

Northwest 111

Chapter 111

Liloa caused a stir wherever she went. Her noble birth, her beauty, and her endless suitors were only among the many reasons. It was to the point where Edgar wondered how he hadn't known her through those sooner. He did learn about her, though, but for a completely different reason. And, in fact, that was the reason which meant the most to him.

Liloa already knows everything.

When responding to ridicule and contempt, Liloa opened her mouth and recited providence.

Of course, no one understood her words. Liloa's greatness, even defending minority races, was dismissed as feminine sensibility.

Edgar felt as if he had met a being from an unknown realm. Providence, which had always been unimaginable to him, wandered so openly in front of his eyes. He thought about reaching out to Liloa in due course. But because he considered himself to be a terrible human being, he felt too ashamed to approach her while carrying the burden of his shame. He simply couldn't dare to. For the time being, he kept his thoughts hidden inside his head and wondered.

When will I be able to tell her about this joy I'm feeling?

A few months later, Edgar was commissioned as captain. The last time he caught sight of Liloa before departing for Nazaro, she was embracing the wind as she rode on her horse named Koud Bhan.

Eventually, Edgar felt no longer the need to remain an admiral. The western pirates had been destroyed, putting an end to his motives for adopting the admiral's title, which was to obtain the relics stolen by the pirates. The remaining ruins either sank into the sea or were unable to be recovered by ship. In order to find smuggled goods that had already been distributed to land, his fleet had to travel into the mainland. Since the admiral was someone who needed to be attached to the sea day and night, Edgar felt he would waste the rest of his life away if he kept playing that role.

He was, however, reappointed. Despite the fact that there were conditions that allowed for his solo departures, as well as other favourable terms, his dissatisfaction remained. He would never have accepted it if his recent accomplishments hadn't made him feel free. And so the time for his next departure grew nearer which was luckily for the imperial family, but unfortunately for him.

Sitting on his desk, Edgar looked at the fruits of his years of dedication. It was a massive mural made up of dozens of pieces occupying one whole wall of his study. It tied together the loose ends of his research which had begun in disarray. He was relieved that he had finally found a satisfactory answer after a long period of struggle.

Edgar spent several days staring at the mural. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, he remembered someone he wanted to see this with.

No, I think it will even be more interesting to see what kind of life she's leading.

Edgar finally made up his mind to face Liloa.

Yes, her.

He tried to recall the name of the woman who had come to mind. However, it was hard for him to remember.

He knew his memory of her would return soon, but he didn't want to wait leisurely any longer. After leaving his residence, Edgar rode his horse to the nearby army attach as it wasn't far away and he wasn't in a hurry either. Edgar gaited his horse slowly, remembering his impressions of her.

If I remember her name, my memories of her will be sharper

Somewhere in the military officers garden, he grabbed somebodys attention.

That woman.

What?

That woman. I heard that she served as a platoon commander in Pontenbach.

The sergeant gave a relatively normal answer to Edgars sudden and seemingly random question.

Im sorry, Sir Edgar, but theres more than one platoon in the elite Karabinae.

Didn't I say Im referring to a woman?

Edgar passed the bewildered man and entered the library. He found a war journal containing rank charts and put it on a desk. At that time, a soldier who was organising books approached him hesitantly.

Um, were you talking about her?

The soldier flipped through the pages.

Is she the one?

Officer Liloa.

It wasn't until then that Edgar remembered how he used to see her. The woman who ran like she was on hilly fields, how lively she was in the wind

Yes Liloa.

Ah! So it was Officer Liloa then, must have been right. Haha.

Where is she, Officer Liloa? Is she out on the Eastern front?

The sergeant replied as if he had heard something very strange.

No. Obviously she should be in Sesbron, right?

Sesbron?

In Mireilles duchy.

What happened? And why did you say obviously

The first sergeant, who followed Edgar inside, intervened.

Ah, about Officer Liloa. As far as I know, shes been missing for over a year now. According to some people in Sesbron, she was supposed to head to Malisuro for recuperation, but her carriage

was attacked by bandits. She got dragged away and disappeared without a trace. Strangely, there was no ransom demand. It's said that they took the woman alive, but there were no signs of her ever returning.

I have always wondered about what happened. After all, wasn't she a stunning woman? Nobody speaks openly about it, but everybody knows, it's almost like an open secret. That's why even the duke's family claimed to be on the lookout for her. There was no body, therefore no burial, but there's no definitive answer as to whether she is dead or alive. It's believed to be in a state of ambiguity. There was a lot of gossip about her at that time.

That's nonsense. She's from the Karabinae. I'm sure she knew how to defend herself with a gun.

The sergeant shrugged.

Well, she was still a woman.

Edgar glanced at the letter with the rose-patterned seal in the hand of his butler. It appeared to be an invitation from a certain noble house. Social circles, not only within Sesbron but all over the empire, knew that the Marquess of Roahn seldomly attended social events. It was also quite common for their invitations to be rudely turned down by the Marquess by ignoring them. Edgar was known to behave differently around Imperial Clairaut officials, however, those who were unrelated to the military could only see him at official occasions that the admiral was required to attend.

In any case, there was no way the servants within the Retiro estate weren't aware of the admiral's opinion on the public. Nonetheless, Butler Grits appeared in Edgar's study, holding an invitation. This prompted Edgar to question the circumstances of this event.

What is it?

This is not an invitation to a mere social gathering.

From whom?

Grits raised his glasses and double-checked the sender.

It's from the Duke of Mireille.

Edgar, who had fixed his eyes on his book again, looked up. He reached out his hand, and Grits handed the letter, surprised by this unprecedented gesture.

Edgar tore off the duke's rose seal.

[Dear Marquess of Roahn, Admiral of the Mondovi Peninsula, Edgar Eichendorff-Retiro. I know a story that will please you, as you're someone who admires history and is inquisitive about other human beings. Your close friend, the Duke of Mireille, Rene Mireille.]

An hour had passed since he started staring at the letter. Mireille didn't elaborate on the specific purpose of the meeting, making it no different from an invitation to a social gathering.

However, in comparison to when he first opened his salon and the invitation was basically an advertisement for his collection of ancient relics, this one is too concise, and it could compel one to come and see.

It was possible that Mireille has some idea about Edgars eccentricities and seeing the minimal card he had sent, he was probably taking his chances.

It worked.

Edgar suddenly became curious about Mireille.

I have never spoken to the Duke, nor have I seen him properly, but even so, there must be something about this unforeseen rush. Mireille is a clever businessman, and wasting time and manpower is something that he would never do.

Edgar thought that Mireille had something certain.

Its definitely something interesting

He slightly smiled when unusual and absurd thoughts passed his mind. He wasn't sure if interesting was the correct word, but Liloa was the first thing that came to him.

Of course, shes not someone who can be described as merely interesting

Edgar attempted to articulate what he had in mind for Liloa but failed. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't find the right word to describe her.

Im sure that even if Mireille died and came back to life, he wouldn't see her as such.

Edgar held Liloa in high regard, but it was a connection that she never knew.

Liloa. Liloa Mireille.*

Chapter 112

Her name spilt out of his lips. It was a name that didn't exist anymore, but even when she still remained in this world, Edgar had never called Liloa. Even so, he liked her better when she was Aspirant Liloa than when she was Liloa Mireille. So when he heard that Liloa had given up her commission and retired to a homely life, his disappointment was enormous.

He heard about her death about two years ago.

It actually must have been over 3 years since she died. I couldn't believe it at first. To see such a prominent person disappear so futilely I didn't feel like I was being told the truth at all

Edgar had to send numerous people to Sesbron before he could accept her death. Scouting about the Mireille duchy didn't provide any sightings or news of Liloa before she died. Despite this, Edgar only remembered her. Mireille's possible possessions of relics didn't even enter his head.

Edgar stepped out of his room and walked down the hallway leading to the gallery. Every space or room he passed was packed with artworks he had collected over the years. The statues and paintings lined up in the corridors, outer rooms, and stairs were things he randomly bought and excavated.

Edgar stood in the middle of the gallery and looked around. On the black and white marble floor laid out like a chessboard, stood all kinds of statues. Some were riding horses, others were wearing

old-fashioned iron armour. Above the ivory-coloured wainscot, portraits of the commanders of varying eras were staring at Edgar.

Even this elaborate gallery could only cover the Degal era. The scope of history was enormous. Edgar aimed to investigate the historicity that had permeated the lengthy flow of time and to dive into the myth of early history.

It was clear what Edgar was after. The truth. He has spent years hanging around and exploring but has yet to even define it. He didn't dare to predict what shape it would be. He had to pave the way himself, so Edgar wanted to collect as many artefacts as possible, and decipher and record unknown myths while he was alive. The study of ancient times dominated his life.

Edgar swept the shoulder of the knight statue next to him.

The rust is proof that the traces of 200 years ago are deteriorating, but how far back are the ancient times buried? Just thinking about it makes me go crazy

However, when I saw Liloa, the truth that was distant to me became vivid, as if it were standing right in front of my eyes.

The light that Edgar could only get a glimpse of was emanating from her whole body.

She was an unconventional encounter that made all his efforts insignificant. An enchanting genius.

