

Northwest 131

Chapter 131

A small figure jumped into the room. It was Courant, holding a gun in one of his hands. Lil bit her lip in her dismay. Realising belatedly that she had unlocked the latch after laying Ed down and right before she tried to leave the bedroom.

Startled by the shout of the uninvited guest, the pigeon rushed toward Courant.

What the?!

The pigeon struck Courants small head with its beak and the sound of its loud flapping wings filled the room. While Courant frantically covered his head, struggling to shove the bird away, a hand rose from above him. Lil couldnt see who reached out because their body and face were hidden behind the half-open door. But the rampaging pigeon that had been pecking on Courants head, was grabbed by its body in an instant. The grip was strong enough to hold the bird firmly despite its violent flapping. Surprised, Courant looked back at his saviour and greeted them. The boy then pointed at Ed and raised his eyes towards him as a gesture of accusation. The hands owner seemed to have said something because Courant eagerly nodded his head in response. The obedient boy then grabbed the wooden door and held it open for him.

Lil hoped the person about to enter wasnt a member from Valtanos or Jarles crew as it was unimaginable how much more threatening the atmosphere would become if word got out that this ship had a navy onboard that could communicate with his fleet. But only a second later, she wished it was one of them as she could only think of one other person who shouldve never seen this scene.

Lil knew before the door even fully opened. She knew it the moment she saw the arm. The way it wore its sleeve and the appearance of the familiar wrist. She couldnt help but wonder what he was thinking about the hours shes spent with Ed. It wasnt long before the identity of the man, who stepped straight into the cabin, was revealed.

Cold sweat poured down her back like a river, her brow became damp and her legs trembled. She felt as if shed been caught in bed with a stranger. The fact that Lil was still pointing her gun at Ed wasnt helping the situation either.

What is going on?

Cesar looked at Lil as he retrieved the message from the pigeons ankle

Oh Im dying

Captain Long struggled to open his eyes as he lay face down on the conference table in the admirals office. He couldnt recall the last time he had a good nights sleep.

The rest of the fleet probably feels the same way. Of course, if the Vice-Admiral refuses to lie down for even a moment, who has the right to do so? Fortunately, I can slack off a bit like this if Sir Sagastar is out of sight, but if Im caught the situation will turn disastrous

Captain Long sighed deeply, drooping his forehead on the hard table.

All battleships were currently on a tight schedule, but the Visha, where Sagastar was stationed, has accelerated its pace immensely. Due to the urgency of the situation, the Visha raised from the middle to the front lines, but then it even set off alone and never drifted off its route. Of course, the Visha was accompanied by a Legardon sloop on all sides.

The captain smiled with relief, thankful that Legardon had joined them.

Legardon, which has enemies in the shallow waters of the Ingres Sea, has a large number of shallow draft ships. These smaller ships were ideal for exploring coastlines. Such a setup would allow them to travel along the coast while leaving a larger ship like the Visha in the middle of the sea.

However, thats the only thing that can be considered fortunate

The captains smile quickly turned into a sad one when he realised everything else was in disarray. He only wanted to sleep. It felt as if he was going insane from sleep deprivation.

I might die if I stay awake like this At this point, Im willing to sell my soul to the God of death in exchange for some shuteye

What are you doing, Captain?

Aaaagh!

Captain Long rose from his seat. Until now, he hadnt realised Sagastar was standing right next to him.

Maybe I really dozed off

That thought terrified him so much that it was writing all over his face.

When did you arrive, Commodore?

Ive been here since you were soundly asleep alone while everyone else worked hard.

No No, I just happened to observe the Hangyang Islands from a lower vantage point

Cut to the chase.

Yes!

Sagastar walked past the table and sat down on the admirals seat. The captain, who was still standing, finally sat down in response to the given gesture. Out of exhaustion, Sagastar leaned back in his chair and rubbed his eyes. Captain Long used this moment to scan the table in front of them, searching for anything worth reporting, before casting a sidelong glance at his commodore. Somewhere along the line, Sagastar had removed his jacket and was now dressed in an for him unusual manner, with a loose scarf hanging from his shoulders. He even rolled his sleeves all the way up to his elbows and his exposed forearms were smeared with ink.

Sir Sagastar used to nag Sir Edgar whenever he wandered around the Visha in similar attire Now hes the one who casually discarded his coat and vest. This practically confirms he isnt paying attention to anything but the search.

The captain snapped out of his thoughts and forcefully opened his eyes to read the report. He could only open his eyes fully by forcefully raising his brows. The captain looked at the black letters with smarting eyes he then felt them close slowly.

Captain.

Yes, Commodore

When he realised that his answer came out unconsciously, captain Long immediately opened his eyes wide.

Yes! Whats the matter?

Bring them.

Oh, yes.

The captain took the documents gathered in front of him and walked up to Sagastar. He scoured for the right page and placed the papers down in front of the commodore.

Uh, well here it is.

Is this really the ship?

Yes. Whether these waters are uncharted or not This must be it. A few days ago, another ship encountered it, but we lost its trail Who would even want to go this way? Its famous for being a windless zone, most ships avoid it, afraid to die of starvation.

However, it overlaps with the route to Serlio.

Ah, according to the officers of Legardon, Serlio primarily trades with the mainland and the islands along the way. Because the main island of the southern archipelago is Marchand, I heard that not many ships from the South find it profitable to go to Serlio.

Right.

Sagastar sank into silence. Trying to predict various scenarios and possibilities, he busily flipped through the papers. For a moment, the captain quietly observed him.

By the way, Commodore

What?

Why do we keep searching the islands?

Sagastars hand came to a halt. The captain winced, wondering if hed made a mistake. Fortunately for him, Sagastar turned the page before responding to him.

Do you recall the most recent correspondence we received?

Yes.

It had the title of the book written on it.

Yes.

Under what conditions do you believe such a change in procedure could occur?

The captain shook his head.

Didnt you interpret it as a distress signal by the Admiral?

Formally, yes.

Is there an informal way to look at it?

Thats correct.

How?

Someone coerced Sir Edgar into writing a code.

What?!

Sagastar gave him an irritated look, so the captain shrank his shoulders and shut his mouth again.

For now, I can only assume something must have happened. Sir Edgar must have informed the perpetrator that their life was also on the line, so they had no choice but to help Sir Edgar. In this case, they must have had some scuffle over the code. If its written down without any chance to check, the perpetrator will never believe the content, and that will mean trouble for Sir Edgar too. And because Sir Edgar couldnt use the official code, this must be a product of the compromise between them.

You came up with all this just because he wrote down the title?

Yes. Think about it, Captain Long. Think. Whats the foundation of the code?

The captain took a quick look around. Like a real library, the walls on both sides of the admirals room were lined with books. Bookshelves whose arrangement and contents havent changed in years. No matter how high the waves the Visha sailed were, the shelves remained intact. Even if a bookshelf was tipped over and all the books were spilt, the owner would return them to their original place.

Is that even human?

The captain shook his head when he even imagined Edgars ghost hovering in front of the bookshelf. He rubbed his arms incessantly and gazed at Sagastar.

The title coordinates?

Thats right, Captain. One cant decipher the code unless he knows what kind of book he needs. The coordinates of the title, the first three numbers, are the key to the code.

If Sir Edgar only wrote down the title with numbers, the perpetrator wont be able to trust the message, in addition, theres the risk that Sir Edgars library would be found out, so they compromised by just writing the title down?

Exactly.

Uh then I understand why its alarming that the Admiral only used half of the coding system, but what does that have to do with searching the islands?

The tired Sagastar rested his hand on his forehead.

It wouldnt have been a peaceful situation if you had to write a letter under duress, Captain Think, youre now aboard a hostile ship with no allies. Threats are lurking all the time. How are you going to escape?

Of course, Ill wait for a nearby island and flee at night

Thats all there is to it.

Well then the Admiral could have drifted to one of the many islands in this vast ocean

Finding that the conversation took another annoying turn, Sagastar waved his hand. The captain immediately bit his tongue and picked up the scattered reports. Meanwhile, the commodore closed his eyes. Captain Long gathered the last report and packed all of them to his chest before quietly leaving the admirals room

Chapter

When her jaw felt numb as if it had been removed, Lil opened her mouth with difficulty.

Ce Cesar

Sweat dripped from her forehead right into her eyes, blurring her vision. Lil shook her head and tightly closed them.

I need to snap out of it.

She had no idea what absurd misunderstandings Cesar would come up with if she let herself get lost here.

Nothing Cesar might suspect has ever happened, so I just have to act as if nothing happened. That means I have to explain the situation, what should I say? Whats the most convincing thing to say?

In the meantime, Ed came into view. He sat down on the bed and blinked a few times, calming himself down. Ed soon returned to his composed expressionless face with a relaxed body. Now, it was only Lil who was embarrassed, jittery and denying this situation.

But thats only natural, isnt it? Im the one who got fooled its the most obvious fact in the room.

After rearranging her thoughts, Lil gave an order without hesitation.

Courant, get Jericho and Alain. Quietly but quickly.

Courant, staring at Ed as if he were going to kill him, muttered.

That was a loud gunshot. What if someone asks about it?

It was Cesar who answered immediately.

Tell them that the doctor attempted suicide.

Yes.

Courant closed the door and left the cabin. Lil still had her gun aimed at Ed, but her hands were no longer trembling. She spoke to Cesar in a calm manner.

What does it say?

Cesar delivered a powerful blow to the fluttering pigeon, knocking it out. To secure the letter, he lowered the flaccid bird to the floor and deftly opened the communication scroll.

Its fortunate that so far, Cesar agrees to cooperate. I might even be able to get the accusations dropped that we cant discuss here. Therefore, its preferable to reduce the intensity of his doubts first.

Resolutely, Lil raised her chin.

