

Northwest 141

Chapter 141

Previous

Sagastar nervously chewed the cigarette that hung from his lips.

Captain, what the hell is this?

Captain Long, who was right in front of the Commodore, grunted and groaned. Although the captain had already expressed his ignorance multiple times, Sagastar still seemed to be waiting for an answer. The prolonging silence between them eventually swayed the restless and stuttering Captain to come up with an answer.

Ugh Umm Thats the Mandus Officers code Upon decryption, it looks like coordinates.

Did I ask you to do that?

No

Then why?

Uhh, well Because the pigeon

Sagastar glared at the captain as if he were the most pathetic human being in the world, causing him to shrink unconsciously.

At times like this, its best not to come over too strongly or whine for that matter. Ill be apprehended the moment I say something useless, even if Im correct

Thats right. The answer Im looking for is how the hell did Sir Edgars pigeon return with a message written in Mandus code.

But how can I

How! Im asking you how?!

How can I

Huh? The handwriting is different too! What the hell! Whos the bastard that dares to imitate the Admiral? Is he trying to blackmail us?!

After chewing on his cigarette for what felt like an eternity, Sagastar eventually lit it. With the progress of their current conversation, the captain was also in desperate need of a cigarette, so he couldnt help but salivate a little as he knew he hadnt the privilege to act on it. When the fragrant smoke entered his nostrils, he twitched his nose and lowered his eyes to the coordinates carried by the pigeon. Next to it lay several maps of their operation. His unfocused gaze wandered around the Hangyang Islands. But a moment later, his expression changed dramatically.

Huh?..

The captain pushed some other maps aside while producing the sound that Sagastar hated the most.

Huh? This, this

So noisy!

Commodore!

First, give me another.

Oh, no problem But, Commodore, this appears to be very close to our fleet

With his gaze remaining fixed on the Hangyang Islands, the captain rummaged through his pockets for a pack of cigarettes. He tilted his head for a moment, then took out his now empty hand and began measuring the distance. Sagastar, who was smoking another cigarette and staring out the window, rolled his eyes at him.

Captain Long! Right now! What do you think youre doing with that corrupted message?!

Commodore. Its the ocean.

What!?

Its in the middle of the ocean. Of course, I know that we shouldnt believe anything that comes from an unidentified sender, but

One more time and Ill!

Its a letter from the man who stole the Admirals pigeon

I said one more time!

At this point, its clear that something has happened to the Admiral. Besides, its an unprecedented catastrophe to have our communication system intercepted

Youre still going on about it?!

Startled by Sagastars uproar, the captain scratched the back of his head. He furrowed his brows with a confused expression, deciding to still express his doubt.

But it was sent in the Mandus officer code What if he knows something

He would only send a message in Mandus if he knew we could decipher it. He probably knew the Commodore would be the recipient and that we wouldnt take it seriously if it was just a regular letter. Whoever he is, this impostor, has now revealed a part of his identity to some extent. In addition, I think he knows about your personality the fact that you can be meticulously suspicious about everything and used it to his advantage. That can be why he sent a message he wrote himself. If he was a pirate who tried to order the Admiral to use Nicolas tears but failed, dont you think he wouldve tried to clumsily imitate Sir Edgar? Instead, he wrote it in the officers code. Why do you think that is?

So, youre saying the sender knows me? If so, why didnt he reveal his name and affiliation?

Well, there can be several reasons why he didnt. Maybe hes the one who abducted the Admiral or maybe hes a former officer who couldnt risk getting caught. If so, is the sender merely a witness?

If that were the case, I think he would have revealed himself.

Is there anyone who doesnt have one or two skeletons in their closet? Maybe he was afraid of getting those revealed?

What do you think?

With his mouth tightly shut, Sagastar approached the captain with a cigarette between his fingers and looked down at Hangyang Islands.

So, according to the message the entry point is in the middle of the open sea

Yes. Based on our charts, there arent any inhabited islands nearby But, since its the South, there must be some smaller deserted islands in the vicinity However, thats only my guess. If the Commodores words are correct, and the coordinates represent the location where the Admiral went overboard, he must be drifting or floating somewhere I think we need to hurry.