Edgar moved his feet again. Passing through this gallery was the library. The sound of his footfall echoing on the marble floor left a reverberation as he stepped into the past

flashback

It was one afternoon following a string of bright days. The Karabinae, to which Liloa belonged, was a cavalry battalion that practised horseback combat by firing while mounted. As a result, the majority of their training took place in Lebruns courtyard, and coincidentally, the Karabinae training area was adjacent to the naval library. One could watch Liloa train if they looked out of the window on the side facing the backyard.

Until just a few years ago, the cavalry only rode horses when they moved, and when they attacked, they dismounted to fire their weapons. As a result, they possessed skills and attributes that were midway between cavalry and infantry. Not a single expert pointed out the inefficiency of such a battle tactic. Now, the kind of cavalry that can attack while riding was known as Karabinae, and for that purpose, this special unit had been undergoing hard training and intricate restructuring.

Liloa was known for having dug into that crack. During the Karabinae's restructuring, applicants were chosen based on their shooting skills while riding horseback and Liloa was overwhelmingly chosen and placed first on the list. But then, even those who had been puzzled by a woman's enrollment were suddenly convinced of why Liloa was able to hold out in LeBrun after hearing about the Karabinae. Horseback riding was widely accepted for women and it didn't require much muscle strength to shoot. Although guns weren't suitable for women, it was also a fact that anyone could kill with a gun if they could pull the trigger. As a result, there has been a recent trend in Sesbron to mock the Karabinae as an army for girls, raising the question of why those who didn't require bodily power could even be called soldiers.

Edgar laughed at their stupid ideas as he looked at Liloa in training.

The art of Karabinae is more than just the combination of horseback riding and shooting.

Liloe, who was sitting tight on the saddle, stretched her pistol-drawn hands.

Bang! Bang!

Bullets fired from both guns accurately pierced the target a few yards away. A faint glow enveloped her in an instant before vanishing, and a smile of achievement that flashed across her face could be seen through her waving hair. Stowing her gun and taking the reins, Liloe swerved her back to her starting line.

Her balance, flexibility, and concentration stand out, but above all, Im impressed by her strength to support her complete body in a saddle posture with the reins set. Its truly amazing. If one didnt know how to coordinate their whole body, they couldnt be in the Karabinae. Liloas brilliance is self-evident. She is always unmoved, and her steadfastness seems to be an inborn attribute

I like looking at her from the back, that ass is to die for

Isnt her horseback riding like a work of art? If she can ride a horse that well, I bet she could ride a man as well, right?

I wonder where she learned it. Who taught her? Her hip movements are no joke. Im envious of that lucky bastard

Just going out to the corridor, Edgar could hear the words mocking Liloe. As the only woman in a place where hundreds of men were trained as officers, it was no exaggeration to say that all eyes were on her. The cadets mocked Liloe, deeming her arrogant by enlisting in the army, and thinking she couldnt do well, but then cursed at her when they realised they had nothing to criticise.

This is all because shes a woman, so they have nothing else but ridicule for her.

Eventually, the level of mocking reached its apex because no one stopped them. On the contrary, they were all too eager to add to one anothers words. Nonetheless, nothing major occurred since Liloe had the support of the court. The Emperor graciously offered her a wing in his Imperial Palace when she left her hometown and moved to Sesbron. Rumours circulated that the Emperor was considering Liloe as a partner for his third son, Robero. The court mistakenly assumed that Liloe was riding at Lebrun for pleasure and recreation. The general sentiment was that once Liloe travelled to the battlefield, she would serve as a morale booster for the officers by carrying out protocols alongside Robero as the actual commander.

Given the intensity of the personal training and the effort that Liloe puts in Lebrun, that prediction is nothing short of insulting. But why is Liloe silently enduring it?

The more Edgar looked at Liloe, the more curious he became.

Why did she choose LeBrun over other options, what does she want to accomplish as a soldier, what does she hope to achieve by enduring criticism and ridicule, or What does she hope to accomplish in her life? Thats right. Actually, Im most interested in that last one. What kind of life does someone who thinks like her, live?

It has been Edgars practice to go to Lebruns library every day even before he met Liloe. Lebruns library, which was fully sponsored by the imperial family, was extensive, and Edgar discovered

many old books that could no longer be obtained elsewhere. In particular, the information on looted goods during the conquest of the Northern Island of the Western Continent were recorded in detail, so he often brought servants to transcribe them.

Occasionally, there were those who polluted Edgars time in his treasure trove of sacred knowledge.

You can really see her from here?

Chapter 113

Yes. I found out by chance, and I think there will be a Karabinae training of her squad soon

How come someone like her, who disregards traditional etiquette, is allowed to participate in the training? Many people don't want to see her there, including me. In any case, the Empire is nearing its end, I tell you. Not only are lowly merchants posing as aristocrats, but now even women are posing as men.

As expected, right? I don't know why she's so bold. I'm sure she knows that everyone can watch her whenever she's training there, right? Does she have no shame? Or, is it because she's enjoying the attention?

Exactly, it's because she has that type of personality, that's why she's staying here to get all that male attention.

When I think about her like that, my lower region heats up again. She seems like someone who'd jump at you even in bed. A wife has to be quiet and modest, but it will definitely be enjoyable to have her as a little plaything for a while. I don't know who this girl's husband's going to be, but it looks like she's going to give him a hard time.

Well, it won't be us. However, I also don't mind having my way with her at least once.

Nothing truer than that. But can you imagine? Having your reputation dropping so low that you'll be tossed around for a bargain price.

I've heard she's very extravagant and arrogant, and that she will break your pride; I'm dying to see the day when this girl who's pickier than a princess gets her nose smashed on that smug face of hers.

Unknowingly, Edgar slammed the book he was returning on the bookshelf. It was hard enough to cause the shelf to shake, and the two cadets at the window looked back at him in surprise.

How noisy. Get out of here.

What? Who?

As one of them stuttered like a fool, his companion grabbed his arm. They did, however, appear to recognize Edgar given their whispers when they passed by him. Even after their disappearance, Edgar's irritation stayed. It was because the feeling of embarrassment due to the fact that he reacted for no particular reason, captivated him. With this, Edgar convinced himself that he only responded that way because they were loud and that he wasn't associating himself with the insults against Liloa.

Regardless, everything he had heard bothered him, despite his refusal to admit to himself that he had grown sensitive about Liloa. He pretended he didn't understand their language. It's not in Edgar's nature to care about someone else, whether he knew her or not, or whether she was troubled or not, but for some reason, he's become annoyingly conscious of her, and he couldn't figure out why.

Edgar considered himself to be naturally gifted. He excels in everything, and even though he could be clumsy at times, he quickly becomes proficient in any field he sets his mind to. In addition, neither his appearance nor his origin had any flaws. He knew all too well that he was exceptional, and he lived content with it.

Although the last few years have been a dark phase for Edgar, such a short period of time hasn't changed his fundamental self-esteem. So Edgar found himself in an unfamiliar and unpleasant situation as he suddenly wanted to conceal his existence for no reason.

Thank you for kicking them out first. I found them loud, too.

The voice came from behind the bookcase. The moment Edgar heard the unmistakable woman's voice, he immediately realised who she was.

No, perhaps it's because I recognize her voice. Aside from the employees, Liloa is the only woman in Lebrun. Also, an employee would never dare to speak to me in this manner.

Edgar stopped his hand trying to pull out a book. He almost asked, Why are you here at this time and what about training? as he knew about Liloa's schedule because of the man's earlier conversation. Edgar hesitated and blinked his eyes rapidly. It struck him that Liloa was standing right in front of him.

Although there is a bookshelf between us, I might be able to see her if I pick out any book.

He could see part of her clothes through a gap created by a short cover.

But now that they'd met, Edgar was frozen in place. It had only been a minute and he already wanted to be with her and talk to her. He got embarrassed as his desire was so obvious.

What did she just say?

However, in the midst of his denial, his tongue steadily spewed out words.

What do you mean thank you?

When Edgar noticed that his voice had become very docile, he cursed inwardly.

Damn, what's this pathetic tone?

Because if I was the one who tried to drive them out, things would have been different. It only would've become louder.

Liloa sighed at the end of her sentence.

She doesn't bother revealing her identity. On the contrary, she appears to plainly believe that the person she's speaking to understands what she's saying. Her implicit recognition appears fed up rather than arrogant. She probably judged it would be too exhausting to explain because her name is prominent but for no good reasons.

Edgar, on the other hand, didn't want to stay long, but his eyes already chased her moving form. Her shoulders brushed between the shelves as she searched for a book, and her hair, tied up in a ponytail, dangled lightly. Edgar's chest jumped wildly.

What were you going to say?

Some of the books between them slipped out and were put back again. The sound of Liloa turning some pages filled the silence. She scanned some more pages, and then closed the book. Edgar moved his body slightly so that he couldn't be seen through the gaps in the shelf.

Hm well, I don't know. I don't really think about it too well before I say something. I just spit it out, you know? But to give an example I might have laughed at the idiot who said he was sorry for my future husband, but then assumed the possibility of being with me in the next sentence. Or I could have mocked them for coming all the way here just to watch me train even though they said they didn't want to see me. I probably would have had a field day with them as they gave me so many options.

..!

Edgar felt strangely excited because Liloa seemed to be laughing.