Its funny how I brainwashed myself like this when nothing has happened.

However, that feeling was short-lived.

It appears to be about the direction our pirate ship is heading [Considering the Bell Rocks route that has been reported so far, its likely to be within the eastern archipelago]

Ed burst out laughing as if he heard something funny.

Incredible!

The Bell Rocks route that has been reported so far

The clear sentence filled Ed with a belated surge of rage. It wasn't until Cesar intervened that he came to his senses as if he had been hit by cold water.

I almost fell for it. Didn't I almost help him destroy the evidence? I'm surprised that someone like Cesar had to intervene to snap me back.

Before he knew it, his hands started trembling, and he spat out curses.

You disgraceful bastard.

Ed raised his eyebrows and laughed at Cesar.

Aren't you so damn good at this? You just read it like that and you sound so damn believable.

When Cesar didn't respond, Ed, who suddenly lost his laugh, looked straight at Lil. The humiliation and betrayal in her eyes attacked him like a swarm of insects he couldn't escape.

He gritted his teeth.

This kind of trust. I'm very envious of that

It doesn't matter if it was the intended message or not. I'm sure that Cesar doesn't know the official officer's code, but hearing him read it out loud with such confidence is really something else.

Ed still didn't take his eyes off her. Lil didn't loosen up either.

There's a limit to Ed's impudence. He himself was caught red handed and can still afford to shamelessly raise his face despite betraying me upfront. It's no use saying my prayers. He isn't even making excuses for himself. What the hell am I going to do now. Damn it.

Lil bit her lip.

This can't be it. I think I'm taking this the wrong way

Carrying a heavy weight on her shoulders, the scale tipped and pointed into the direction of defending Ed.

When I recall every time I was fooled, I should be angrier, but I'm not. I know I should be resentful, and I'm trying hard to feel that way, but the rage that had been snuffed out doesn't return. What kind of mentality is this? I'm feeling disconnected as if this is all just a bad dream.

Rather, her days with Ed were much more vivid, and she appeared to be completely possessed.

However, because Cesar had been staring at Lil in silence, she was forced to begin the interrogation.

What else did you leak?

Ed laughed at her comment.

Well, there were so many that I don't remember.

You're so

Why? It doesn't really matter what I say now anyway, right?

Is this really the attitude of a spy whose identity has been revealed? It's hard to believe. He's been avoiding many crises with his attitude, but something is definitely different. Perhaps he gave up on everything? But Ed is too particular a person to do that and it doesn't seem to be in his nature to give up on life as vainly as this too.

Despite her guilt, Lil continued to speculate.

If I think that Ed isn't a spy, then I should doubt the content of the correspondence. But doubting the message means doubting Cesar who read it. Why would Cesar do such a thing? To banish the guy who might have spent the night with his lover? Can that really be it? Surely, he must've looked for me as soon as he woke up. Wait, he might have searched all over the Bell Rock, and not being able to find me, worried him. Then when he heard the gunshot and came looking, he found Ed, who was being called out for being a spy, and me. He then realised that I spent the night here. For that reason, he could have fabricated the message from the pigeon on the spot. But that's nonsense! Nothing I come up with makes any sense. But does it really matter? There's no way a Naval message contains mere small talk. It doesn't change the fact that it's a telegram from the Western fleet bound to a messenger bird that then flew all the way here. To the Bell Rock, the ship Ed boarded. Even if the message is impossible to decode, it's still proof that they've been communicating with each other.

As soon as Alain and Jericho entered the cabin one after another, Lil ordered them without delay not even fully informing them on the situation.

He's a spy from the Navy.

What?

What did you say?

Lil avoided further explanation by wriggling the barrel of the gun she was holding. The more she confronted her inner thoughts, the more the scale pointed into a direction it shouldn't as it couldn't bear the weight.

Lock him up. We'll throw him on a suitable uninhabited island soon, let's discuss the timing later.

It had been a particularly rough day.

As soon as the trumpet sounded in the morning, the captain's office became crowded. This was because the moored ship decided to raise its anchor. After a long time, the Bell Rock was caught on a windy day again and sailed along the course. Due to their resumed voyage, the officers busied themselves around the decks all day long. As she was never being left alone for even a moment, Lil and Cesar still hadn't had the chance to speak about what had happened in private.

While constantly giving orders and receiving reports, Lil thought of Ed's disposal. Ed had been chained up and was watched alternately by Alain and Jericho. Those who asked about the gunshot were told it was a suicide attempt.

Indeed, thats better than the lame excuse that it was a mistake. No matter when he disappears, we can simply tell them he succeeded in killing himself and the doctors work has been suspended.

The work on deck didnt stop till evening. Only then did Lil, Cesar, Alain and Jericho gather in the captains room to discuss Eds removal. Out of necessity for this meeting, Eds warden became the young Courant. Although Lil was worried that Courant might not be able to handle Ed, they werent in a position to do anything about it.

Lil declared the sentence without question.

Isolation. As soon as the sun rises tomorrow, throw him overboard near a deserted island.

Alain asked disgruntledly.

Why tomorrow?

His view

Lil pressed her lips before she could continue any further.

For a prisoner whos supposed to receive the maximum sentence, the suggestion to delay his disposition until the morning just to increase his visibility wont make sense

Sure enough, Alain banged the table in frustration.

Are you going to throw him away in the morning knowing theres a risk of someone seeing him? We should throw him out when its dark, like right now. It will be better if this doesnt reach the ears of guys like Julio. Besides, Captain, wont the other sailors get suspicious if the doctor has been locked up for a long time? A new patient can come any minute! Anyone can knock on the door of the doctor! If its only one or two people, the excuse we use now can work, but not when there are ten or twenty. We cant lock him up like this. Lets hurry and dispose of him as soon as possible. Well need to go back to Panichi and report this.

Jericho, standing next to Alain, couldnt stop fidgeting with his fingers.

Thats right, well have to tell Anunchio about this disaster oh, what to do oh

Jericho, with his head down, thumped his forehead. He was so remorseful that tears welled up in his eyes. Because no one stopped him, only Jerichos lamentation could be heard for a while.

It was Cesar who eventually cut him off.

No. Our destination wont change.

Navigator. What do you mean?

Did you forget that this ship is carrying out the orders of the League? Currently, the Bell Rock is in the process of bringing in supplies necessary for the upcoming war. If the Navy is already this close to the League, we need to hurry, dont we?

But

Ill send a letter through another ship when we encounter one on the way.

What kind of ship could we possibly encounter on these waters?

Didnt we already come across one?

Thats

For now, thats the best thing to do. Isnt that right, Captain?

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Ignoring both the agitated Alain and the wistful Jericho, Cesar only looked at Lil. She nodded slowly, not knowing what he was thinking.

Obviously, it has something to do with Serlio. He must be trying to get me out of this situation in which I have an infiltrator under my watch, right after announcing Im retiring. But, is that all theres to it? Due to the unexpected battle, we also lost men from Jarles and Valtanos crew. Being contractually indebted to those guys and going back to Panichi empty-handed, basically means I have no value for my own life I have nothing to say even if they demand my neck upon our return

Yes.

Alain clicked his tongue and scratched his neck.

So, whats the order?

Theres none for now.

Hah! How frustrating.

Cesar is right. If the Mondovi fleet suddenly makes an unexpected move, we wont get a second chance. Grandpa, we need to return loaded

and ensure we reach Panichi in one piece.

Lil swallowed the end of her sentence with bitter breath. After a moment of silence, Alain, who considered all of it a waste of time, jumped up from his seat.

Well, all right then. Lets get rid of him.

Startled by his sudden declaration, Lil jerked from her seat as well.

Wait! You cant just throw away a Navy like its trash! Even the corpse

Lil cleared her choked throat with a dry cough. Once seemed not enough. She could only speak calmly after she cleared her throat a few times.

Even a corpse should be set adrift on an island so that it can be found. If he comes from a prominent family, it can become more difficult for us in the future. The League has maintained a moderate stance so far. Being careless now will render the hard work of Anunchio and the other captains to nothing.

Who gives a damn about the nobles?!

Alain exclaimed in surprise.

Oh my! Everyones crazy here! Crazy I say! What do you want me to do, accompany him on a yacht?

Shut up, old man. Didn't you say you'd keep an eye on him in the first place? Back in Amiaeng, didn't I tell you that I found him suspicious and didn't you say I should trust you? Can you say you did a good job considering how his pigeon has managed to fly back and forth all this time?

Alain shut his mouth firmly and sat down again. In fact, everyone gathered here was to blame for making a mistake one way or the other. Eds boarding was approved by Jericho, and Alain told their doubting captain that he would watch over him. For that reason, Lil summoned only Jericho and Alain as both of them had a heavy responsibility in this situation.

So

A small wooden board should be enough.

Cesar cut off Lil's words.

At least he might be able to keep his life. It's hard to give more than that.

Cesar cast a sidelong glance at Lil. It wasn't a look that asked for approval. It was to see if she'd ask for more for the man she'd spent the night with. While Cesar continued his instructions to Alain with a cold stare, Lil's face darkened and she failed to say anything.

The space next to the doctor's cabin is empty because of the rudder.

So you want to throw him out through there then? Hm Yes, as soon as we open the sliding door on the stern side we would be right above the hull. There's a bulkhead too, so there's no one to see when we're moving him. All right, mate.

It was only then that Alain relaxed his expression and stood up. Lil glanced anxiously at the hilt of his sword that his stubby hand was grazing, afraid that he might cause an accident.

Grandpa.

I know! I know! I won't kill him indiscriminately, so don't worry!

Alain walked out of the captain's office, dragging the still snivelling Jericho behind him. After the deliberate stomping of their boots faded away, the wooden door slammed shut. In an instant, silence began to settle layer by layer in the space where only the two of them remained. And as time passed, the layers piled up.

