations in the Western and Central Continent are different.

This was a hypothesis he had long tried to prove.

The voyage would be long and hard, but the answer would be the same no matter how many times he thought about it.

Murasha is unable to survive on the Central Continent. She can only live in the Westerns jungles. Even within the Central Continent, there are different regions with different oxygen levels in the air. Murasha finds it difficult to breathe here, just as its difficult for someone who lives on flat terrain to breathe when they travel up a mountain.

She may not feel it, but her cells certainly do. Because if cells cant handle oxygen levels that are less than usual, eventually changes will occur in the living body so that they can survive even with that amount of oxygen. Thats why plants and cells that live in places where the air is thin form coils in the bodies of higher organisms.

Edgar headed to the Western Continent with her. Around this time of year, the route was clear and that was fortunate for them. Perhaps thanks to that, Murasha didnt have a hard time sailing. No, it was more right to say that she didnt have the spirit to struggle.

Edgar lay always next to her, unable to step out of the bed. He held her cold hand and begged for a sleep that never came.

At some point, Murasha stopped eating full meals, but she never mumbled that she was hungry. So, Edgar naturally stopped feeding her and instead played her the Cembalo he had brought on board

A few months later, they anchored off the coast of the Western Continent.

Edgar entered the jungle with Murasha in his arms. Wild boars and buffaloes roamed the ruined village. Elephants flapped their ears and roared. Most of the burned buildings were covered with black spots, and vines entwined around the destroyed building acting as their support.

Murasha.

He lowered his gaze to her in his arms. He was met by a pale face that revealed the contour of her skull. He always thought her pink skin was lovely, but today, no matter how hard he looked at her, he couldnt see it because of her grey complexion.

Edgar felt fortunate that he was able to give her a proper Ruwa funeral. Ruwans were cremated. So, he set up a pyre in front of the temple. The process was neither complicated nor difficult. One should sprinkle enough flower petals to cover the body and set it on fire.

As Edgar watched the flames blazing in silence, the resentment he had endured for a long time finally bursted out

Chapter 110

Edgar cried and shouted incomprehensible words.

In fact, his sadness was an unscrupulous emotion. It was Edgar himself who had strangled her, he gave her just enough air to keep her from dying by providing her with good food and a safe place to sleep every day. He murmured incessantly.

I wanted to save you

Tadak Tadak

The crackling of firewood and the sound of fire stirring the air sounded like a melody. It seemed like she was playing happily, because she was finally able to leave.

She had to endure so much in the end that it was better for her to die, she probably stayed alive in anticipation of this moment

At least, that was how Edgar saw it from his perspective.

The temple was visible in the backdrop of the sadly fading tune. Half of the temple had collapsed and its distorted form looked like a face that was mocking him. It laughed at him along with the vision of the dying priest in front of it. Edgar, who was lying on the ground, recalled the priests last moments in his tilted view.

{ Everyone will die! }

Wasnt that a curse meant for the invaders?

{ Everyone will die! }

Edgar slowly got up.

A curse that he cried out in fear No, it wasnt a curse. That was a prophecy. The priest foresaw the destruction of the tribe. The old man knew And all this time I thought that he was going to say I should to take Murasha out of there

So what the hell was he talking about

Stuttering, he started running toward the temple.

How? How did you know?

His shoeless feet dashed up the stairs where only the shape remained. The majority of the colonnades and walls had collapsed, leaving only the altar floor and the wall behind it. As expected, the burned-out wall had turned black.

How did you know?!

Edgar scratched the soot away. It wasnt until his fingernails were torn that the densely engraved characters were revealed. Murasha regarded this banquet of letters as the image of a god, but Edgar knew what kind of letters they were.

Vanished and forgotten text.

Edgar gathered the stone rubble that had slid beneath his feet. It was a piece of a mural.

A form known as God.

Bewitched, he murmured toward the mural.

Did you know?..

Murasha said that God had saved them, so in many ways they thank God. They even went as far as to hold their own ceremonies, on behalf of the priest

However, he couldnt understand it at all.

God, that kind of thing is unspeakably vague and unreliable

Edgar looked up. The wall that towered above him looked down at him and laughed

Two years later.

Rain poured down. It was the monsoon season in the jungle. Edgar raised his head toward the sky. He slowly closed his eyes as he watched the falling rain, countless raindrops slid down the curves of his face. Kneeling outside the plaza, he faced the debris of the building and the murals he had restored. These were the vestiges he had gathered in the past two years.

Suddenly the rain stopped, leading Edgar to open his eyes. Instead of a gloomy sky, he was met with a black curtain. Adjusting his gaze, a pale-faced man with long black hair stood in his field of vision. His long, monolid eyes looked cold. Edgar called out to the unexpected visitor.

Linhardt.

The man holding the umbrella stared down at him.