She is more ordinary than I thought. Considering the extent to which her environment suppressed her, she has a cheerful personality. She's not on the defensive and doesn't approach strangers with hostility. It's difficult for many people to survive this kind of treatment in Lebrun, but Liloa is doing it. Perhaps it's because her generalisation is slow, she doesn't pass judgement quickly, or she respects the other person as an individual. Yes. That's right.

They should feel ashamed of themselves. And that's what I would've made them feel.

Why shame?

Because they feel no guilt for disrespecting people. In perfect the way I am, I can perform all the tasks I'm assigned, but in the end, I'm incomplete because something will always be missing. Isn't it rude to treat a normal person as an invalid?

Yes.

Then they should be ashamed.

Isn't it a bit absurd? The concept of shame has been changing all throughout history. Many people are still insensitive to the shame I've been talking about, but well, I think it can change over time.

Like how we started to wear clothes for purposes other than protection?

Indeed.

Liloa was horrifically accurate. Edgar had considered the Ruwans to be lacking because they couldn't breathe on the Central Continent, even though they were already whole. On such a subject, he was belatedly ashamed of himself from time to time. The ordeal was so shameful that he avoided Liloa when he first saw her. But now, Edgar wanted to ask her face-to-face instead of over the bookshelf.

Where in the world did you hear, read, and learn such a way of thinking?

He wanted to know everything Liloa thought and said. But at the same time, he didn't want to know the source of her knowledge.

How can you say so?

Naturally, because I was born that way.

Edgar didn't understand what made Liloa so sure.

Whats natural? I asked her how, so why can she answer with its only natural?

But he didnt dare ask why. Whereas Edgar was filled with confusion, Liloa was exuding confidence. Their worlds seemed so far apart despite the bookcase being the only barrier, as though Edgar would step into another world upon crossing the shelf.

No, it might not just be one bookcase.

Edgar felt that he could only face Liloa after crossing the vast world between the numerous bookshelves separating them.

Is that all?

There are natural laws thats why. Im referring to it as laws because of course, one should never say that people who exist are wrongful. Shouldnt we admit that natural laws shouldnt be broken, just as were ashamed of breaking our Empires laws?

Where did you

Edgar almost asked reflexively but quickly closed his mouth.

Where did she learn such a thing?

Since his time at the Imperial Clairaut, Edgar had been bombarded with similar questions. He conducted his own research and discovered the answers. So, Edgar was always the one to respond to such inquiries. As a result, when he became the questioner, he was placed in the same position as the old-school scholars, and his embarrassment increased even more.

Chapter 114

But his questions continued to pour in.

How did you learn about providence? Has anyone else deciphered the ancient language besides me? Whats the natural law? Where did you obtain that information? Have you come across any other types of ruins Im unaware of?

It didnt take long for Edgar to realise he was suffering from a terrible form of inferiority complex. His sudden realisation was due to inferiority being an emotion most distant from him. He was always one step ahead of everyone. There was no shade called the shadow of another person in his field of vision. Edgar was a pioneer without fail, even when he was studying medicine, briefly staying in Lebrun, beginning archaeology on the Western Continent, and returning to Lebrun to finish his naval training.

Of the correspondence piled up in Edgars office, half were full of praise, the other half full of curses and accusations. Scholars at the Imperial Clairaut have made no headway in deciphering the archaic language Goe. The same was true in the medical field. Some sought out Edgar, who had gained unparalleled medicinal knowledge directly from the jungle, and they constantly asked him questions. Some, on the other hand, sent messages filled with envy and malice.

Am I no better than them now? To decipher Goe, one just has to endure the voyage of half a year and step on the land of the Western Continent. If one wants to discover new medicine, he has to go through the jungle

People say he was born a genius, but when he thought about himself, the only thing that made him different from others was his tenacity.

In what area do I fall short of her?

Only then did Edgar realise why he was reluctant to face Liloa, she was the only human who made him feel so shabby. He couldn't stand himself being in a position of inferiority, possessing nothing but pitiful inadequacy. He didn't want to stand in front of her because she was captivating, far too captivating. Even though Edgar sometimes had the urge to meet Liloa face-to-face, he naturally avoided her presence whenever he thought about how insignificant he would look compared to her

end of flashback

Liloa was such a person.

Because of that, Edgar was astounded beyond comprehension to learn from her obituary that before her death she made the decision to resign from her commission. And after giving up her appointment, Liloa moved from the court to the Mireille duchy. Edgar couldn't say he knew her very well, but he admittedly endured days of mysterious disappointment.

It's a pity such a pity I was so envious of her.

As time passed, Edgar still couldn't understand why Liloa gave up. He held others to high standards just as he was strict with himself. Like a country's sage, he was the most strict with himself but he had not yet developed the habit of being lenient with others.

If someone has a situation to endure, in addition to enduring it, one has to overcome it. Otherwise, it would have been all in vain. Giving up halfway equates to not having achieved anything at all. Such will shouldn't have been interrupted because that's what makes a human's will so great. It can intervene and change the course of history.

The will he felt that resides within Liloa was by no means usual.

But in the end, she cut it off. She gave in.

As he approached his library, Edgar looked at a mural he passed.

The first humans to appear after the fall of the ancient world. The river from the mountain that mankind crossed. Its will oozing from the decaying barriers, producing a seed that dyed the continent golden

Edgar stood in the centre of the library and looked around. As he was standing as the man he was today, his determination about Liloa remained unwavering. He came this far carrying a sense of inferiority, a sense of shame, and expectations.

So, Liloa shouldn't have thrown away the truth so easily. Knowing how precious it is I thought she knew better than that. Even though she already understood what I had obtained thus far, she shouldn't have thrown away the will she has been desperately harbouring as if it was nothing.

Edgar glared at Mireille's letter that he had crumpled in his hand. The forgotten sense of betrayal and anger seeped into his mind. He was certain that if Liloa found out about this, she would laugh at him and mock him for being angry at a person whom he shouldn't even care about, as though she did something extraordinary by speaking about the truth and providence.

Edgar opened the torn letter again.

It makes no difference what Mireilles intentions are. Ill go even though Liloa had nothing to do with me. I need to know why Liloa had given up her will and gone to Mireille. And for her to have made such a terrible choice, what sense of purpose and happiness shes gained by doing so

Captain Long pushed the admirals door with his body and stormed inside. Almost rolling in, he shouted at the hidden Sagastar.

Commodore! A ship has been spotted at the east-southeast, about 2,000 morts!

While trying to quickly emerge from under the table, Sagastar hit his head on the edge. He was down there looking for possible clues on Edgars whereabouts. The commodore rubbed his head and cursed.

Report.

The captain spoke to the still invisible navy beneath the table.

A signal has been raised at the rear of the 1st Provisional Squadron. Its an old galleon.

Sagastar was finally able to lift his head above the desk before grabbing the chair and stumbled to his feet. Meanwhile, the captain double-checked that Sagastar was wearing his hat properly before allowing the group outside to enter.

The officers who came in one by one removed their hats and gathered around the conference table. On their crimson uniforms, various golden epaulettes and insignias proclaimed their rank. Before sitting down, they saluted respectfully. Sagastar unknowingly returned their stares with a serious face but gestured lightly. They were sparsely seated, taking out their handkerchiefs and wiping the sweat from their brows. The southern climate was bound to be too hot for them, especially with their multiple-layered uniforms.

The miniature-shaped model ships on the map were reorganised by someones hand, and the navigation officer next to him began performing detailed calculations. In the midst of all of this, the signals changed every few seconds, so an officer interpreting the signal from each ship came and went from the admirals room. On the other side, a communications officer was deciphering the Mandus officers code while holding a short-range communication tool. Sagastar sat quietly alone in the middle of each busy scene as he received the report.

Major Conans Justorin is now approaching them for inspection.

Theyre approaching from the wind. The winds in their favour.

If the ship departed from Marchand, it is most likely to be the Towny Lelden.

We cannot rule out the possibility that it is the Herotot or the Canchis other than the Towny Lelden. According to Legardons records, the Canchis departed around the same time as the fleet, so the 3rd Provisional Squadron will circle around and search the area.

No, the 2nd and 3rd squadrons of the 1st Provisional Battalion have been instructed to change course and support the Justorin. Operation Total Combat Deployment. Theyre approaching from three directions: northwest, north, and southwest.

The mood in the office was generally calm except for the fact that the officers had to constantly wipe the sweat off their brows. It wasnt a large-scale naval battle, it was just one ship, and the vice

admirals ship, the Visha, was in the centre of the battle line. Major Conan, who was in charge of the vanguard, had discretion, and at least eight ships followed him as support. The only concern was Edgars reported abduction.

If this sailboat is the ship were looking for, a hostage situation could occur. There's been no engagement thus far, but this is due to the fact that the people we encountered were all innocent. There's no guarantee that the next ship we inspect would be just as innocent

Sagastar hoped it wasn't the case.

If a person is taken alive, it can lead to one of the two scenarios. That person is either turned into a slave or, in the case of the Navy, executed. The former is the better option, but the latter means were wasting every second.