The captain bent down again and made some new calculations. Sagastar, on the other hand, kept himself busy with his cigarette in order to stop the ominous thoughts from coming.

Assuming that the pigeon flew from there to our location today given the distance and the wind it was close to midnight yesterday by now, twelve hours have already passed

Damn it, are you crazy? Are you suggesting we move the fleet because of some unidentified bastard?

Then give me a sloop and I will go by myself instead. Even if its a trap or trickery, when we run into them, we can either catch them or get rid of them. It will be fine either way.

This is insane. Long No, Julbert. Arent you aware that youre basing your whole theory on circumstantial evidence and your own imagination?

Im indeed aware of that.

Sagastar stroked his chin and stared down on him.

Arent you just trying to run away from the Visha?

Commodore, thats too much!

When Sagastar shot him with silence, the captain, who knew exactly what that stare meant, closed his mouth. The Commodore pulled the map of the Hangyang islands in front of him, but suddenly looked the captain in the eyes again.

Wait Did you say midnight?

Yes.

Its night. You didnt mean night near dawn, but just midnight?

Yes.

If youre getting off a ship, why the hell would you choose that time to escape?

Silence befell them. Midnight in the deep dark sea. There was no idiot in the navy who didnt know what kind of hellhole the sea was at night. At that moment, the authenticity of the correspondence became irrelevant.

Upon comprehending the possibility that Ed couldve jumped into the sea at night, the two immediately displayed distorted facial expressions and soon they spat out the same curses.

Sagastar started shouting as Captain Long grabbed the table bell.

Damn it, raise the signal!

The bell in the captains hand rang loudly, causing a young aspirant to jump in with a surprised expression. Before the captain could even open his mouth, Sagastar already yelled his orders.

Move the sloops! Make a full course change!

..?

Damn it, what are you waiting for? Get out of here!

The rash remarks made the young cadet tremble, however, the boy didnt turn around and countered with a rather reasonable question.

Um To which direction should we turn?

When Sagastar glared at the captain as if he was going to kill him, Captain Long quickly snatched the map from the big pile of files on the table, tearing it in the process. He then nervously read the direction while holding the half-ripped pieces of paper together.

Northeast Northeast, Commodore!

Northeast! Go and change our course!

END OF VOLUME 4

Chapter 141.5 RECAP

We start this volume with the side story of Eds past. When he was around 16 years old he dropped out of military school and joined his grandfather on his expedition to the Western Continent. At that time Ed was already a diligent medical student who had inherited the love for adventure from his grandpa. When they had safely arrived at the western continent, Ed immediately started exploring the nearby jungle where he had a rather uncomfortable encounter with a new animal race, the elephant. After almost dying due to an attack, Ed awakes in a hut belonging to the Ruwa tribe. Here he meets his saviour Chippo and later his first love Murasha. We fast forward to a year later, in that time Ed had frequently visited the tribe, learned about new medicine from them and the jungle, spent time with Murasha and learned their language. On the day his grandpa announced that they would be leaving the continent again, the Ruwa tribe gets attacked by raiders hired by imperial nobles. Ed managed to get Murasha out, but they had to see how the other members of the tribe either got killed or taken to the Empire.

After Ed and Murasha arrived in Roahn, Eds hometown, Murasha starts to get sick with a mysterious disease. Sadly, she wasnt the only one, all the surviving members of her tribe, who were taken to the empire, suffered from this disease and eventually died from it. Ed tried everything in his power to save Murasha, but it was all in vain, a half year after they arrived in the Empire, she passed away on board the ship that was taking them back to the Western Continent. In the period following her death, Ed lived alone in the ruins of the Ruwa tribe, searching for enlightenment and providence. He eventually found clues of it on scribes in the temple of the tribe, which led Ed to resume military school and embrace the title of Admiral.