Nobody moved. The silence gave the impression that no one was present and continued for a long time. Cesar and Lil exchanged no words nor glances. Lil had no idea where Cesar was even looking. In this case, she had to say something first, so she wiped her dried lips with her tongue before opening her mouth.

Cesar.

Cesar let out a long sigh. Lil felt like she was being buried under his heavy breathing.

Nothing happened.

Let's talk about this later

I was wrong.

After the work is done.

Really nothing happened

The harsh screeching sound of Cesars chair filled the room.

Forgive me

Lil could only mutter as his back receded. However, Cesar didnt turn around and instead opened the door of the captains office before disappearing. Her throat burned. She felt like she was about to be erased from this world. The desk and chairs, which were all perfectly fine, felt alien to her. Lil raised her hands and held them in front of her eyes. When she saw the bloodless palms similar to those of a dead person, she bent her trembling fingers and clenched them into fists.

I dont know what to do. Should I kneel and apologise, or

Even though no one was rushing her, she felt impatient. Lil raised her pale hands higher and wiped her anxious face.

Why did I do that Why on earth did I do that? What was I thinking when I got in there, fell asleep, opened the window, and let the bird in Damn it! That damn messenger pigeon. Why did it come there at that time? Why did it have to come when I was there

Lil raised her head in a flash.

But, wheres the oil?

Her smooth flow of self-pity was abruptly disrupted.

Its so strange. The pigeons arrival in the morning meant that the incense had been placed several hours before that, but Ed had been with me all night. Im not sure what he did when I fell asleep, but he definitely had enough time to remove the scent before the pigeon picked up the trail. He couldnt afford to make such a stupid mistake. And Ed didnt have just an hour or two, but the entire night. He also couldve woken me up at any time and kick me out, but he didnt

A certain assumption crossed her mind.

Maybe he didnt know. Maybe the oil was applied to a place that was out of his control. Perhaps the perfume had been stolen The fact that the pigeon arrived while I was present couldve been designed to create an undeniable situation. Such a ruse couldve been made by simply wiping the window sill with the oil.

But even so, the result remains the same. The reality that the pigeon recognized Ed, means that it has communicated through it before. From the very beginning, perhaps even before boarding this ship Ive been thoroughly deceived. So I shouldnt be defending Ed, I should be driven mad with rage. Im not in a position to be foolishly worried that he might be innocent.

But Ed No, Cesar confirmed the content. The whole thing couldve been staged.

After all, Lil finally accepted Ed through a fairly irrational process. She never meant to let her guard down, however Ed dug into her mind and dispelled her doubts. Her beliefs were seen through, played with, and eventually turned into tools to win her trust.

Lil buried her face in her palms. But, no matter how hard she tried, there was a desire that she couldnt shake off. It was a desire so grand that she really began to suspect that she was going insane.

It was the desire to forgive Ed.

Truthfully, Lil has been plagued by a pathetic urge all day. She wanted to visit him and ask him questions like; This couldnt have been you, right? or Have you prepared your brilliant excuse?. She decided to trust him, and since she still believed in him, she wanted him to tell her why he did it. She was preoccupied with forgiveness even if she was driven mad. She assumed Ed had to be blameless. And if she kept thinking that way, she imagined that he would indeed become innocent.

A minute passed, and her thoughts came and went. Lil had to control herself before she lost her mind.

Ed has been to Panichi With a war looming, the League cant take such a grave risk A weighty decision like this cant be made relying on personal faith. No matter what beliefs or reasons he holds, the fact that Eds a spy remains the same The only person who understands me is also a person who still communicates with the fleet. These two arent incompatible. The former and the latter can coexist. Even if Ed was sincere, it cant suddenly make my pain go awayYes. Thats the truth.

After rearranging her thoughts, Lil left the captains office to oversee the execution.

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Headnote: The following scene may be distressing for some readers, warning of slight gore.

The upper deck was cluttered. As the evening was setting in, the sky was already a dark shade, so half of the crew recognized their captain and half of them didnt. Lil passed the artillery deck and went down to the cabin deck. After passing through a space filled with hammocks, she reached the bulkhead, behind it was the space where the involved officers were gathered.

Lil stood still and pondered, she then carefully opened the door next to the rudder control room. It was Eds cabin. She noticed that the cabin, which had felt bright until this morning, was now desolate as if it had all been a lie. The medicine bag was still laying on his desk, so Lil rummaged through it with bated breath.

Ed once took that glowing object from here. I think it might be helpful even if its just a little. At night, not even the horizon is visible, so its only natural that he wont be able to recognise the shape of an island either. In addition, there arent even any uninhabited islands in the immediate vicinity This will only be a small light, but its better than nothing realistically speaking, he at least needs some kind of lighthouse to spot an island in these conditions And even if he does find one, theres no guarantee there'll be drinking water

Lil bit her lip. Her hand trembled violently as she held the medicine bag open.

I need to stop worrying about it. All I have to do is turn away and pretend I dont know But, is there really no other way? I cant stand this. This isnt isolation, its nothing less than the death penalty. Throwing him overboard now would be a terrible sentence of suffering until his last breath is taken away. Its torture in itself to make him hang on to the waters surface by kicking his feet. After a mere 30 minutes, the average person will be exhausted There are at least six hours left until daylight! Will he be able to endure that strenuous physical activity without water or food? If the wind picks up, the waves will crash The sea is a merciless place for people to survive. Even if he holds out till morning, will he have enough strength left to swim to an island?

This was an inevitable decision right from the start. The Bell Rock doesnt enforce the law arbitrarily. No one should disregard the courtesy I had worked so hard on to build. I cant just turn a blind eye to this. Everyone who boarded the Bell Rock laid their hands on the law book and swore an oath. But if executions are carelessly carried out like this, what will prevent them from breaking the law in the future? People need to be charged with the crime they committed, then a verdict can be given. Even a spy deserves a fair trial determining his fate instead of a hasty decision that plays with his life. I made the law. Its a law that applies to everyone without exception

A faint light began to shine from the bottom of the medicine bag. Lil stormed out of the cabin after grabbing the balsam.

I might be able to persuade them in some way. Alain and Jericho are the most thoughtful sailors. Im confident that if given more time, I can come up with something. Another option for safely isolating Ed and relieving their anxiety.

Lil pushed hard against the wooden door in front of her.

Ala

When she entered the room, the first thing she saw was a man on the floor. At a glance, the man, who was stretched out and lying face down, was tied with a rope and covered in blood. Lil was in the middle of calling for Alain, but shut her mouth. In the beginning, she couldnt comprehend what she was seeing. However, a moment later, she cried out, white as a sheet.

What the hell!

Lil ran to Ed. When she lifted his head, blood streamed from his open mouth. She grabbed his cheek and turned his head around. There was almost no skin on his face that wasnt swollen or cracked open. Looking further down, she saw that the rest of his body was in a similar state.

Lil grabbed his blood-soaked sleeve.

These arent wounds that can be made by bare hands. Something metal-like mustve been used to beat him.

Alain!

An angry voice called out to Alain. Alain, who was opening the sliding door, shook his head without looking back at Lil.

It wasnt me, Captain.

Her blue eyes turned to Jericho. Shaking his head as well, Jericho glanced sideways at the corner of the cabin. Lil followed his gaze in that direction. In the corner stood Courant, who flinched as her stare reached him.

Courant?

Did you do this?!

It happened when the two of them were left alone here

Alains explanation fell on deaf ears. Lil only cried out to the corner of the cabin.

Courant!

The front side of Courants clothes was splattered with blood. The boy, who was shaking at Lils shouts, started screaming.

Argh!

With his distorted face and glazed eyes, he looked nothing like his typically cheerful self.

He belongs to the Navy! Hes the reason were all gonna die! The Navy is following us and if we get caught They love to cut our bellies open and expose our guts! Theyll laugh at us and tell us to look at our mothers. And and if we scream, theyll cut off our ears just like Mellie Yes! I saw it first hand! How much they

What does that have to do with this assault?

With his eyes out of focus, Courant only trembled. When she tried to question him again, a sour smell pricked her nose and the spot where Courant had slumped down became heavily stained. Even though he was peeing himself, his screams didnt stop.

A guy like him deserves to get beaten! Even if hes beaten like this, its too generous a punishment! We have to cut his ears and nose to make it even! He has to die the most painful death in the world! Ill kill him! Im gonna Eup! Eup!

Stop it, kid.

Holding onto Courant, Jericho covered his screaming mouth. Lil, who turned away from the desperate Courant, shouted at her opponent.

Not like this! How is he supposed to swim like this? Hes just going to drown!

Alain replied as he cleared the floor.

His limbs are still attached, so he probably wont die, right? We just need to untie him.

How can you say that? He isnt even conscious!

Jericho laid down the fainted Courant and intervened cautiously.

Ca Captain. Were all about to die, so why should we waste our time worrying about him? Lets do it quickly, all right? I kept quiet, but to be honest, Ive been holding my pee like Courant!

Everyone was losing their minds from fear. The empire trampled on the islanders peaceful lives and slaughtered their families and neighbours. They killed them for no reason and didnt treat them as human beings. The hatred for the navy was deeply ingrained. Lil glared at Cesar, blaming herself for overlooking their deep rooted fear.

But Cesar knows better than anyone else that the Navy shouldnt be treated like this.

Cesar coldly looked down at Lil and affirmed.

As long as theres life attached to him, hell survive somehow.

Lil almost screamed.

Did you forget?! Its the Navy were talking about! Hes not supposed to die!

Im not saying this thoughtlessly. This much wont kill him.

Lil flatly ignored him and when Alain and Jericho were approaching, she stood in front of Ed to block them.