The latter is, of course, a characteristic of western pirates. Although the western pirates were wiped out, this only means that the active pirates are gone, remnants can still be found elsewhere. It's also not uncommon to hear news about the surviving ones becoming bandits. The Southern League, a rapidly rising pirate organisation, appears to be an appealing stronghold for such activities. However, it's not expected that the Southern League, which has previously been benign, would suddenly touch the Navy. Rather, the remnants of the Western Pirates are more credible.

Besides, it was Sergeant Sorola, that clumsy non-commissioned officer who tried to assist Sir Edgar while dressed in his uniform. Knowing that, it must have been easy to confirm Sir Edgars identity and he would have been discovered right away. Furthermore, he has a tattoo, so denying his Navy affiliation would have been pointless. If that's the case, it's only a matter of time before he's executed

Chapter 115

Sagastar pressed his hand against his shut eyes.

There are a variety of reasons why officers get a tattoo. It serves important and convenient purposes for the person who possesses one in most cases, like if taken prisoner, a person with a military tattoo may be treated with respect. In case of his death, his corpse can be identified as someone who needs to be transported to the mainland or he can use his tattoo as proof of his Navy affiliation when requesting assistance in an emergency

Although Edgar was unconcerned about all of this, Sagastar had been nagging him about it for three months straight. As a result, Edgar got a tattoo after succumbing to the commodore

A sudden shout split through the office.

Commodore!

...!

A young man with epaulettes stormed in with his hat on.

There's been a battle!

The silence that had enveloped the room for a moment, broke at once.

What about the hostage?

The hostage has not yet been identified! This is the signal I just received!

Was the attack preempted? What was the naval fleet's response?..

What about backup? Have the 2nd and 3rd squadrons caught up?..

Is it Towny Lelden?..

Have you secured the location of the hostage?..

Sagastar slammed the table in the midst of the various questions, causing the ship models around the Hangyang islands to shake in unison.

Catch up at full speed.

Yes, Commodore.

Half of them hurriedly left the admirals room. The remaining officers in the office were busy calculating the position of the Towny Lelden and the angle of the Justorins gunports.

Major Conan must also have the location of the hostage in mind. Its upwind, but Im sure he is aiming for the mast

Squadron 2 has arrived. Signals are expected to come in soon

Sagastar rubbed his chin nervously, worrying about Edgars tattoos.

Being unable to deny ones identity is one of the rare negative consequences of having them It could be that the execution ceremony has already taken place because of that

Sagastar couldnt bear his pessimistic imagination running wild anymore and jumped to his feet. The cluttered command centre focused on him in an instant. Ignoring the attention, he silently turned around, pressed his hand against the wall and lowered his head. A particular situation from the past was clearly drawn before his tightly shut eyes. At that time, they were at the receiving end of a shelling

flashback

The naval force was on the defensive after the central upper deck got completely destroyed. The deck was thick with gun smoke. Sagastar gasped when a corpse collapsed next to him. Shrapnel from the bow had pierced the bodys chest, and the tip of a sharp fragment was lodged in Sagastars thigh.

Sagastar shouted desperately.

Doctor!

But there was nothing but groans around. It wasnt difficult for him to piece together the fact that the centre of the ship had been annihilated. Still, Sagastar shouted through the smoke that began to disperse.

Officer down! Doctor! Doc

The cloud of smoke dissipated, and a pair of red eyes engulfed with fear were frantically searching everywhere. There wasnt a single breathing person in his line of sight. There were only corpses scattered all over the place. His instinct that sensed death, became desperate to live.

Doctor! Doctor! Is anybody there? Damn it

His cries started to sound more and more like sobs.

Because the shelling happened at such a close range, hand-to-hand combat is only a matter of time. I have to go down to the infirmary before the enemy crosses over

However, to do so, Sagastar first needed to remove the wood stuck in his thigh. He ripped the shirt off a nearby corpse and wrapped it tightly around his leg just above his injury. He then grabbed whatever he could get his hands on and put it in his mouth. As he started to remove the piece of wood, the size of his forearm, from his body, he quickly ran out of breath and felt himself getting faint in his head. Nonetheless, Sagastar took deep breaths, clenched his jaw and continued.

A groan escaped through his gritted teeth. His hand that squeezed his thigh was starting to get wet. Hot liquid gushed out in sync with his heartbeat; He started bleeding. The sensation felt as if his senses were getting numb. By the time he successfully removed the fragment from his leg, his strength was completely drained from his body. He swayed back and forth, looking for something to hold on to. However, his frantic arms fell without catching anything. His entire body went limp, with no power to lift it back up.

His body wriggled intermittently, as though convulsing. From somewhere he could hear the gentle voice of his wife and the cries of his newborn son. With their ringing hallucinations in his ears, Sagastar called out to them faintly. His neck gradually bent backwards and his vision collapsed.

After falling down, a fast-moving object flashed across his eyes. It was the back of someones shirt without a coat on. His resentment grew as he watched the body move so vigorously with his dying eyes. However, as if he felt that gaze, the man who was running turned to Sagastar. Sagastar only saw a blurry face. The man was about to pass him indifferently but then looked down as though he had noticed something.

Sagastar saw that the man was aware of his survival. The man, who hesitated for a moment and checked the pirate ship on the other side again, approached him with reluctant steps.

Sagastar wanted to beg him in the hopes he would be taken to the military doctor. However, he was unable to make a sound. The man kept looking back with some kind of lingering attachment as if he was unable to see the desperate expression of a dying man.

Just why did this man, who seems to have no interest in me, approach me? Anyway, I need to make clear that he has to take me to the infirmary

Even if he couldnt make a sound, he could mouth his words.

The man who sat down next to him muttered annoyedly.

Why did you take it out yourself?..

He seemed to have noticed Sagastars wound.

Still having some strength left to move his eyes, Sagastar lowered his gaze. He needed to get the mans attention in order to express his desire to be taken to the doctor. However, the man seemed a bit odd. Despite the fact that his injury was confirmed, he remained motionless. A wounded person would normally be dragged by the arm to the deck below, but the man sat still and stared at Sagastars leg. With that, the hope he had for a moment, helplessly vanished. His withering body could only bear resignation, no longer possessing the burst of energy he once possessed. Sagastar muttered with his spirit going only further down.

If you are not gonna save me Why did you come here

The body that had given up all hope gradually weakened.

Wake up.

Sagastars eyes widened at those words. The man lifted his head and looked at Sagastars epaulettes before asking.

You're a lieutenant? What's your name?

Surprisingly, his voice came out this time.

Sah Sagastar

All right. You still remember your name.

Victor Sagastar

Do you have a family?

IsabelleLe, Leon

Okay. I found your arteries I just sutured your femoral artery.

..?

Sagastar, who was repeating the names of his wife and son, couldn't understand a single word the man uttered.

But it seems the injury has touched the iliac artery as well, this one lays deeper so it will be difficult to get a clear view.

Sagastar shook his head while letting go of the blur in his mind. He still felt weak, but his focus came back dimly. The man grabbed his chin and forced Sagastar to look at him. That's when Sagastar saw the man's face. It was a face he knew very well. The man spoke again as if he was trying to clutch himself into his dying consciousness.

So, Isabelle is your wife, huh? If you want to see Isabelle again, you'd better hold out until I find where the bleeding is coming from.

Yes I know Admiral

Edgar's eyebrows curled up upon hearing that Sagastar, who finally recognized him, sounded relieved.

I guess you're not destined to die here then.

A sigh escaped between Sagastar's trembling lips. He realised a little later that he had laughed. But before he dwelled too much on it, Edgar started talking to him again.

Who is Leon?

My, my son now just, a year

Edgar hung his head in silence. Rather than asking out of curiosity, he asked in order to keep Sagastar's mind busy. Edgar's sweat gathered on his brows before pouring down like rain. He was clearly preoccupied with something, wiping his sweat without pausing. It seemed that he was looking for the blood vessels that were damaged. Edgar, who was engrossed in Sagastar's rescue, heard the latter muttering frantically.

Tha thank you!

Hah! Found it.

Die! Navy bastards!

Along with an unidentified cry, the sound of piercing flesh entered Sagastars ears, followed by an unbearable groan. When Sagastar raised his eyes with difficulty, an unfamiliar face suddenly emerged from behind Edgars back. Its shaggy face grinned, and dirty gold teeth flashed. He moved his gaze down as he scanned the body of the uninvited guest. From his shoulders to his arm, his hand and his hilt

As blood dripped down the sword lodged in Edgars side, the blade began to twist deliberately. Edgar could only tolerate the tearing of his skin and did not respond. When Sagastar noticed the admirals bloodshot green eyes trembling, he raised his eyes in a flash of anxiety. That fleeting moment. Sagastar passed by the green eyes enduring the pain, his senses heightened, and lowered his gaze. Edgar wasnt able to fight back because both his hands were stuck somewhere. Sagastar looked down at Edgars hands which were clutching a needle and thread. The admirals hands, covered in blood, remained motionless. Sagastar intuitively knew, if Edgar let go of either one of them, he would die

Chapter 116

Without a second thought, Sagastar pulled out his gun and aimed at the face with crudely glazed gold teeth

end of flashback

Bang!

A precisely aimed bullet pierced between the brows of one of the ships officers. The body, which had been on its knees, fell to the side. Sagastar watched the execution before he crossed the plank. The ship was already full of navy officers eagerly searching for their admiral. When Sagastar stepped onto the deck and adjusted his hat, major Conan saluted and began his report.