When a few years later all the western pirates were annihilated and Ed retrieved as much of the relics of the Western Continent as possible, he found himself standing in his library thinking about that one woman who spoke about providence if it was her second nature; Liloa. However, when Ed

went out of his way to look for her, she had already disappeared from the dukes mansion and was unofficially declared dead.

In part two of Eds side story we go back to the period where Ed was still finishing his military training and had a meeting with Liloa in the school library. What followed was a short conversation between the two where Ed wanted to know more about the natural laws that Liloa always spoke of. After their talk, Ed was left with a sense of inferiority. He was ashamed of his past behaviour and envied Liloa for naturally having the providence that took Ed years to obtain.

From here we go back to the main story and we find ourselves in the Admirals room on the Visha. The Mondovi fleet was in the middle of chasing after their Admiral and came across a small part of the Western pirates. After interrogation, they learned about the escape of Sir Edgar, but not before he got himself wounded. Around the same time they received a message from Ed saying he was doing fine and that they should stay put. However, seeing that the code suddenly changed, the order had the opposite effect and the chase for their Admiral continued

In the meantime, the Bell Rock had anchored nearby a deserted island, in the week that followed Ed came to understand that the changed effect of the necklace was only visible to him. Ed concluded that it might have something to do with the fact that he told Lil he would respect her whomever she was. He also noticed that Lil was treating him more nicely and it appeared that her guard had gone down a bit. On the other hand, Cesars suspicions that something was going on between the two of them were only growing.

When both men were dealing with their feelings, the atmosphere on the Bell Rock escalated. Due to the hierarchy and the weak punishments, the borrowed crew acted as they pleased. This tension between the borrowed and original crew peaked when a young sailor, Julio, openly assaulted and insulted their captain. This disturbance was quickly settled, but it did increase the already native vibe onboard.

When the argument was being settled behind closed doors, Ed wanted to take advantage of the commotion and sneaked into Cesars cabin to retrieve his medicine. There he was met with a rather disturbing surprise. In an effort to catch Ed red-handed, Cesar had Courant hiding in the room. Fortunately for Ed, he discovered this in time and nothing major happened.

Later that night Lil visits Ed with the pretends of giving him his share of the pearls she got from Bellus. For Lil, nothing good came from this conversation as her longing for freedom only increased.

After sharing an intimate time with Cesar, Lil found herself staring at the night sky on deck. Ed showed up and it led to her following him down to his cabin for some treatment. Due to the combination of insomnia and the comfortable feeling she got from Eds cabin, Lil eventually fell asleep in his bed. The next morning, however, ended with a big fight. Ed decided to push Lils feelings some more, which made her confused and defensive. But before Ed could explain himself any further, his messenger pigeon suddenly showed up. This left Lil with no choice but to draw her gun and Ed was imprisoned with the prospect of being thrown overboard. However, when the involved officers were still debating over the verdict, Ed was beaten half to death by Courant.

In the end, there was nothing Lil could do to prevent the execution and Eds almost lifeless body was thrown overboard. Fortunately, after a hellish night, the heavily injured Ed managed to not only greet the morning, but also an island.

This volume ended with Cesar using Eds pigeon to send his coordinates to the fleet and Sagastar making his way to Eds location.

Some quick and important trivia:

Eds parents both passed away when he was younger and he was raised by his grandfather.

Ed met his first love when he was 16 and Murasha was 14.

Ed learned to play the Surihe from Murasha.

The Ruwa tribe, from the western continent, was known for their short build, pinkish skin, reddish eyes with silver hair and their intelligence as well. Ed often compared them with fairies.

When Ed was in the middle of finding a cure for Murasha, he went back to Sesbron and conducted autopsies on the corpses of the Ruwa tribe. Because autopsy wasn't a really well-known practice among the nobles, rumours that Ed was torturing the race even after death began to spread. This was also the beginning of the infamous rumours circling the admiral.