No, she could only try to block them because Cesar suddenly pulled her arm. Lil, who was trying to shake him off unconsciously, was trapped in a tighter grip than before. It felt as if her shoulders would soon crumble. Surprised, Lil looked up at him while swallowing a groan. Cesar muttered low.

Thats enough

Nonetheless, she spun back around. Alain and Jericho were already lifting Eds droopy body from both sides. Lil attempted to stop them by yelling. However, Cesar shook her as he gripped her shoulders again.

Stop!..

Cesars rough treatment came as a surprise. When Lil stumbled and became unable to maintain her balance, Cesar reached around her, held her shoulder and vigorously turned her. With her shoulders forced up and her chest pressed against his, her heels were gradually lifted off the floor.

I

When Lil faced Cesars fierce, dark red eyes, it rendered her speechless.

Youre trying so hard to delay this, arent you?..

Such a horribly murderous gaze.

If I were you, I would rather have him thrown into the sea

They were just looking at each others eyes, but it felt as if his gaze was weighing Lils whole body down. With that, Cesar carved into her how cruel his intentions of murder were.

Or else Ill kill him myself

Cesar meant it. If she resisted a little more, his patience would explode. He would stab Ed proudly in front of her eyes. He would gladly sacrifice Ed instead of her for her own immorality. Her body, which had been resisting until then, was drained of strength. Lil begged with her eyes to let her look back at Ed just once. However, the red eyes that twinkled even in the dark never allowed it.

The sound of a heavy body being dragged over the floor gradually faded away.

A stingy heat ran up her throat and her breath came out in pants as if she was on the verge of collapsing. Lil clenched her jaw to keep her sobs from escaping. From her chest to her shoulders and neck, every part of her upper body was shaking. She squeezed the balsam in her hand. There was one sound that was even more terrifying than the sound of something bloody being dragged away, it was the silence that eventually came after it. And that terrible silence seemed to last forever.

Splash!

The sound of a person being swallowed by the waves rang in their ears. Cesar never took his gaze away from her. He seemed to be patiently waiting for the sea to devour Ed whole.

Jericho and Alain wiped their hands and a few moments later, several pieces of wood falling into the sea could be heard.

Slowly, very slowly did Cesar let go of Lil. Soon enough, the pressure on her shoulders disappeared as if it had never been there. Her half-raised heels sank to the floor. After putting her down completely, Cesar turned around and left the cabin. Alain and Jericho quickly followed, taking Courant with them. The previously opened door slammed shut again. Frozen and stuck on her spot, Lil stared at the leaving Cesar. Only when her head reached its limit and became dizzy, did she release the breath she was holding. She took a faint breath, the air coming in through her sour nose was unfamiliar.

Lil turned stiffly. The bloody drag marks that ran across the floor dried up in a dark red. The sliding door was still open and a lukewarm wind, which felt like it came from the depths of hell, blew against her cheek. Despite being grazed by the heat, she felt chilled for some reason. Streams of water trickled down her cold face and dripped down her chin. When the hot tears dried up by the wind, her cheeks felt cold all over again.

Lil moved her feet along the sparse bloodstains. Blood that had not dried yet, clung to the bottom of her feet. With each step, it became more and more difficult to move her legs. When she finally collapsed, her bent knees hit the floor with a thud.

Completely broken, Lil dropped the balsam she was holding.

Tung, tung.

The ray of light rolled over the floor and fell into the sea below. It disappeared without a single trace in the waves that were as calm as ever.

The moon was bright, and the stars were shining.

The waves that reflected the night flowed dazzlingly.

They flowed dazzlingly even after swallowing a person

A few hours ago.

I need to tell her that Im sorry.

His rational self-reflection already came after only half a day of confinement.

Ed raised his head amid a sense of self-pity and all kinds of self-deprecating emotions.

At first, I was angry. What Cesar read out was clearly a ridiculous fabrication. Theres no need to go into the authenticity of the content, for Cesar simply doesnt know how to decipher Nicolas Tears. It seems that Liloa thought it was the Mandus code used by officers, but Nicolas Tears is a code system only known by the now retired Nicola, Sagastar, and a small selection of high ranked officers on the Vishas Unless Cesar became me, he couldnt have pulled a book from my Admirals room on the Visha, tens of thousands of morts away from the Bell Rock*

This absurd situation if Liloa had even a smidgeon of suspicion, she shouldve noticed that it was all part of a bigger conspiracy. But she believed it in a heartbeat. She didnt even look at the letter; all she knew was what Cesar recited. It was absolute trust that left no room for suspicion to dig into. Im not sure why she delegated that authority to Cesar, but seeing it right in front of my eyes made me furious.

I cant accept it at all. It wasnt just Liloa, but Cesar too His sneer I saw the other day is still so vivid. I denied it in the beginning, but looking back on it, it was definitely a laugh meant to mock me.

Cesar may have considered Ed to be his rival, but Ed was confident that the one with the upper hand was himself.

Despite their romantic relationship, I always thought that I had a much more comprehensive understanding of Liloa than him. Like the fact that Cesar has no idea that Liloa suffers from nightmares

That made it even more difficult for Ed to grasp.

Cesar, whos only waiting for Liloas retirement, and Liloa, who naturally believes in Cesar.

Ed finally began to wonder if he had been looking at an illusion all along.

Perhaps it was Cesar who didnt have to take his opponent seriously. Liloas feelings for him are that strong, and he knows it well. Of course, Liloa has to be aware of that too In the end, it was only me who was stupid

He gritted his teeth in disgust at Lils choice. What seemed obvious to the both of them, came as a cruel surprise to Ed. He had been deceived for a while, not only by Lils transformation, the origin of his illusion, but also by the absolute belief that it might have meant something When he began to suspect that everything was an illusion, he felt shame and self-hatred, as well as anger toward Lil

Suddenly, all sorts of questions exploded in his head.

Why did she keep denying the artifacts effect? And why does she make people feel guilty by accepting things so carelessly? How can she call this act faith, if its so easy for her to abandon? Why am I suffering like this?

Her doubts and beliefs are based on her own convenience. How arbitrary! From the moment we met, Liloa made it clear that her trust is unspeakably hard to give, so I lightened up the mood through jokes. But now that I think about it, it isnt even funny anymore. Her trust felt as light as a feather when I received it, but having it taken away is one of the toughest feelings in the world

Thats when his inner turmoil stopped. When he thought about taking it away, the imagery in front of his eyes became so vivid. He was sure he could even hear the sound of dripping water. He started crying while laughing like the beautiful, pitiful, yet pathetic figure that he was.

Even after reaching such a low point, the only one who wanted love was

Ed glared at the ceiling with his hot, raging eyes.

I have only myself to blame for being in this position. Why the hell did I feel the need to drag myself through the mud? Normally, self-love means leaving some pride for yourself, but its all in vain now. Am I even certain that my feelings for Liloa arent love? In the end, Im the only one whos disappointed. Im the helpless one. No matter how cruel she turns, I will still beg for a chance to be spoken to, even if she curses at me and even if I met her eyes full of contempt, I would still plead to be looked at

Shattered by a sense of helplessness, Ed ended up wishing for Lil to open the cabin door and appear without resentment or anger. It was hopeless to admit to misery and endure it, the childishness of wanting to hate Lil had long since fallen to its knees.

In the end, all of this nonsense was about wanting her to know how hurt I am. But what good would it do me if Liloa doesnt come to see me?

On that note, he had acted crazy haphazardly. He thought he was on to something, so he proceeded impulsively.

However, someone whos misunderstood must be allowed to explain themselves before the other party gets angry. But now, Im the one responsible for this misunderstanding, not Liloa

But no matter how long Ed waited, Lil didnt come. The tightly closed door looked in that sense just like her heart. Ed rummaged through the ashes that his hope had been reduced to.

She told me to explain. Didnt she want an explanation from me? At that moment, she couldnt even point her gun directly at me Even at that moment, she wanted to keep me alive.

However, as time passed, only those who stood guard appeared alternately. The rope that tightened his wrists became tediously bitter

Ed moistened his parched lips. Raising his head a little, he faced Alain who was leaning against the opposite wall. His fingertips were, of course, resting on the barrel of his gun. Despite his clear hostility, Alain never tried to come within a certain distance as though he had heeded some advice from his captain.

Eds dry tongue moved stiffly.

I need to speak to the Captain.

Alain glanced at Ed and shook his head.

Dont even dream about it.

As if Alain was dissatisfied with the sudden silence, he added with a more ferocious look.

That man is in favour of fair trials, so if you start complaining about unfair treatment, chances are he would actually listen to you and even be swayed by it No way in hell, I let that happen.

Why?

What do you mean why? Does a Navy like you not understand the situation?

Being a spy means that youre not even compatible with animals, but youre still acting so boldly. Well, then again you have to be that shameless when you need to be able to sell a persons life at ease. Youre such a disgusting The only reason Im letting you live is due to the Captains orders. Dont forget that.

Yeah right, the Captains orders. Because he thinks that letting me live is the right thing to do, right? But in the meantime, you guys are pretending to be able to read the code, when the reality is that no one but me actually can.

Damn it! Stop talking if you dont want me to forcefully shut your trap myself.

Ed stared at the old man who had threatened him.

If you bring the Captain, Ill indeed start complaining about how unfair this all is, just like you said.

Wha What you shameless bastard!

Because it really is unfair, isnt it?

In response to Eds calm words, Alain could only stutter. His forehead and cheeks flushed red, and he averted Eds gaze. Conflicted eyes filled with guilt circled the tip of the gun. Ed decided to continue playing with Alains conscience.

Its strange, isnt it? You guys are always talking about the code But what if im really being wronged, what then? Also, the Bell Rock isnt in any immediate danger. What is it that youre all so concerned about?

Cut the crap

The reason why you guys are making such a fuss is out of fear. But theres nothing to be afraid of in the first place.