Its not the Towny Lelden. Its a ship that wasnt even noted in the Marchand records. Also, since we found a large quantity of Erimyan in the warehouse, we continued the search with utmost precision. And

The major handed him a piece of paper. It was a map folded in a specific way to make it easier to carry.

Do you remember the testimony of Sergeant Sorola of Legardon? He stated that the Admiral took one of their charts without permission, that was the reason why he chased him.

Yes.

I already confirmed it with the Legardons support officer. Hes certain that this chart belongs to Legardon. Theres no way the pirates could have access to the map used by the Navy, which is proof theyve encountered the Admiral.

Sagastar turned his head. A group of pirate officers were chained on the railing on one side of the ship. Half of the men were already dead, and the other half trembled at the prospect of their

impending death. Among them, a particularly fat pirate suddenly raised himself and spat phlegm at Sagastars feet.

Fucking Navy bastards! Why did you have to turn south

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The swearing stopped with several gunshots. The pirates chest and forehead were pierced, and the impact caused his lifeless body to fall backwards. It happened so suddenly, but no one was shaken. There were also no voices asking who had disposed of him. As if he had just been waiting, a navy officer came out and wiped the phlegm off Sagastars boots. Sagastar looked back at the major with indifferent eyes.

What about Sir Edgar?

Hes not on the ship. We know for sure that they kidnapped two sailors, but they confessed that they escaped along the way, but

But?

The major gulped down as he looked at Sagastar. Although Sagastar lives by saying that hes on the verge of quitting the role of Edgars babysitter every day, all officers were aware of how strong his loyalty to the admiral was. Sagastars attitude now also proves that; the urge to wipe out all the obstacles in front of his eyes was scary.

One guy testified that he saw the Admiral collapsing after getting shot. But the guy next to him said he saw the Admiral safely get onto another ship. Their confessions dont match up

Therefore?

Well resume the interrogations with utmost care.

Like hammering nails into horses, a mix of dozens of screams and groans could be heard from the lower decks. Sagastar decided to go downstairs and interrogate them himself. The major seemed to have read his thoughts and stepped aside to make way.

Commodore!

..?!

Sagastar looked back at the voice coming from the Visha. It was Captain Long, who was standing on the poop deck of the Visha.

Commodore! Its a messenger pigeon!

After a while, Captain Long and Sagastar stared at the decoded letter from the admiral. The correspondence was very short.

[You must have heard that I was kidnapped. Its no problem. I dont know how much you already stirred up, but dont waste your energy. Go back to Marchand and wait.]

The captain, who had been waiting for an order, asked quietly.

What shall we do?

Sink them immediately.

Instead of asking any further, the captain nodded and opened the door to the admirals office. When the junior officer who was waiting outside was given the order, the young cadet, burning with a sense of mission, shot across the deck. The captain closed the door again and asked.

What should I

Sagastar, who was staring at the letter, spoke without looking up at the captain.

Its suspicious that the title of the book is written on it.

Ah. Well, thats true. Usually, the title was all numbers

Thats why it raises my suspicion.

Yes Yes?!

The captain, who was just leisurely answering the conversation, became startled when reality hit him and summoned the recording officer at once. The records officer rushed in, grabbed his quill and unfolded a piece of paper.

Its questionable that the composition of the code is different from the usual. Theres never been anything like this in all those years. My interpretation of this is that the Admiral is still in danger.

..!

An officers order to open fire came from afar. Soon, dozens of cannons exploded at once. The shells that fired mercilessly tore the hull to shreds. The sound of masts and bow poles breaking and collapsing was heard. Screams, shouts, and curses continued to rise from the slowly sinking ship.

Sagastar continued like he didnt even hear the uproar.

We will search the entire Ingres Sea to secure the Admirals whereabouts.

The Bell Rock, anchored on a shallow shore, has been undergoing maintenance for over a week now. The ship had been through heavy rain right after the battle, so the hull and gun deck as well as the mast suffered heavy damage. Some sailors remained calm, believing it would be all right. But some were feeling a sense of panic. Nonetheless, the original Bell Rock crew had few complaints. The main issue was the temporarily borrowed crew, who were extremely dissatisfied.

On the Bell Rock, where corporal punishment wasnt implemented, the borrowed crew acted like outlaws. In addition, an injured captain has weakened authority, so fights and mutinies happened from time to time. If the gold bars hadnt been taken from the Marian, there wouldve been a lot more friction between them and the Bell Rocks crew. Lil managed to lift the mood by giving away more gold as a bonus and promised maintenance to ensure a safe voyage. However, when a considerable amount of time was spent on repairing the ship, their supplies began to run out. As a result, the Bell Rock had to change its course to an uninhabited island in order to complement their insufficient food supply. The sea to Serlio was very calm, so their schedule would be pushed back even more if the wind didnt catch up soon. At this rate, their plans would be delayed by several weeks as they also deviated from the best water route.

Two small boats idly moored between the Bell Rock and the inhabited island. The pale sea shimmered densely as a gentle breeze blew. Ed was slumped down leisurely and bounced on his surihe. He rested his legs on the bow bar fixed at an angle to the deck and lay down using a finely

folded sail as a pillow. As he was blankly staring into the air, he slowly blinked and grasped for a specific point in his memory

*flashback**

Her wet lips trembled as if she was trying to keep herself from laughing. The rainwater trickled down her cheeks and gathered at the corners of her mouth before seeping towards her neck.

Younow

Is it so shocking to hear that I still believe?

Lil smiled awkwardly and brushed back her hair. She appeared to be a bit embarrassed herself.

Suddenly, a wind blew through the cabin, causing the shirt covering her shoulders to flow down. To Ed, the sound of her falling and crumpling clothes was as loud as thunder. He remained frozen as a man struck by its lightning.

How unexpected. I thought you'd like it.

Ed completely missed Lils sarcastic undertone and therefore took her remark way too seriously.

Of course, if I had seen her like this at another time, I might have liked it. However, the situation is so shocking that I don't have the time to truly enjoy it. What the hell is going on?

He started reasoning but soon realised he was groping in the dark.

I mean, the necklace is still hanging

Hm, you can make a pretty cute expression. With your brown hair and your mouth open like that, you look like a surprised little squirrel.

Ed's thoughts came to a standstill without getting a single step closer to an answer. His face heated up at the complimentary words given by someone from the opposite sex. He had no choice but to be defenceless while facing her smiling expression as she spoke the words. It was also the first time he had ever seen Lil smile as a woman. He noticed that when she smiles, her cheeks get very full, and her pupils disappear into her puffy eyes.

It really is the first time I've seen her smile

In an attempt to hide his flushed face, Ed started looking for the bottle he had dropped. It was also an effective way to avoid his gaze. However, he struggled to concentrate on the vial.

Where is it? Where did I drop it? There was no rolling sound, so it must have fallen somewhere on the bed

Ed, who was frantically rolling his eyes, discovered the vial next to Lils hand. He hurriedly extended his arm, but Lil was quicker. She picked up the medicine bottle and examined the ointment-like contents within. It was the ointment he'd just applied on her knees.

Is this what you have put on my abrasions?

As if being chased by something, Ed hurriedly nodded. However, it appeared that Lil wasn't really waiting for an answer, seeing she had already taken some ointment on her finger. When she pointed her finger at him, Ed bit his tongue in surprise.

I've been watching you do this for a while

Chapter 117

Lil had already moved towards him quite a bit, but her body leaning forward closed the gap between them even more. Her half-exposed shoulder, still dripping with water, drew nearer. Ed felt like his reason was about to fall into pieces. He closed his eyes, not knowing what was happening.

Didn't you bleed on your forehead? Seeing it up close, you don't have enough scabs yet.

...!

A slick liquid was smeared above his brow. It was the ointment that he had applied earlier by hand. Ed let out the breath he'd been holding along with the relaxing of his tense muscles. He wasn't sure what he was expecting or nervous about, but he was.

I didn't know I hit you so hard back then, I'm sorry. But you're a doctor, so why aren't you taking care of your own body? Instead, you're putting it on someone else's knee

A circle was drawn in the centre of his forehead, which was common practice when applying external medicine. Lil twirled her fingertips round and round. Even though he wasn't a child, she carefully rotated her finger several times as though thinking that it would permeate well only if she did that.

Just a few days ago, she acted like she was going to kill me, but now she's making me laugh because of the absurdity that she's doing this.

Why are you laughing? You're making me feel bad now.

I bet you don't even know why I'm laughing.

Come on now, I can't just let this go.

Ed sneakily opened one of his eyes. Lil frowned at him as soon as he made such a mischievous expression. She still has the same mannerisms and temper he saw of her every day, but he now thinks she was just cute. It seemed strange to him that their many days together had actually led to this. He started complaining with a smile, not wanting to miss out on this opportunity.

What's the use of only applying ointment? Once I leave the captain's office, everything will be washed away in the rain.

Then what should I do? I already saved you from drowning and being eaten by a mermaid, but now you want me to nurse you back to health too?

No, not to that extent. I only ask you to put a cotton cloth on it.

You can do that yourself.

But didn't you say you were sorry? This is the wound you caused, isn't it?