The age difference between Ed and Liloa is approximately 5-6 years. Ed was 20-21 when he resumed his military studies when Liloa was only 15 years old. (making them now 22/23 and 28 years old)

Liloa was part of the Karabinae, an elite cavalry unit of the army. She was highly talented in shooting targets while riding a horse. During her time in the military academy, Liloa got sexualised and ridiculed on a daily basis for being a woman in the army.

To escape from Duke Mireille, Liloa staged her kidnapping/death and ran away.

Ed was highly fascinated by Liloa even when they were still in school. However, he never approached her because of the shame he felt. He never got over the fact he dragged Murasha to the empire and thereby causing her death. Ed did want to speak to Liloa one day, but only when he repented on his sins and found the answers to his questions about life.

Back in the day when Sagastar was still a Lieutenant, Ed saved his life. His loyalty stems from that.

Even though Ed sent the fleet a note that he was okay, the fact that the code changed was enough reason for Sagastar to remain searching. As he was convinced the Admiral was in danger.

Ed is the only one that can see Lils changed appearance.

Julio, the sailor who assaulted and insulted Lil, is from Marchand. The reason for his hostility towards Lil is due to her skin tone, Julio hates people from the empire.

Lil starts to be more and more shaken up by Eds presence. Especially by the fact that Mortu leaves her alone whenever she is with him.

Cesar deliberately used Eds perfume to lure in his pigeon. He then used that pigeon to set Ed up.

Even though they never expressed it, the whole crew is afraid of the navy.

The highly classified code that the top officers of the Mondovi fleet uses is called Nicolas tears probably named after Sir Nicola, the Commodore/Vice-Admiral before Sagastar. Mandus code is the basic officer code used by the military.

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Someones nervous steps walked up and down the admirals office.

Compared to other galleons the Visha is undeniably the fastest, but with her deep hull shes noticeably slower than smaller and lighter sloops

Sagastar began tearing his hair out at the thought of the Legardons sloops being already far ahead of the Visha. Finally, just as he considered transferring to one of those sloops, someone simultaneously knocked and burst into the admirals room.

The ill-mannered officer, who seemed to have lost his hat somewhere along the lines, shouted.

Commodore! A person has been spotted on one of the sandy islands east of our current location!..

Roughly two hours later, Sagastar found himself on a small boat heading for said island.

Opposite from him was captain Long ordering the four oarsmen with fierce momentum. Longs impatience almost tempted him to start whipping the officers.

Without even having had the time to lower its sails, the sloop that had arrived first already began aiding the Admiral, inspecting the island and guarding the surroundings. The captains shout and the sound of oars breaking through the waves could be heard alternately. But even though everyone was in a hurry, the boat that was advancing seemed to go slower and slower.

Sagastar closed his eyes behind his interlocked hands.

No matter how much Sir Edgar likes to wander around, hes rarely been in this much danger as he is now. When Nicola was still around he was incredibly reckless, but compared to those days hes been more docile. Under Vice Admiral Nicola, Sir Edgar had the habit of vanishing and then reappearing out of nowhere rolling around deck covered in blood. On the contrary, in recent years, he looked mostly relaxed bored even, as if he had already obtained the thing he had been pursuing with zeal.

Maybe thats why I was so complacent, even though there was no reason to be. Its entirely my fault. Its unthinkable to even consider making excuses. Unlike Nicola, who had stayed up day and night in the Admirals room until the day he retired, Im just a disgustingly indolent person.

Old memories flooded his mind

flashback

Shortly after putting a bullet in the pirate who had stabbed Edgar in the back, Sagastar passed out. Even Edgar, who suffered a minor injury, was unable to reawaken him. After Sagastar finally regained consciousness in the recovery room near the bow, he immediately grabbed the jacket of a passing navy surgeon.

Admiral What about the Admiral?

Due to his fatigue, the navy surgeon couldnt even muster a genuine expression and instead of listening to him, he randomly poured out answers to questions that a just recovered officer would normally ask.

Sir Viktor, youve awakened? Thank goodness The battle is over now Of course, theyve been sunk Its been half a day

The Admiral

The navy surgeon finally accurately responded when he started a series of tests, such as lifting Sagastars eyelid one after the other.