Shut up! You Navy bastard I was right, plugging that hole in your mouth will be for the best

After approaching him with a growl, Alain put a gag in Eds mouth and left.

Jericho, who eventually came in after him, stared at Ed as if he were looking at a monster. Soon he didnt even try to meet his eyes anymore and sobs and lamentations were the only sounds coming from him. It turned into an absurd situation when Jericho looked like he was about to cry. Not long after, Jericho left the cabin again, still wiping his nose and Ed expected that Alain would come back. But the guy who opened the door was Courant. Eds eyes widened as the boy set foot in the cabin

Chapter 135

A few hours ago.

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Chapter 136

Ed didnt see Courants hostility as he was too busy figuring out why it was Courant that came down and not Alain. Seeing that a kid with no combat skills was sent to guard him, Ed concluded that it must be because a meeting between the four involved officers was about to start.

Well, at best, I will be thrown on some deserted island

However, this very thought scared him more than it should. Rather than being afraid of drifting around the sea endlessly, he was terrified of the fact that Lil was about to abandon him. To Ed, the possibility of being erased from Lils life was definitely the most frightening.

In his wavering delusion, a presiding judge suddenly rose high and covered his eyes in darkness. With the feeling of becoming a convict kneeling beneath a high platform, Eds head filled itself with thoughts a prisoner awaiting his sentence would have; he wished for a miracle. And in his case, the miracle would be Lil.

On the ship, only Lil was in a position to help Ed and the only way to reverse this situation was to make her aware of it.

As things already turned out like this, she needs to come to the realisation that she cant just abandon me like this. Im not sure about affection, respect, trust, or whatever reason she holds dear, but I need to make her realise that she doesnt need her necklace whenever shes with me, that will be my best bet

A hoarse voice came from somewhere.

Tell me

Ed didnt hear it, he was too absorbed in his own life-or-death situation and couldnt afford to pay any attention to Courant.

Tell me

If I knew this was going to happen, I wouldve told her everything I shouldve come clean regardless of the possibility of revealing my identity. My attempt to stir the conversation in a particular direction and urge Liloa to finally be aware was useless from the beginning. I remained vague throughout all of it and was only beating around the bush I shouldve taken a different turn when she repeated again and again that she didnt understand a thing I was saying

Tell me!

Tung!

Something thrown by Courant hit his head and bounced off the wall. This action made Ed finally look at him, but instead of being in pain, he was only feeling annoyed. After approaching, Courant reached down and removed the gag, scratching Eds cheek with his rough fingernails in the process.

What are you doing?

Tell me what youre up to!

Whats with this kid?! I dont have time for this

Thinking so, the sitting Ed lowered his head again

Keok!

His neck was bent sharply by Courants surprise attack on the back of his head and Ed fell forward from the bed till he eventually collided with the floor. With his hands tied on his back and his legs wrapped in ropes from his shins to his ankles, it was only natural for his body to lose its balance.

His face, buried in the floor, heated up. Eds disorientated state made it hard for him to comprehend how he already bled that much with only one hit.

Is that even possible?

While Ed was thinking of an answer, Courant grabbed the distracted navy by the collar and threw him on his back. Ed still had a hard time understanding the situation, when a flushed face suddenly shouted in front of his nose.

Tell me now! Where is the fleet? From where is it tracking us?!

His mouth gagged as a punch to the stomach wasnt easy to endure. Ed spat a mix of blood and saliva over Courants forearm.

Your Captain wont tolerate this.

The bridge of Courants freckled nose twitched.

Ed found Courant irritating, so he was determined to get over this immature stroke quickly. He was in a situation where he couldnt even spare a second of his time.

Theres no tracking or anything of the sort. I told Alain that I was innocent. Didnt you hear that?

Dont lie!

Ed was beaten once more. Instead of his stomach, this time his head began to ring.

You filthy traitor

You bastard!

Courant climbed on top of Ed and swung his fists without a break. At the same time as the heavy weight landed on his chest, Eds head twisted and bent mercilessly.

How dare you lie!

Ed, whose limbs were bound, had no chance to defend himself. Therefore, absorbing Courants incoming fists was all he could do.

You psychopathic bastard! Take this! This is what you guys love to do, right? Agghh!

Blood that burst from Eds mouth and nose began to flow back and accumulate in his throat. However, instead of the immediate pain, the fact that his breathing was being obstructed became more concerning. With an instinctive cough, Ed spewed out blood. The red liquid gushed from his nasal cavity and throat in haemoptysis several times, followed by a crackling sound that pierced through his airways. Perhaps because of the graphic scene before him, the boys punching came to a halt. Instantly, Ed twisted his body without missing a beat.

His upper body rolled under the bed and convulsed due to shock. Only then did the reality of being tied up come as a serious threat.

Ed struggled to open his eyes. He felt a dull pain around them, which was probably due to the swelling from the beating moments ago. In addition, blood had permeated his eyes, making it hard for him to see. Despite his blurry vision, Ed looked around in search of any kind of tool that could help him untie the rope, but instead of seeing something useful a foot in boots stepped down into his view.

Ed struggled to move his mouth.

Dont let me live didnt betray the Captain!

In an instant, Eds stomach churned violently. Excruciating pain radiated from the lower part of his torso that wasnt shielded by the bed. Ed swallowed his groans after losing his breath. Seeing Ed react more violently than expected, Courant took a step back in embarrassment. However, his hesitation didnt last long and was quickly followed by more powerful kicks.

You bastard! Tell me! Tell me!

Any type of internal damage Courant might inflict can render me into a dead man. Clearly, the boy has never beaten anyone up before, so he isnt aware of the ways to inflict pain without the risk of killing his opponent. Clumsy attempts to counterattack on my part can result in a fatal blow, so I have no choice but to stay still and crouch as much as possible.

It seemed that something inside Courant was about to snap as he started to swing his fists and feet like a madman, while shouting from the top of his lungs. Reason clearly faded away from the boy who also just shook off the last bit of guilt he felt. In the meantime, Ed was barely holding out, but when he thought he couldnt take it anymore, the movement abruptly stopped. To get the most out of this opportunity, Ed needed to crawl somewhere quickly, but his body didnt cooperate.

For a moment, only Courants heavy breathing could be heard in the quiet cabin. The sound, fluctuating through Eds flickering consciousness, rendered him dizzy.

You tenacious cut off each of your fingers

As if that comment struck him like lightning, Ed jolted awake and instinctively clenched his fists. He became extremely aware of his fingers that were rolled into balls. All his remaining strength was extracted from his droopy body and concentrated into his two hands. Nonetheless, he was afraid. He feared the loss more than the pain. The fact that he would lose one or more fingers was much more terrifying than any harsh beating. His closed eyes opened desperately, and his field of vision filled with the tightly closed door. He wanted to crawl further under the bed, but his knees were unable to move. The knot tied by Alain, a seasoned sailor, didnt loosen, not even for a moment. So the only option Ed had left was to relentlessly twist his shoulders. Finally, when he pushed his shoulder away with difficulty, his body moved like a crunching bug.

Courant gripped one of his fists and persistently tried to open his fingers. Eds heart began to beat so fast that it felt like it was about to pop out of his chest. After dragging him from under the bed, Courant held Ed down by pressing his knee in the Navys shoulder. The cramp that followed caused Ed to unravel his fingers slightly, but it wasnt enough to completely lessen the death grip he held. But then a cold blade suddenly touched his skin. Ed squeezed his eyes shut and moved his lips, which were heavily crushed into the floor.

Really Im not

Fuck it! Im going to do the same as what you guys do during interrogations. Im going to cut off your fingers, one by one! Im going to cut them!

Theres no fleet

Dont fuck with me! Uh, confess now! Or this this!

It was then that Courant managed to fumble his way into Eds fist and pried it open. Even though Ed hadnt let go of his resistance, his fingers were helplessly spread out.

Lilo Liloa

..?

The name he called with difficulty scattered between the floor and his lips.

In the next moment, some of his fingers were bent backwards far enough to break them.

This is my last chance

Ed flipped his body by retracting his knees and suddenly gave them strength. Courant ended up falling backwards and landed on the floor. After the short scuffle, gasping breaths, cries and sniffles were the only sounds heard for a while.

But then, Ed started to scream like a madman.

Liloa!

Shut up!

Liloa! Lil

Courant came to his senses and rushed at him. Eds upper body, which he had been struggling to get up, fell back again. Through his swollen eyes, he could see the doorstep in Courants hand.

Shut up! A bastard like you

..!

The thought that he might actually die struck him. Ironically, it felt like this wasn;t the right time nor place for his life to end. Nonetheless, fear rushed in and gnawed at his entire body. Courant took hold of Eds hair and lifted his head. The boys face, which was consumed by anger and revenge, flashed before Eds eyes.

A man like you deserves to die!

Courant extended his arm. Eds green eyes which had fallen helplessly to the side came to a halt at the door.

Smash!

A bone-throbbing roar vibrated through Eds head

Chapter 137

Previous

Even after his senses were cut off, Ed was conscious every few seconds, although feebly. His body appeared to be shaking in response to the prolonged shock.

Tung, tung

The floor rang.

Footsteps and some voices fading away maybe, finally

His consciousness was numb as if submerged in water.

Ed could vaguely hear words and shouts in the distance. He wasn't sure, but it seemed like his eardrums had been raptured by the multiple blows he received to his head, thus making it hard for him to make out anything they were saying.

Suddenly, someone lifted his head and his body moved without will. That person examined his face, grabbed his shoulder and shook it. But that was about it. Ed's muscles didn't have the strength to respond and none of his senses could get any sharper than this.

Nonetheless, Ed tried to examine his condition. Slowly. His awareness didn't seem to follow, so there was no point in doing it in a hurry.