While looking at Lil, Ed touched his forehead with a slight hesitation and a pained sound. Lil snorted at the obvious trick, but saw that he stubbornly held out a small piece of cotton cloth to her. She looked down at his palm as if it were something dirty before she eventually snatched it out of his hand.

You're really weird. It's strange no matter how I look at it, you're asking a man to put this on you?

It's fine if it's the Captain.

Somewhere in the near future, Ill let Marenzio be the Captain for a day. Well see if youll let him do the same thing to you then.

..!

Even though recalling the terrifying image brought a shiver down his spine, Ed tried to shrug his shoulders like it was nothing. A delicate face came closer to put the bandage on. Her expression, which had only looked annoyed before, was different this time around. With her lips pursed and her eyes narrowed, her face was just lovely. Her cheeks, which began to slowly rise in colour, also turned a bit puffy due to the pressure she put on her lips.

With an excited smile, Ed lowered his head slightly and held it out to her. It was out of consideration so she could easily access his forehead, but his gaze unintentionally drifted to a certain spot. His eyes were fixed on the opening of her robe, which followed her movement. However, the robe didnt open as he expected it to, so he was waiting for the wind to blow, but at the same time, he felt a bit nervous

Pak!

Ed regained consciousness with a groan before grabbing his brow and retreating. At the same time, Lil sneered, thinking the surprised expression on his face was amusing.

Feeling better now?

Dumbfounded, Ed held his forehead and let out a scream.

What was that? Did you just flick the medicine bottle at my head?

Did that hurt you? But the bottle was already so close?

Did you think it wouldnt hurt?

Lil snorted and put her foot on his leg.

Hurry up and finish what you were doing, then get out.

The ointment that had been applied to her knee was half smeared off. The sullen Ed looked at Lil, but she only cleaned her ear and remained silent. In the end, Ed could only grumble as he grabbed the vial and did what he was told.

Lils knee was half dark blue, half dark red. It happened when she swung the rope and knocked Jacques Poussin down with her knee. The abrasions and bruises almost resembled battle wounds.

Normally, it would have been fine to leave it as it is, but because of the rib injury, additional unattended abrasions on her legs would be aggravating.

Ed began to disinfect the area again, he was actually planning on reducing the number of painkillers he was giving her over the next couple of days. Meanwhile, Lil kept moving her toes, possibly because of the stinging disinfectant.

The foot placed on Eds thigh kept pressing and rubbing his leg. The soles of her twitching feet were a constant stimulation to Ed. It became so bad that at one point he had to bite on his tongue and tense his leg muscles.

Did she do this since earlier?

Flinch.

I dont know I dont remember.

Flinch.

As I look at Liloas legs, I can see that theyre never exposed to the sun..!

Ed suddenly couldnt stand it anymore and shouted.

Hold on!

He jumped up from his chair and quickly ran to the other side of the room. Fortunately, there were no wall lights, so it was dark enough. A puzzled question came from behind him.

Whats the matter?

Ed rested his head against the wall and took the time to calm down, looking as far away from the bed as possible. Lil, who could never understand why he had to do that, eventually asked in a more firm tone.

Have you lost your mind?

He deliberately ignored Lils questions. Its been a long time since Ed had been teased by a woman like this. So to him, it was like they were already moving to the next phase. Clinging to his corner, Ed lowered his head towards the floor and pounded his fist against the wall in the hopes to make him feel better.

Thump! Thump!

Suddenly he could hear a different sound that rang even though he didnt hit the wall.

Knock! Knock!

With each sound, the wooden walls vibrated minutely. Ed lifted his head and turned his attention to the door. Someone was knocking.

Captain, its me

The voice belonged to Marenzio. Ed turned on his feet and moved away from his spot. He glanced back at Lil. A woman in a single robe.

No!

He didnt even have time to think anymore. Ed crossed the captains quarters in haste. Lil, who was sitting on the bed with a fierce aura, looked at him suspiciously. But Ed, unable to afford an explanation, pushed her back on the bed with all his might.

What..?

Ed hurriedly bent over her and tucked her body in. Although embarrassed, Lil couldnt resist properly and had to let herself be wrapped tightly in various blankets and clothes. She was getting trapped from head to toe. When she finally realised what was going on, she started to struggle with her arms like a drowning person. It was only then that Ed realised she couldnt breathe properly and freed her face. Her flushed face couldnt take the absurdity any longer and yelled.

What are you doing!

At the same time, Marenzio burst the door open. Along with the sound of pouring rain, his complaints invaded the room.

How can you be inside, but you dont give me an answer?

He came inside grumbling and brushed the water off his wet hat.

Marenz

Ed covered her mouth with a blanket, fearing that her voice would be heard.

Ugh! Ugh!..

Dont talk.

He then quickly responded to Marenzio.

Marenzio, the Captain has a very bad cold right now. If you come any closer, you might catch it, so why dont you talk from over there.

Unfortunately, however, Marenzio was a man who neither cared about nor feared diseases.

Marenzio approached them, digging his nostrils as if asking why the dog barked. Ed pressed Lil down with his back so that she could no longer be seen between the blankets. But her struggles only got worse, and Marenzio continued to stride along.

No, this is too dangerous. He must be stopped.

Ed hurriedly stretched out his leg to stop the large gunner.

Hey, wait!

..!

At the calling for a stop, Marenzio stood tall.

Do you think everything will turn out well just because youre feeling good? As this ships doctor, I wont allow any more infections. Stay there.

Boohoo, doctor. Then I promise that I wont visit you if I catch a cold, stop making a fuss.

He drew closer and closer. Ed kicked his foot in the air again and held him back again.

Whoa, whoa! Dont you know that when you catch a cold, it doesnt just end with you? The entire shelling deck will be sick. Next, the entire crew moving from and to that shelling deck will get sick. So, why dont you just listen to me when I say that you arent allowed to come any nearer?

Marenzio finally stopped walking. But he stopped because he didnt understand what Ed was saying and not because he agreed. Marenzio stood there with his mouth open as if he never heard about the science behind the spread of disease. Ed frowned for a moment, but he thought the situation was fine for the time being. He lowered his head towards Lil.

Her enraged eyes were throwing daggers at him.

Oh.

Chapter 118

Ed was so startled that he almost removed his hand.

Come to think of it, the blanket covering her mouth is being pressed down by my hand Those intense eyes conveyed only one meaning Let go.

But Ed spoke to her calmly.

From what Ive seen, you have a very bad cold right now. You must have heard what I just said to the gunner. In fact, Im actually a warrior trying to save all of the Bell Rock from the clutches of the flu. Its hard for me to fight it alone. So for the time being, stay still and keep quiet, understand?

Let go!

Well, do you understand or not?

LET GO!

Her bright blue eyes remained fierce without even a moment of flinching. Ed, on the other hand, eventually faltered. Without realising it, he lowered his voice and asked cautiously.

Are you getting angry?

With Lil nodding slowly within a limited angle, Ed bit his lip in response.

It was great hearing her compliments moments ago, but now everything is messed up again. What a shame. But this is nothing compared to the disaster that would ensue if Liloa is discovered Shit. I cant think of anything to do. Marenzio will eventually stop thinking and try to come to the bedside again. Its only a matter of time before shes identified as a woman I cant let that brute see her in this state

Ed shook his head to get back to his senses. Meanwhile, Marenzio complained, ending his confusion earlier than expected.

The artillery deck is destroyed and the bow side is in pieces. If we continue like this, you dont have to worry about the cold anymore as we all will be thrown overboard by the wind coming through the ships holes. And given the amount of water we scooped out today alone, the Bell Rock could even sink before that

Ed hurriedly turned his head to Marenzio, who was approaching once again.

Dont come any closer!

Not wanting to pass this opportunity, Lil twisted her face from under Eds hand. When he confirmed she was getting angry, his resolve softened unknowingly. Lil freed herself by pushing Eds back, which was lying on top of her, away.

Ed, focused on Marenzio, lost his sense of support and slid from the bed to the floor. Lil then quickly pushed off the pile of blankets that had wrapped her. They all landed on Ed, who was still on the floor, rendering him unable to get up immediately and he ended up crawling on the floor for a while.

Didnt you say that same thing yesterday, Marenzio?

Hearing her voice, Eds breath got caught in his throat. It was a gentle voice, one that made you feel like you were walking on clouds. Her voice wasnt thick even when she was Lil Schweiz, but this was on a completely different level of thinness. His heart sank heavily in frustration as he tried to raise his upper body.

I need to shut her mouth No, I should cover her face first!

Huh? You seem to be fine, Captain.

Dont mind the crazy doctor. He already started acting weird before you came in.

Marenzio muttered something incoherent and sat down on the chair next to the bed. Ed opened his mouth wide, unable to hide his astonishment.

No, its Marenzio who is the insane one. He cant possibly keep a straight face after seeing her like this. How can he remain calm when he sees a woman wrapped in only some thin fabric with her long wet hair hanging down?

Marenzio calmly crossed his legs and wiped the dirt off his boot with his fingertips. Ed stood there, speechless at the incomprehensible sight.

Of course, neither of them cared about Ed.