Have you been out of your mind for the past two years, Edgar?

Grandpa is looking for you. Why don't you stop chasing the dead and start taking care of the living?

Edgar lowered his head again. Water droplets, formed on the tip of his nose and chin, fell onto his knees

Knox.

The Marquess was lying on the sofa, smoking a cigarette. Edgar knelt down beside him and kissed the back of his hand, which had grown older over the years. As the Marquess let out a sigh along with the smoke, a dry voice flowed from the old man's throat after he coughed.

Oh, no. I should go back to Weissland before I get any older.

Edgar raised his gloomy eyes. Seeing his grandson's rare expression, the marquess smiled as if he thought it was cute. As always, his thick beard formed a curve.

I have a favour to ask of you.

Yes.

Continue the title.

Yes.

The Marquess frowned at Edgar's immediate answer.

What are you up to?

Nothing.

Although the old man was suspicious of his grandson's obedience, he could no longer pry like he used to. He hadn't seen Edgar much since the young heir started digging for archaeology in the Western Continent. The Marquess felt now as awkward meeting Edgar, who had recently turned 20, as he had upon meeting Edgar when he was younger. Furthermore, Edgar had transformed into an entirely different person over the past two years. Not only in his speech but also in his demeanour

and conduct. The bright child had lost his vigour. The one thing that didnt change was his tendency to immerse himself in what piqued his interest. The Marquess furrowed his brow in resentment.

You must graduate from Lebrun. I didnt think I would ever see you get commissioned after you turned 15 years old. Has it been 5 years? 6 years? Your peers have been commissioned 3 years ago oh You shouldnt have skipped it cough cough

Yes.

Yeah. I guess Ill be at ease when I see you finish something.

The Marquess closed his eyes and smiled. He seemed to have fallen into a daze, perhaps due to the medicine. Levi, who was helping the Marquess, motioned Edgar to step out.

Edgar quietly left the study and shut the door. The Marquess might have thought that Edgars demeanour was unusual, but the young man truly had no ulterior motives. In fact, he was already considering becoming a navy officer, and he needed the authority that came with the title.

Ancient traces arent only found in the jungles of the Western Continent. In fact, they are scattered over the Southern and Northern Islands.

The Southern Island was recently discovered, and although the ruins on the Northern Island were more well known, they had been extensively damaged by pirates.

The ones the Ruwans possessed only revealed a portion of Gods existence. Its not enough, Im missing so many pieces.

Edgar needed to recover the stolen ruins, but there were way too many for him to collect on his own.

It so happens that the Emperor has issued an edict to wipe out the western pirates, and officers often receive part of the spoils as a bonus.

Knowing this, Edgar considered commissioning for the upcoming Battle of Nazaro, which was scheduled for next year.

While walking through the corridor, his moving feet came to a halt in front of a certain room. As he opened the door without hesitation, he immediately spotted the cembalo in the centre. It was an antique musical instrument, gilded ornate and brightened by the sunny window. When the lid was opened, light dust rose in abundance. Edgar pressed a black key, producing a beautiful sound that echoed through the lonely room.

He understood that God was close to nature. In the case of the Ruwans, God was the forest itself. It gave the forest a will and character while accepting natures providence as its meaning.

The difference in the amount or concentration of oxygen wasnt the answer.

No human can live under water, but no one needs to explain why because there is no air in the water. Because its self-evident, without the need for a reason or proof. Likewise, it was self-evident that the Ruwans couldnt live outside the forest. I only looked at them from my own point of view, while trying to constantly attach a reason to the phenomenon. I kept her submerged in water every day, while wondering why she couldnt breathe. The priests prophecy was nothing but natural words. In fact, it was comparable to saying, everyone will die if they fall into the water.

Edgar didnt realise that there were humans who, in one way or another, differed from himself. Although the imperial residents didnt see the Ruwans as human beings on par with themselves, Ed did and reasoned that because he could breathe here, it was unimaginable for him that there were humans who actually couldnt. As there were various races in the world, there must be various characteristics and constitutions. But to him, whose perspective was based on himself, thought their constitution was the problem that needed to be developed. It wasnt until he deciphered the walls of the temple that he realised that there was such a thing as an irresistible will. Providence wasnt a quality that could be judged by mere human beings.

However, I realised it too late, far too late

There was a person who talked about it so openly. So naturally. That person spoke about it as if it was an old truth. Edgar, on the other hand, only realised this through years of research, after losing Murasha and turning his back on a lot of things

Edgar chased her with his eyes.

A cadet who was only fifteen years old. And a woman at that. Her cheeks, which had not yet lost their baby fat, emanated dazzling vibrancy. When she mounted her horse, the wind blew constantly across her fiery cheeks. Her eyes, which shone blue in the sunlight, were filled with confidence and conviction. Edgar heard her name from the people around him.

Aspirant Liloa.