Judging from my ability to breathe without much difficulty, my pleura and pericardium seem to be still intact I have some worries about the momentum in which my consciousness wavers, but it can't be helped

Ed struggled to draw out his physical state in his hazy mind.

Though, the fact that I can think like this proves that my brain is still working well. However, a person's consciousness can easily flee if not caught at the right moment. I need to pull myself together as soon as possible

Someone roughly yanked his arm. A sense of crisis fell over Ed when his body was dragged somewhere. He belatedly realised that his shackles had been removed, but even so and despite his efforts, he couldn't move his arms.

My body isn't experiencing a sense of panic, I'm literally feeling nothing

Ed didn't feel his feet being dragged over the floor, the pulling on his shoulders or the weightlessness that came with falling

Like I'm being sucked into a world of oblivion

Splash!

Water flooded the nape of his neck, then his sleeves, and lastly the inside of his boots. A chill that engulfed his entire body jolted him awake. A series of bubbles rose up his cheeks and a steady flow of frothy sea water flowed passed his ears with a bubbly sound. The body that had defied buoyancy submerged. Surprisingly, his vitality returned the moment he came in contact with the cold energy.

When he finally opened his eyes, he saw a light.

The light sank with him. Its brightness spread in all directions and left shimmering shadows on the pieces of wood floating on the surface of the sea.

A strong current passed through his dwindling fingers. Ed opened and closed his hands weakly. When he extended his arms, they appeared before him, intact and unsevered. All ten of his fingers were still attached. A silly snort was released from his chest.

Apparently, the thought of remaining a dignified corpse is so comforting, that it actually makes me laugh a little.

As if possessed, Ed stared at the palms of his hands. It was then that he noticed the blood pouring from his sleeves.

The dark liquid rose like ink dissolved in water. In fact, the blood wasn't just oozing from his sleeves, but from all over his arms. Like smoke, it emitted from his arms, torso, and legs. The bleeding seemed to have sped up because he was underwater.

The blood that left from all over his body, covered Ed in red. He knew that his blood loss was significant, but witnessing it in person left quite the impression. The sparse stream continued steadfastly, it appeared to only stop when all the blood was drained from his body. Ed thought as he looked up at the blood welling up like a haze.

But wouldn't Liloa have seen me like this? Given her character, there's no way she wasn't present at the execution. Even so, the execution didn't stop. That's how I ended up here, hanging onto the last thread of life deep down in the sea. It doesn't take a lot of medical knowledge to realise that the act of dumping a body, sustaining massive blood loss and an impaired consciousness, into the sea is tantamount to death. Leaving someone unattended in that state will be enough to kill them. So, by throwing me into the sea, did that mean she wanted me to die as quickly as possible? Did the verdict change from isolation to the death penalty while I was unconscious? But can this even be considered the death penalty? Since when is letting one suffer till their last moments and having them die in utter pain, part of the death penalty?

If that's true, then I need to drastically correct my impression of Liloa. She's a much crueler and vicious person than I took her for. And I have been thoroughly fooled. I feel embarrassed that I even called for her when I was on the brink of losing my mind. Now I know. The way she drew a line between us wasn't a denial of her feelings. From the beginning till the end, she insisted I was no different from her crew. There was simply nothing more than that to it. Thinking back about it, she never gave any indication that suggested otherwise either I was the only foolish one there.

But still, isn't it too harsh for Liloa to do this? Maybe. Maybe something else happened when I lost consciousness.

As if he was scoffed for having such a silly thought, Ed's throat tightened and he began having shortness of breath. An acrid stream of asphyxiation flowed into his lungs and the heat of death flared up in the centre of his heart. It was like his body was scolding his stupid mind for entertaining such ideas.

Ed was getting tired of himself. In normal circumstances, he wouldn't be crazy enough to wallow in fantasy while being in a situation where he was running out of breath. It seemed that the blows to his head really did a number on him. He felt so pathetic that he couldn't help but tear up at the thought of being beaten like that even though he was truly innocent. He was sure that everyone who heard his story would give their sympathy.

Why would you even try to defend her when you're stuck in this situation, you idiot? Everyone has the right to be outraged when they're treated like garbage. She shouldn't have done that. This was degrading in every single way. It's only right for me to long for punishment and revenge. By doing so it will be better to kill those unfamiliar and clumsy feelings like love. From the very beginning, it was never meant to be anyway. I stupidly put myself in this situation, so I'll get myself out of it too.

The hands that had been trembling with embarrassment clenched into fists.

I need light if I want to survive.

His phalanges spread and his hand soared through the water as if clawing at the light. His lungs, desperate for air, burned intensely. No longer were there shadows seen above the light that was close enough to touch. It was dark all around. Ed realised he had descended much deeper than he initially thought in the time he was stuck in his stupid delusions. Possibly to the depths holding no chance of survival

He had swung his hand in vain. Only the foam caused by his movement eventually reached the light. Ed knew it all too well, not long from now would his body gasp for air and thereby draw in water. Instincts would tempt a person to do that, and he felt that the tendency to do so wasn't far off.

Once I lose consciousness, its over damn it.

Fixating over a normally insignificant gesture, Ed threw his hands over his head again and again. The small current made by his movements drew him and the balsam closer again. His desperate eyes were fixed on the glow that seemed to descend from the heavens. It was then that Ed noticed sleek fins and streamlined body. Scales of a fish reflecting the white rays glistened brilliantly.

Is that a mukkali?

If Ed had been in the position to actually speak, he would probably have muttered about it a lot in astonishment. The fish has been hovering around the balsam since a while ago. The slippery greyish-white creature was a mukkali fish species that was only seen around the Mondovi Peninsula.

Is this part of some kind of dying wish to have my life ended at the coast of Mondovi, or is this a hallucination caused by my dying brain? If its the latter, why would I be seeing something so simple as a fish? And if not, how could that species be seen in the South where only warm currents flow

Eds eyelids sank as if he suddenly realised he couldn't afford to devote himself to such nonsense.

But Theres no way that that particular kind of species, normally living in cold waters, could end up here

The light that illuminated his view faded when a voice mingled through it.

{ and cold currents meet }

The voice took on a familiar shape

It was a flashback. A confident Lil turned to a suspicious and confused Ed. As her obscured face emerged from the fading torch, hatred flooded Eds dying body like the shadow of a flickering fire. The bitter resentment he felt, reached deep inside his bones.

{ The Vigare Deaire lives in mild temperatures like this where warm and cold currents meet. }

Why did she tell me that in such detail? I never asked or questioned it As if she had foreseen all this

Chapter 138

Previous

{ theyre usually found in shallow waters on top of pure white sand beaches }

Ed looked at the light from a distance. Small grains of sand surrounded the balsam like clouds surrounding the moon. The sand swirled around helplessly with the movement of his arms.

chances are a hundred to one

Lowering his gaze, Ed saw the sandbar getting closer. The floor, which he hadn't seen because he was only staring at the balsam, appeared faintly. Several conch shells, resting on the seabed, reflected the light weakly and created emerald-coloured hues.

The terrible voice rang in his ears again.

{ Its an empty shell without the conch. The inside is filled with a thin membrane full of air }

You abandoned me so cruelly and left me out here to die, so why are you trying to bring me back to life now? You seem to do whatever you feel like doing. You're treating me like an idiot. If I survive, I'm going to grab you by your neck and tell you the truth. I'll clearly imprint on you what you've lost by abandoning me. But, will the emptiness I feel go away once I break that neck?

Ed looked up again. The light that he wasn't able to catch this whole time sank right before his eyes. When he reached out his hand, rays of light began pouring out between his fingers. Grabbing the balsam, Ed descended onto the sandbar. The current tangled around him when he moved his feet and stirred his arms. Every time the seawater grazed his torn skin, he had to overcome the pain similar to that of tearing flesh.

Ed tried to approach the reef with all his might. His muscles, which had long reached their limit, resisted the buoyancy force, thereby causing his entire body to twist and turn. In addition the more vigorously he swam, the more blood seeped from his body, obscuring his vision. Regardless, there was only one thing on his mind. It was the need to breathe before his limbs stopped working altogether.

The hands that were holding the reef, finally managed to rip one of the conch shells off. Fresh air entered his throat when he breathed in just before his remaining breath was depleted. Ed deeply inhaled the air. Bubbles wrapped around his face when he breathed frantically. His hazy mind revived when his blood vessels pulsated and his heart pounded.

Ed purposely tried to tear the colony attached to the reef. He pulled as hard as he could. Fortunately, the seaweed fell off relatively easy despite his lack of physical strength. He then quickly grabbed a few of the vigare deaires that were woven in rows by the lush vegetation and floated upward.

As soon as he rose to the surface, a wooden plank floating next to him tapped his shoulder.

It must've been thrown out as a splint, seeing that debris doesn't just float in the middle of the sea like this.

At first, he didn't want to look at it, but he pushed his pride aside knowing that his survival was his number one priority. So, Ed placed his right hand on it, along with the vigare deaires. He lacked the will to separate them one by one, but having them with him was enough to keep him from worrying about not being able to breathe.

This was because even with the support of the wooden board, Ed wasn't in a situation where he could inhale fresh air easily. No matter how calm the sea was, the waves would come and go. With that, water frequently splashed on his face, making it difficult to breathe, especially when the water went up his nose. He also lacked the strength to kick his feet or catch his breath every time he was poured over by the sea. In addition, he had to save the little stamina he had left for later; he would need it to swim towards a nearby island once he spotted one.

That was why the conch shells were useful. Ed didnt have to struggle to consistently keep his neck above the water. All he had to do was grip the plank and place the shell on his mouth every now and then. This way, he saved stamina and increased the chances of his survival.