I first left it like that because I didnt expect the rain. I initially thought that we could just repair the holes while we were sailing. But Jericho predicted the reaction of the borrowed crew and that was no feast. He figured that one complaint becomes two and two becomes three Thats normally how mutiny starts, isnt it? Anyway, Jericho is a smart guy. The moment the rain started, the complaints indeed came flying in. Then I havent even talked about the wind Its a mess.

All right.

Anyway, its fine to just hang on for now, but the rain has caused part of the hull to fall off, so well have to do some maintenance.

The schedule will be significantly delayed Well, it cant be helped.

end of flashback

Eds blank expression now wasnt much different from back then. He blinked after staring at the sky for a while.

After observing for the past ten days, it appears that everyone is still seeing her as Lil Schweiz and not as Liloa. Nobody treats her any different too. Also the way she conducts herself didnt change. The Captain is still respected as the Captain, and she treats her sailors in the same manner.

Ed glanced at Cesar, who was talking to the helmsman next to the wheel.

Then what about his gaze towards Liloa? Well, I dont know, but it shouldnt be difficult to predict.

Ed recalled the moment when the relics effect disappeared.

No, it was never clear to me what kind of effect it had on people, so I can only say that whatever it does, is still effective on them Liloas appearance changed the moment I told her that I would accept her as a human regardless of her gender. But whats unclear to me is what exactly triggered it, whether it was the whims of the necklace, the influence of the mermaid, or the will of a deity

Ed thought about a clue that didnt even seemed like a clue at first.

Ecce tibi benedictio Formae. The mermaid conveyed Orsays protection on Liloa and prayed for the blessing of Forma, the goddess of beauty. That would mean that the power of her necklace*

belongs to the latter. But Im not sure if I can find anything about this if I rummage through the legends related to Forma

As a result, Ed had been lost in such myths for several days. But today, as he wandered through the endless history of the past, a voice brought him back to the present.

That instrument looks strange.

It was the only soft voice on this ship. Ed lifted the hat he had draped over his face.

Its an instrument from the Western Continent.

The Western Continent? Really? Whats it called?

Without a hat, Ed had to squint his eyes against the sun.

Liloea still has the same appearance today. Shes convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that she appears as a man, so she pays little attention to her clothes

Therefore, Ed saw a woman wearing only a shirt with no corset covering her torso every day. It was, even after ten days, still difficult for him to get used to the sight of her walking in front of him in her sleep or outerwear clothes.

It was an experience that was more difficult than it was pleasant. As it was never pleasant to be struggling against an urge. Because of that, Ed had to impose upon himself strict discipline.

Liloeas outfit is particularly thin today as well

He swallowed his saliva before answering.

Surihe.

Ed pushed the Surihe aside. Lil leaned against the railing and looked down at the instrument. As she moved her head, the baby hairs by her nape fluttered. She has tied her hair up high these days, perhaps because of the hot weather. Her exposed shoulder line was incredibly thin. Even though she wore mens shirts, she was unable to completely hide it. Ed couldnt help but be drawn to her every time she came in his line of sight. It became so bad that he eventually started to understand Cesars dislike for her injuries.

Its difficult to imagine bones similar to mine existing in that slender frame of hers.

Lil tilted her head as her focus remained on the Surihe. She had never been curious about the instrument, but now she couldnt take her gaze away from it and even wanted to get a closer look.

Have you been to the Western Continent?

I just happened to obtain it.

Really? You carry a unique musical instrument Ive never seen before, so I wonder if this could be related to ancient times.

Ed cleared his throat to calm himself down.

The ancient times were thousands of years ago, so can any such instrument still be intact? Anyway, whats going on? The Captain talked to me first.

I have a question.

What?

Are you familiar with ancient artefacts?

It was an unexpected question. Ed tried to figure out her intentions but soon gave up.

Dont tell me you want to ask about the necklace?

An artefact? Are you asking if I know one or two artefacts?

No, thats not what I meant. Havent you heard many old stories while coming and going? Then you might have heard about strange artefacts roaming the world

What do you mean by strange artefacts? Its not like we havent encountered one or two strange occurrences on this voyage either But youre talking about artefacts? Hm, there probably are still many which havent even been identified yet.

No that, magi an artefact that uses magic.

Her voice shrank inaudibly like crumpled paper. Leading Ed to almost ask, You mean the one around your neck?. But, he tightened his jaw muscles to prevent it.

Its a subject that shouldnt be brought up even as a joke.

Eds strongest defence would be pretending to be unaware of the artefacts existence. Meanwhile, Lil sharpened her doubts like knives and stabbed Ed whenever she could. However, it was the almost invincible shield that neutralised Lils daggers in the end. Confessing what he knew here was equivalent to attempting to break the shield on his own.

Were making great progress. I cant let her suspicions become reality.

Chapter 119

Ed knew Lil Schweiz was the same person as Lil, an employee of Madame Rouge, and that her transformation was due to an artefact, but he still pretended he didnt know anything. Knowing that fact alone would raise enough eyebrows, but thats not all. All traces of Lil stopped at Madame Rouges brothel. However, after confirming Lil Schweizs identity through the letter he received from Lil, he resumed his pursuit on the Bell Rock. Cesar pretended not to know Ed when he boarded the pirate ship, but if questioned, Cesar could admit that he was intimidated. Intimidated by someone who knew Cesar and has the ability to silence him.

This baseless suspicion would then take physical form. A person who is knowledgeable about ancient times and can intimidate Cesar with overwhelming force. Eds true identity would be easy to discover once his ignorance shield was removed. Their meeting in Amiaeng, without knowing what Lil had been up to, was his first and most serious flaw. His biggest mistake was to not start searching between the sailors in the first place. Maybe there was a better way to deceive Lil, but he has no regrets at this point.

Ill tell her someday. But not right now and not during circumstances like this. Liloa is still a woman with her guard up. Also, I dont want to miss out on the significance of her state that only I can see right now.

Youre asking me about magic artefacts all of a sudden?

If mermaids have the ability to make people breathe underwater, dont you think there could be a lot of artefacts that uses magic as well?

Come on, tell me.

Ed looked up at her without saying a word. Her eyes under the shining sun were clear and bluish.

You should be the one telling me.

He asked with words that he could not convey.

But this appearance of yours, what the hell does it mean?

Ed wanted to talk about something other than mermaids or artefacts. For example, her mind.

If it was because of the clash of divine powers, the necklaces effect should have ceased the moment she met the mermaid. But without a warning, it was that specific moment In addition, starting the day her appearance changed, Liloas attitude towards me changed as well. But Im sure shes not aware of it. She even came to see me first. Im not sure what kind of wind blew in and changed things, but something in Liloas mind has definitely changed or perhaps she realised something she didnt know before.

Right from the start, Ed didnt desire a future with Lil, so he thought it didnt matter if his identity was revealed after some time. He thought it would be fine even if Lil felt betrayed upon knowing who he was. But now he began to realise he wanted to be someone significant to Lil, someone she was happy to see. So slowly, the future wove itself anew. What he didnt know yet, however, was in what kind of relationship he wanted to exist in her future.

He was certain of only one thing. Thats if his identity was discovered at such a perilous time, their future will fall apart immediately.

He had no idea why Lil had resumed this unexpected voyage, whether it had anything to do with his fleet, where the Bell Rock was going, or what her future plans were. In this chaotic situation, he couldnt afford to make a confession that would completely change the game.

Ed avoided Lils eyes. He had to lie, he needed to give an answer he didnt want to. They were just words, but they didnt come out as smoothly as before. In the midst of his confusion, Ed opened his mouth.

The only things I know are about murals, clay tablets, and some other junk.

His forehead, which was receiving Lils calm gaze, felt pierced, and his stomach hurt more than he could imagine. No, it was excruciatingly painful. The blades of the countless lies hed told had carved into his heart, engraving Lils words that hed never be forgiven. Never to be erased. It appeared to be imprinted in a deep place that couldnt be washed away with time.

Really?

It was an incredibly refreshing voice.

Too bad.

Lil pursed her lips like she was really sorry. She didnt press any further, which wasnt like her usual suspicious self. Ed, who somehow expected a suspicious reaction, couldnt look her in the eye. He

thought a gaze of distrust would have been better, for that naive belief of hers was even more painful.

Well, Im off then.

Seeing Lils hat disappear toward the poop deck, an irrefutable fact pierced his heart.

She trusts me. The fact that she inquired about the artefact itself is sufficient proof. She truly believes me

The sentence he thought would bring him joy someday only made him feel terrible now. Ed gradually became aware of what he had done and where it was leading. The inevitable conclusion was so obvious that a sense of remorse close to fear crept in.

It wasnt supposed to be like this seeing how we started. I shouldnt have been so careless

Ed clutched his dizzy head. The area around his chest was scorched. He knew how heartbreaking it was to lose a loved one. And it was just as painful now as it was then. The agony of losing Lil was like a rippling sensation in his chest. A vague question arose in his mind.

Since when?

Lil had always been in the form of a man. Her appearance gave no room for Eds rational feelings to intervene. Furthermore, Ed occasionally went overboard and treated her as if she were a true fellow sailor. On rare occasions, she appeared as a woman, but only for a brief moment before resuming her form as Lil Schweiz. His emotions couldnt have become this intense in such a short period of time.

Old memories laughed at Ed.