Ah, yes. Thats right. The admiral left you in such a good condition that I didnt have to do much about you. I hate to say it, but hes one of the best surgeons in our fleet. So, consider yourself very lucky, Sir Viktor. You would have lost even more blood than you had now. Normally, doctors wait in the infirmary for their patients to be transported, meaning its unusual to be treated right on deck. I was impressed when I first saw the sutures, it isnt just any ordinary skill, haha.

I administered some medicine, so youll feel a bit dazed for a while you wont have much energy either due to the blood you lost. For the time being, you should rest in bed.

How is the admiral?

Ah. The Admiral. Well, he was walking all over the place holding onto his side before he got caught by the Vice-Admiral. Fortunately, I heard that the surgery was successful. It wasnt a major operation, so he should have woken up by now Uhh! Sir Viktor! You cant get up

Ignoring the doctor who tried to stop him, Sagastar stood up from the bed. He then hurriedly climbed up to the deck with his crutches and left behind the man who kept shouting loudly. When he arrived at the admirals office, he saw another doctor just finishing Edgars treatment. With a bandage tied around his waist, Edgar muttered expressionlessly after seeing Sagastar.

So, youre alive.

Thank you, I really appreciate

Youre free to leave now.

Edgar chinned the doctor away. However, the doctor appeared to want to wrap some more around his patients body, but when Edgar made a face, he quickly left the private room in silence. As soon as the door closed, Sagastar bowed his head.

How can I express my gratitude?

The point wasnt simply that Edgar had saved Sagastars life. It was an unrepayable favour that Edgar had endured the blade digging into his flesh just to finish stitching Sagastars blood vessels. With Isabelle and Leons faces fluttering at the feast of grace, Sagastars tears full of emotion and gratitude flowed down his cheeks once more.

Ed sat on the bed and quietly watched Sagastar. He then threw on the shirt the doctor had given him and approached the officer.

Lieutenant, youre aware of this, right? Youre alive because of me.

Yes, Admiral. Thank you. Thank you so much. I dont know what to say. Really

Thats right. Im glad you know. Seriously, Ive seen a lot of people who have died from being reckless like you. Its dangerous to pull a foreign object from your body without a doctor. Being alive despite having something lodged into you, means your vital organs are still functioning. When that happens, you need to think about how to preserve your breath. The only thing you will accomplish by removing the object from your body while your heart is still pumping, is dying from

massive blood loss. Next time, try preserving your breath rather than fixing the affected side yourself, all right?

Yes! Ill keep that in mind.

What did you say your name was? Sagastar

Yes, Lieutenant Viktor Sagastar. I belong to

Thats enough for an introduction. Youll be under my direct command soon.

What?

Well, lets see, you obviously want to repay this great favour, dont you?

Sagastar lifted his forearm and solemnly wiped away his tears.

Yes! Simply tell me, Ill do anything!

That doctor just told me that my right kidney may no longer function properly in the long run Do you know what I mean? Ive suffered permanent damage trying to save you. I have no intention of using this as an excuse and forcing you into anything. I only need to know if you think you can handle it. Think about it carefully.

Nowadays, Sagastar wouldve never believed such an obvious exaggeration, but at that time he was far more nave. He recognized Edgar as someone who had made a revolutionary contribution and risen to a much higher position, despite being the same age. So, he could never imagine such a person committing anything less than correctional misconduct towards a subordinate officer.

Sagastar turned as white as a sheet when he realised Edgar had suffered permanent organ damage because of him. Looking at Sagastars face with satisfaction, Edgar continued.

Hmm, there are a few things that need to be taken care of

Please! Please tell me. Leave anything to me!

Nicolas going to kill me sooner or later.

After responding resolutely, Sagastar questioned for a moment whether the Nicola Edgar spoke of was the Sir Nicola he knew.

Pardon?

Ive seen that look in his eyes before, normally it wasnt anything unusual as hes probably already stabbed me hundreds of times in his head. However, this time I think hes really going to kill me his eyes look so tired.