Normally, the time a person could endure being adrift in the sea was limited to around twelve hours depending on the water temperature, however, Eds time would be significantly reduced as he was also dealing with his blood loss. Not to mention, hypothermia could also become a serious problem. It was key for Ed to locate an island as soon as the sun rose and his visibility became better. Fortunately for him, the southern sea was shallow with many uninhabited sand islands that were a short distance from each other.

Ed shifted his gaze to the east. But no matter how many times he turned his head, there was no sign of sunrise.

Its probably due to overcast, or maybe its still before dawn. Or

Suddenly, a humiliating realisation stabbed him in the back of the head. Slowly, but decisively. He had to entertain his embarrassed thoughts once more.

I cant believe Ive been hit on the back of my head like that and rendered defenceless

Instead of looking at the horizon, Ed raised his head.

Ha haha

He was met by a shower of shining stars and a high moon.

It seems to be only a little past midnight I didnt expect it to be so far from dawn. At best, I thought my surroundings were this dark because it was just before sunrise. At this rate, I dont feel very optimistic about ever greeting the sun My body temperature is already way down, and my blood has been pouring out dangerously for a long time.

Ed, who instantly forgot his anger, started to drift absentmindedly.

The waves lashed out at him and the plank, and his feet that had been floating on the surface, sank with the passage of time.

It wouldve been nice if I could climb on the plank, but this wooden board isnt strong or wide enough. So, I have no choice but to stay in the water.

Shivering from the cold, Ed squeezed the wood with his fingertips.

His mind and body withered as time went by, and his rapid breathing emitted clouds of steam. As his consciousness faded, it seemed that his physical presence was fading as well. He was terrified of disappearing forever, but it felt like there was nothing more he could do to remain in this world The waves crashing up the plank continuously hit him in the face before flowing down again. Ed floated with the rhythm of the sea as if he were dead. There was no reason for him to move in the first place as he held those small bags of air. Instead, he was more concerned about his brine-soaked wounds that throbbed as if they were about to burst.

His spine spasmed intermittently, and he had small convulsions all over. For a long time, his body, which had forgotten how to move, was completely focused on the sense of pain. It was the pain he had expected the moment his broken skin came in contact with the water. If hell existed on earth, it would be right here. Here, in a sea teeming with tens of thousands of needles, that persistently

penetrated him one by one. Slicing through his skin and piercing his bones. From small scratches to bigger torn pieces of flesh, all his festering and tender wounds were being ripped open and stabbed once more. In addition to the pain, another negative occurrence was that his blood had no chance of drying

Ed had long since given up on counting the hours he had been bleeding.

No, with this hazy mind of mine, it could only have been a few seconds for all I know. It doesn't really matter anyway. What matters now is to live in the present. I need the conviction that holding on to this moment will let me greet another. Only that's apparent. I believe that when I collect all those short passing moments, I can drive out the night and see the sun soon enough.

Unfortunately, it was Ed's body that severely dulled his spirit. His body wanted nothing more than to sink to the bottom, exhausted by the constant loss of blood and the cold. His heavy eyelids, carrying a thousand pounds, wanted to do the same. The moment he thought that he was about to lose his mind, he suddenly heard the longing for life screaming in his head. This combination of the tormenting pain, the shattering time and the screaming brought him back to reality, although shortly.

Ed cocked his head, his eyes twinkling.

I'm not dead yet. I have to keep reminding myself that I still have a living body that can enjoy the luxury of suffering. No matter how active my mind is, everything will be rendered useless if my body fails to stay awake

With that thought, Ed struck the side of the board with the back of his hand. By every hit, screams and sobs echoed and caused ripples through the waveless sea. His hand, which had been repeatedly slammed into the wood, had already begun to swell. However, the pain he felt was monotone. So, Ed had to perform the action over and over again until he sensed a distinct stimulus.

The new pain overshadowed his misery.

This isn't the time to mourn my miserable situation anyway

In turn, the pain was covered by the intent to kill. The determination to twist her neck was enough to eat away his pain.

Ed sobbed between his laughter and laughed between his sobs

Chapter 139

After what seemed like an eternity, Ed was greeted by another moment. This period was just as agonising and long as the previous one. Much longer than his lifetime and much longer than any eternal history.

Then the sounds of clatter and rippling waves tickled his ears. Bird chirping, too.

That goddamn flying beast will appear whenever he feels like it and bother my ears. Though, it's most likely just my hallucinations

Similarly, a brightly lit island flashed before his eyes at times. Ed eventually realised that such hallucinations could indicate that his brain was finally going insane. Also, his symptoms only worsened over time. Of them, the sudden scent of fruit was the most difficult to resist. A sweet odour emanated from somewhere, stimulating his sense of smell. However, the more he smelled it, the drier his salt-stained mouth became, and his hungry stomach famished in agony.

I can only imagine how thrilling it will be to bite into one of those bright yellow fruits and taste their sweet nectar This illusion is indescribably tempting, but I have to resist the urge to swim. I know that when I chase this illusion and start kicking my feet and swinging my arms, Id end up in hell in no time. Nonetheless, I can still sense the desire in my legs telling me to get there When in reality, my legs are probably nothing more than pieces of rotting meat Damn it.

Ed had tried to not think about his legs too much as such thoughts wouldnt help him with his survival. But he couldnt deny he has been concerned about them for quite a long time now.

Will there even be any blood left after my wounded legs have been submerged in the sea for hours? The bleeding from the open wounds must have continued Even at this momentOr maybe theyve already fallen off and a swarm of fish, smelling the blood, are having a feast right now.

The more he thought about it, the stranger his legs began to feel. He was uncertain whether they were still attached to him as even the dull pain had disappeared. Over time, Ed has forgotten how to move them. To be exact, it was the same for his arms, torso, and head

There seems to be no reason for me to go on like this

When that thought crossed his mind, the last bit of strength slowly vanished from his body. Like being sucked into an unknown opening, his soulless body sagged further and further down. As if it had been waiting for him, the black abyss opened its jaw wide around his feet. Ed gradually sank and the shadow of the abyss made it all the way to his forehead. However, the moment it was about to swallow his head, a brightly shining straight line drew horizontally over the darkness.

The starting twilight on the horizon spread into his darkened field of vision. The permeating energy caressed his eyelids faintly and sweeter than all the hallucinations he had before.

Ed opened his eyes languidly, just like one would when waking up from a deep sleep. Rays of light pierced his red eyes like the tip of a sharp knife and blinded him. Baffled, Ed opened his eyes in an instant. It was so vivid that he almost couldnt believe it. The light that burned brighter and more brilliantly than any other sunrise he had ever witnessed, lit a fire that seemed to pierce his retina. Ed was certain that this time, the scene before him wasnt an illusion and he fearlessly faced the stinging pain.

The light that seemed to be embracing life, slowly pushed the night back with its brightly-coloured red glow and only left a trail of clouds behind. As the sunrise wielded its brush over the sky, Ed was greeted by an ecstasy of sand dunes, tree trunks, and palm trees swaying in the wind. A flock of birds took off and flapped their wings across Eds view.

The emotion of welcoming life filled his tired eyes with tears.

This is the light that made an end to my hell I can never not be ecstatic about it even if it blinds me

Cesar stared at the half-crumpled paper. It was a palm-sized note with no writing on it. But despite that, it disgusted him as if it contained the dirtiest ink in the world. Cesar washed his face dry unconsciously. Hes been doing that since a few hours ago and redness from friction clearly started to show. His hair was a mess too, which was unusual for him, but he didnt bother to fix it.

He had been debating whether or not to write something on it for a long time.

What a miserable time

He wondered if Lil would ever doubt him or wanted to confirm the content herself. It was a time of iniquity in which he struggled to obtain undeniable proof.

In the middle of that struggle, Cesar had been hit with a terrible realisation. He knew better than anyone that he couldnt persuade Lil solely based on circumstances or feelings.

Liloa could never be coaxed by mouths that claimed innocence, spouted confessions, or misrepresented the truth. She firmly believed in the evidence that remained after a crime was committed. If she couldnt find it at first glance, shed take her time obtaining it Thats why I need this vexing piece of paper to convince Liloa about Edgars misdeeds. Unfortunately, in this case, there was no other tangible evidence of any kind, so I had no choice but to fabricate it Of course, if I had more time, I wouldnt have engaged in such disgraceful and impulsive manipulation And I wouldnt have to live with such guilt But somewhere down the line, Liloas attitude toward Edgar had clearly shifted. Im not sure if Im in the right to be jealous or if its just my delusion, but Edgars cunning tricks started to work at some point.

During that time, Cesar had become more and more nervous and wanted to remove Ed from the Bell Rock as soon as possible. So, the navigator tried to make Lil suspicious of Ed again in the hope that she would banish him herself. However, it proved to be difficult to touch Ed without telling a lie.

Whats more, I deceived her first. I never told her that the doctor was actually Admiral Retiro, even though I recognised him during our very first meeting And now, I probably cant tell her till the day I die Because, Liloa will inquire as to why. Why had I stayed on the sidelines when I knew what kind of garbage we brought on board. This troublesome situation wouldnt have happened if I had told her about Edgar from the moment we met him in the mansion of the Count of Amiaeng Saying that I was intimidated by him would be useless. Furthermore, telling her; I was afraid youd leave will never be accepted as its such a cowardly excuse. Also I wouldnt be able to bear that humiliation anyway

As Cesar couldnt confess, he had to beat around the bush and come up with subtle lists to trap Ed. However, that progress was agonisingly slow. In the end, he talked Courant into being a witness to Eds crimes, but unfortunately for Cesar, that failed too.