No, maybe

Ed pressed the inside of his elbow over his eyes. In front of his eyes immersed in darkness, the shadows caused by thick leaves swaying between pillars were seen.

Thump. Thump.

The sound of footsteps walking the LeBrunns corridor rang in his ears. Birds happily welcomed spring and flew from their nests. Except for the sound of distant chatter, the hallway was quiet. It was then that he heard that voice for the first time, coming through an open window.

{ No, Baron. He is just a child. I am not going to punish this young kid with a whip. Besides, it seems to me that the reason for the punishment you claim is his dark skin rather than his mistake. }

Before Ed could even turn his head to see her.

{ Obedience is one of the virtues, but how can you rule your subordinates when you are this soft-hearted? }

{ It is not because of my soft heart. It is because they have no intention of doing wrong. I call this righteousness. }

Perhaps thats when it began. When I heard her speak about something so unknown.

{ You mean uprightness against the laws of the Empire? }

{ What law does this punishment apply to? Please tell me. }

In fact, it didnt matter who she was. It didnt matter which shell she was wearing.

{ }

{ There is no law applicable in this situation. There is only one law that cannot be expressed in human language. Until he met you, this child was neither dirty nor inferior. Do you still not understand? You, Baron, are the one framing an innocent child because of his appearance. Why do you not be honest and tell him directly that you beat him because of his dark skin? }

How could I not have known?

{ }

{ But you cannot do that now, can you? Because you know it too. That there are natural laws that you cannot go against. }

Its just that I loved that voice that exuded noble convictions.

From his spot, Cesar could see Ed perched beneath the mast. Ed sat there watching Lil with a look full of affection. He never took his gaze away from her. His eyes remained fixed on Lil as she approached the poop deck. He chased her back, looking regretful as if he didnt want to miss a single moment.

Cesars annoyance was palpable. What he saw was as clear as day. Ed didnt want to be caught, so he acted when he was facing Lil, but when she was no longer looking, Ed appeared to be watching a spectacle. He was as enthralled as a young boy discovering love for the first time. Sometimes, he wouldnt even notice when someone was approaching. Ed has recently been behaving out of character, and Cesar couldnt think of a more appropriate word to fit Eds behaviour.

The navigator observed Ed with disgusted eyes. His green eyes glistened with both desire and melancholy. A desire that he could no longer control.

Its so obvious that he can no longer hide it. It goes without saying He desires Liloa.

Chapter 120

Discomfort oozed over him and clung to his whole body, his grip on the steering wheel tightened.

Since how long? How long has he held back his insatiable lust and has he pictured her in his disgusting imagination? Even Liloa seemed sympathetic towards him today. It isnt unusual for her to talk to her crew first, but Liloa had been especially suspicious of Edgar. No matter how persistent he was, her dislike for him was so obvious. But her demeanour has clearly changed since then. What transpired between them? Something has changed since the mermaid. Helping with its escape must have contributed greatly to winning Liloas favour.

Cesar cast a sidelong glance at the bare mast. It had been a week since they dropped the anchor. Serlio, he thought, was the end, but he didnt know how much their schedule would be pushed back. It could take up to a couple of weeks. The thought of having to look at all of this for another month made him sick to the stomach.

I cant even warn Liloa about the doctor knowing her real name. He boarded the Bell Rock after striking some kind of deal with the Duke, and is willing to do anything to achieve that purpose. Knowing him, he also wants to meet some personal pleasure, so there is nothing he wont do to

catch Liloas attention I should have told her from the start When we got out of the Counts mansion in Amiaeng, I should have revealed to Liloa that he was the Admiral. But now its already too late

Cesar leaned on the wheel and rubbed his face.

At first, I was perplexed. I recognised the face lit by the moonlight the moment our swords met. But I was so taken aback that I didnt even call him out on the spot. That instance, that room, and that face felt so strange as if they were all unrelated to each other. It was such an unexpected person that it was hard to fathom his name Nonetheless, the two of them had already met.

From then on, Cesar became suspicious of Eds motives.

The news of the Admirals southward movement, which was causing a commotion throughout Anatole, had to have something to do with Liloa. I couldnt open my mouth in front of Liloa because I didnt know what Edgar was up to. Assuming that the Duke was behind it, I abandoned the idea of speaking about it completely. Could this situation have been avoided if I had told her about Edgar back then? Maybe if I had just kept it vague Damn it. This is a pointless illusion now. Despite the fact that this shouldnt have happened, what is done is done. Im unable to tell her. And even if I could go back in time, I would do the same thing Because Im not confident. I still cant help but doubt her whispers of love. Her heart. Im unsure about her true feelings Knowing about the Dukes search for her might compel her to return to him. Theres no assurance she wont. Im afraid of what Ill do if I even see a hint of confusion in her eyes. I told her I didnt want to force her feelings, but I cant let her go

His stomach burned every time he thought about it. His heart raced at the thought of discovering Lil wasnt happy by his side. It was a fear that could become a reality at any time, and that dreadful possibility had always felt within reach. What made matters worse was that the feeling kept persisting even after years of being together. When he looked at Lil, such flaws still existed as possibilities. It was a gap as thin as a needle, but it could open and tear so easily. When that happens, all of his happiness would shatter. Cesar was nervous and couldnt take it any longer. Ed, on the other hand, was approaching rapidly. His fingers appeared to claw their way through the gab. As long as he couldnt get rid of Ed, Cesar couldnt be relieved.

Cesar lowered his eyes in search of Lil. Just simply looking at her caused his heart to beat intensely. This hasnt changed even after many years. It was always a wonderful experience for Cesar to wake up next to her, seeing her when he opened his eyes and hugged her when he opened his arms. Cesar loved Lil far too much to let her go now. If she left, his life would lose meaning

I dont want to lose her. I can never let her go.

Cesar was about to call Lil. He hoped shed raise her head and smile when she heard his voice.

Cap

However, a sailor from Valtanos crew, Julio, approached Lil in a condescending manner. As Lil gave him a look, asking what his deal was, he shoved her shoulder. With this, the scene that was their peaceful day-to-day life shattered in an instant.

Cesar let go of the steering wheel and shouted.

Captain!..

Ed jumped up and yelled as well.

Captain!..

The two rushed forward at the same time like they were betting on who would reach her first. After assessing the situation, sailors near the middeck began to flock in as well. Alain was the first person to approach the captain and bumped his torso against Julio.

What? If its a mistake, apologise quickly. Youd better, little Julio.

In fact, Julio was not small at all. He looked rather large compared to Alain, who was smaller than Lil. But even so, Julio couldnt help but be embarrassed and was unable to really refute the boatswain.

Stay out of this, old man.

Alain snorted audibly and wiggled his little finger between his legs while rocking his hips.

Hey! Valtano begged us for something small, and gave you to us, now youre playing with mutiny?

My Captains nose was cut off by those pale bastards! Whenever I see the same skin as theirs, I cant help but grit my teeth!

Cesar and Ed, who arrived almost simultaneously, held Julio in check. One with calm and intimidating eyes, the other with squinting eyes wondering how to cut Julio off. However, the grip on their hilts were the same.

They werent the only ones affected by the commotion. Before long, Bell Rocks sailors were gathering around their captain. Although he was pretending to be confident, Julio was still young and relatively inexperienced. Feeling intimidated by the forming crowd, he looked behind him. But the sailors of Valtano, who were supposed to be united together, were already falling back one step at a time.

Alain, the eldest, stepped in and stopped the young sailor.

Stop this. If Captain Valtano finds out about this, do you think he will commend you or rebuff you? Huh? Dont forget that Captain Valtano supported the Black Whale with goodwill and that youre sailing the Bell Rock because of that.

Julio just sighed and stared at him. Even so, he still despised Lil and wished he could kill her. Although there were others who had the same skin colour as her, Julio couldnt dare to look at Cesar and Ed, who appeared much stronger, so his glare was only aimed at the captain.

Despite this, Lil passed him with a tired expression and walked towards the captains office.

Julios reasoning for making such a bold move was straightforward. There was no corporal punishment on the Bell Rock. In comparison to other ships, where confronting the captain like this would result in dozens of lashes, the Bell Rock would only resort to wage cuts or orders to clean up filth. Furthermore, Lils appearance was the main cause of this conflict.

Judging by the gravity of his hatred, Julio must be from Marchand

Lil let out a small sigh no one could hear and began to worry about the day when she would be stabbed in the back with a knife. It was becoming tiresome for her to constantly put her life in danger in order to pursue her passion. Nonetheless, this was no unfamiliar sight. When she first got onto the Bell Rock, where there was no corporal punishment, the crew acted arrogant and fearless. Shed been through this hardship before, but it had gotten more difficult recently. Her time with the

Bell Rock was coming to an end, but half of what she had built up was already gone. It was bittersweet for Lil to remember her last voyage in such a crumbling state.

Lil chinned Julio toward the door of the captains room.

Follow me in.

?

At first, no one seemed to understand her words. Lil then gently raised her hand and pointed at the captains room.

Come in.

Captain!..

There were hushed murmurs of concern about her dangerous decision. Ignoring the noise, Lil leaned against the wall next to the door and waited for Julio. Julio walked forward with a disgusted expression only after Alain had kicked him in the back. Cesar then followed as if pressuring a prisoner, and grabbed the doorknob to let Julio in.