But then came that night, less than a day later, when I woke up next to that empty space I couldnt even feel Liloas body temperature anymore. She was nowhere to be found, and I couldnt sense her

Lil wasnt on the deck, the stern, or the docks. Cesar had stood in the silence of the damp dock, the ships lowest compartment, for a long time. He waited for her to come back, even turning to the wall-less void and begged the person who never showed up to meet me there. It was only after Cesar frightened the passing sentry, doing his usual rounds with a lantern, that he came to my senses. Completely unaware of how long he had been standing there

flashback

Perhaps we just missed each other. She mightve already returned to the captains office when I was out here to find her. Im not sure why I didnt think of that sooner

From the dock, his feet naturally started to take him to the end of the cabin deck. But halfway there, Cesar stopped and pondered.

What makes it seem so natural? Its like Im convinced that Liloa cant be anywhere else than the captains room

With that Cesar regained his steps.

It felt like he walked for a long time despite the short distance. As he neared the end, he eventually raised his eyes. A wall lantern reflected on the familiar reddish wooden door of the captains quarters. However, to Cesar, the space behind the bulkhead felt more alien than ever. He took this path dozens of times before and met her in that form even more often. Still, the thought of meeting Lil in that foreign body that didnt belong in this world, filled his chest with discomfort. Feeling strange, Cesar came to a halt.

I didnt go out of my way to chase a stranger like Lil Schweiz I long for the original Liloa

The fact that she was nowhere to be found in the captains office, drove Cesars composed thoughts right over the cliff.

Theyre probably at each other right now, skin to skin In this deep night in the Admirals cabin

Cesar shivered in horror at the sentence he had written in his mind. He tried to shake it off, but that foreign body made from material unknown to this world, transformed into Lils soft skin and voluminous hair with the touch of an unknown man. It became a woman who moaned and whispered, watched through the eyes of a man that wasnt Cesar. Then Lils face, filled with drunken pleasure, was seen clearly.

Cesar couldnt breathe. His entire body heated up like a blade held in a boiling fire

Chapter 140

As soon as Cesar sensed the furnace-like heat, a blacksmith, who started forging, hammered his head.

Tang!

I should hurry and stop them

Tang!

Im going to stab the man who is having fun with her

Tang!

Then I have to question Liloa, who betrayed me

The heat had reached the crown of his head and his hand that gripped the hilt of his sword trembled uncontrollably. His breath became constricted as if he had run a long distance. But just before he was devoured by the heat, an eerie chill passed his ears.

If so, should I break up with her? I cant keep embracing an unfaithful lover But, am I confident enough to do so?

The cold air seemed to mock him for having such thoughts. His anxiety finally got a hold of him and Cesar cooled down like a newly forged sword submerged in an ice bath. Being hit by the cold water, he froze for a moment, before turning back and entering his own cabin.

He then glared at the messenger pigeon that arrived two days ago. For the past week, Cesar had deliberately put the perfume on him, so it came as no surprise that the bird actually flew to him.

Back then, I thought it would be useful someday, not knowing I would use it so early on. And at such a bad time too

For hours, Cesar agonised over what to write on the paper. Even when dawn was about to arrive, he hadn't written a single line. He couldn't bear writing the very evidence of his sin with his own hands. His maniacal rage just wasn't enough to challenge his guilt. Although the impulse to write something came several times that night, he was unable to bring himself to act on it as he didn't want to leave such an ugly imprint on the world. Cesar couldn't be ignorant of his conscience. He had always lived according to the laws of the empire, which he saw as the only rightful rules to follow. Meaning a plan like this felt like he was one step closer to treason.

In the end, however, Cesar managed to convince himself.

If it's just between me and Liloa, my word alone will be enough for her to believe me. She wouldn't bother checking the communication tube. Even though I know that, it's still a very risky plan

Instantly, doubts seeped in.

If Liloa wishes to see the correspondence, then

Cesar tried to muffle his self-destructive thoughts with silence and that long dark night finally came to an end

end of flashback

By the time I had made up my mind, the day dawned. After that, I only woke up after that noisy morning was already in full swing. Liloa's reaction was surprisingly satisfying, and the guilt weighing on my shoulders diluted and faded by the pleasurable scene I witnessed. As time went on, I became pretty convinced that she couldn't have shared a bed with Edgar and I even blamed myself for stigmatising my innocent lover

But the wound that was already so big, didn't heal easily. Similarly, the sense of guilt didn't go away easily either. Like black oil, it remained as a stain that couldn't be removed even after washing it countless times. Cesar not only bore the guilt of deceiving Lil but he now also carried the anxiety that Ed might actually die.

Clearly, Edgar is a human with a strong body and an even stronger mind. He's a high-ranked naval officer who didn't survive countless naval battles and deviations by sheer luck alone. It was also due to his mental strength that he was able to endure that surgery where his skin and stomach were pierced multiple times without anaesthetic. But unfortunately for him, his current state is probably worse than it was back then. If he's not already dead, I can only imagine the pain he must be in right now

Just why did Courant fall into madness like that

Anybody could have told at a glance that he was bleeding out. On top of that, he seemed to have sustained a serious injury to his head. Even so, I'll never regret pushing for his isolation. At that time, when Liloa cried out loud and raged at her officers, she tore open that barely subdued wound of mine. I really would've killed Edgar myself if he hadn't disappeared from my sight. I would've lost

my mind if I had to see Liloa embrace and defend him for a second longer. Theres no way I couldve stayed still watching that.

However, there was something Cesar could never deny.

He was still Edgar Retiro. Although everybody here casually called him Ed, in reality, he wasnt just some ordinary man. No matter how he may have seemed like an outsider to the sailors here, he was a Marquess of the Empire, the head of a key family, and the Admiral who led more than 40,000 Mondovian navies And Im responsible for the death of said Admiral

The weight and value of Eds name increased the weight of his sin.

Cesars gaze shifted to the other paper in his hand.

[5, 3, 8 42, 6, 1 37, 11, 9]

It was the original letter retrieved from the red-tailed pigeon. Cesar didnt try to crack it because knowing the code as an outsider was equal to treason. What he did notice was that the message had no title, which made him certain of one thing.

{ Bring me any book you read. That will do. Ill write using that title so you can verify the content
Its not the official code, but it cant be helped }

So, the title is determined by a specific set of rules. It cant just be any book. And seeing that theyre deliberately hiding it, must mean that the title is the key of the code If so, will the Commodore stay still?

Its hard to guess, I never had a close connection to Viktor Sagastar Other than that we both resided in Sesbron around the same time I do remember that Sagastar was well known for his hot-blooded personality ever since his aspirant days Its more likely that he wont be staying still then In addition, Sagastar received a full promotion by the recommendation of the Admiral, took over Grignard, and became Mondovis second-in-command. Since that promotion was purely the Admirals decision, many are envious of him, making his position unstable. The Western Navy has a lot of other Captains who are much more experienced in long naval battles than him. Meaning that even if Sagastar possesses the title of second-in-command now, chances are that hell be demoted to a senior officer when the Admiral disappears. Once an officer is degraded, the probability of receiving an edict again is close to zero. For that reason alone, hes probably brimming with personal and political motives to keep pushing for this search He still needs the shade that Edgar provides for him after all

When I think about that personality of his some more, it suddenly isnt unimaginable to assume hell take over the Legardon fleet in the process. He probably doesnt even have to threaten with his title of Vice-Admiral as his fierce presence must be enough to push for it. What also isnt unheard of in the South are those vacant spots left behind by higher ranked officers setting out to sea, if thats the case, Sagastar only has to deal with some Lieutenant who is way over his head anyway After that, the next step is obvious. Hell set up a medium-sized operation and exclude all their large ships, thereby improving their speed immensely. If I was the Commodore, I would reorganise the squadron around their sloops to increase mobility and explore the nearby islands

Cesar instantaneously raised his head. Quickly erasing the loads of sloops joined for the search party from his mind. Masts that were spread out like nets all disappeared from his imagination in an instant.

{ If youre the commander* }

The words hes heard countless times from his father rang in his ears while his palms covered his face and rubbed his tired eyes. Even since he was a young boy, he had always thought that he was bound to become a commander someday.

Commander, the brilliant star with the rank of a Commodore.

That title, which he threw away like trash when he chose Lil, suddenly trampled on his insignificant self. The more he thought about it, the more aware he became, and the harder such dreams scoffed him.

He glared straight ahead through the gaps in between his fingers. Along with the ships old wooden walls, the narrow desk in his executives office looked shabbier than ever. While cupping his chin with his hands, Cesar pressed his head down harder.

With reality as miserable as this, the past I left behind is nothing but a mirage now. I expected it to be insanely enchanting and brilliantly evocative. But thats all I could think of. I never imagined that this would happen to me. I thought Id be happy, that every moment would be filled with joy and affection I really knew nothing

Cesar clenched his fist.

However, I knew what I got myself into, so this is nothing new.

He tried to divert his thoughts.

The fleet might be nearby. It would be a stretch, but its not impossible for them to get to Edgar if they conducted their search properly. Nonetheless, will they be able to rescue him in time? Even if I send them a message right now, Im not sure if they can arrive within 12 hours. If Sagastars unable to arrive in time, theyll only end up recovering their Admirals remains Once his body is found and the cause of death is identified, theyll look funny upon the message. Anyone who will see Edgars state, will find it highly suspicious and ask themselves how a battered body like his couldve sent a message like that

But I have no choice. Contrary to my initial expectations, Edgars condition is far too critical. If theres something I can do to increase his chances of survival with my own hands, Ill have to do it. Because once the Admiral is officially declared dead, his fleet will be relentless in catching the culprit, and their determination to find us will even be fiercer. Sesbron wont sit idly either. I have no choice but to hope that the dying Edgar can be found

Cesar wrote a message and put it in the communication tube. Awakened by the movement on its ankle, the pigeon visibly started to struggle. Cesar ignored its flapping wings and silently nodded his head toward the window. At first, the pigeon appeared to peck its beak menacingly, but soon lowered its head and flew out of the window