Anyway, seeing as youre so eager, I think youd be ideal as my deputy.

What are you talking about

You have to protect me before Nicola murders me of course.

Even through Sagastars tears, Edgars darkly smiling face was seen very clearly

end of flashback

It was the same now. The admirals dishevelled face displayed on the sandy beach could be clearly seen this time as well.

Sitting on the boat, Sagastar tightened his grip on the hull he had unknowingly grabbed. His hips restlessly moved up and down in an attempt to look closer.

Captain, what happened? Is he unconscious?

I-Im not sure.

The captain handed over the telescope. Looking through it was an useless action in more ways than one, not only were they about to set foot on the island also the fact that from his current spot Sagastar couldnt do anything but watch, was negatively influencing his patience. The face seen from beyond the eyepiece was terribly miserable. Gasping for breath, Sagastar let go of the telescope and dropped it.

Alive.

Is he even alive?

The unfinished sentence went down his throat with a gulp. Sagastar seemed to be frozen for a moment before he suddenly pushed off the boat and jumped into the sea.

Commodore!..

Commodore!..

Due to the swaying of the boat, the clearly embarrassed captain stumbled. Immediately after, the accompanying sailors threw their oars and followed their Commodore. Left alone, the captain was unsure whether to jump or not, but when he saw the back of the unstoppable Sagastar, he closed his eyes and moments later his feet sank into the shallow shore.

Sir Edgar!

Sailors who came and went from the sandy beach all turned to Sagastar as he slithered through the sea like a water buffalo.

Sir Edgar!

Every time he took a long stride across the sand, his massive chest muscles twitched. The drenched uniform he wore to greet Ed flapped violently, and the medals and insignia on his shoulders and chest collided with each other. Sagastars howling face resembled that of a ferocious beast and the sound of his shouts filled the spaces around him

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Commodore! Youre not supposed to go near Please stop Commodore!

You, you still came Commodore!

Finally, Sagastar fell to his knees upon reaching Ed, the cause of his worries. As a result of his actions, the admiral, who was in a lying position, was hit by a wave of sand.

What the hell happened? Huh? Guiad!

Guiad, the navy doctor, was questioned mercilessly by a clearly startled voice. Sagastars reaction was understandable because at first glance, the body covered in all kinds of wounds such as bruises, abrasions and lacerations, looked terrible. While Guiad was examining Ed, Sagastar couldnt grab his collar, so he grabbed the soft sand instead.

Ugh! Is this our Admiral? No, what the hell is this?

Captain Long arrived a little later and instantly covered his mouth with both hands when he saw the state their admiral was in, thereby dropping Sagastars hat which he had picked up along the way.

Unable to contain his rage, Sagastar clenched his fists. In the beginning, he only silently ground his fist into the sand next to the captains boots, but that quickly changed into hitting the sand harder and harder. Dozens of times. The soft sand hollowed easily. His broad shoulders shook, and soon enough, thick drops of water dripped from the corner of his eyes. When the officers in the surrounding area heard the babbling voice, they all turned out of curiosity and witnessed Sagastar crying without even thinking about saving face.

This is so terrible! Keuheup Heuk! How did you end up like this How what am I supposed to do

Huff! Huff!

Sagastars roaring noise persisted for some time. Even though only the navy doctor, Sagastar, and Captain Long were near Eds body, the wailing could be heard from far away. In response to Sagastars open display of sadness, the assembled officers began to sob too. One officer even took out his handkerchief. Gradually, the men lowered their hats and placed them on their chests. The doctor, however, seemed to be the only one embarrassed. He repeatedly missed the timing to speak up and was desperately searching for an opportunity to intervene.

Hes Hes still alive

Uwaaaaa! Uwaaaaa!

As more men began to cry out loud, the unfortunate navy doctors voice faded into the air. The wailing went on until Ed opened his eyes and tried to stop it.

How noisy

Of course, Ed couldnt silence them all at once.

First I need to silence Sagastar whos crying all over and apparently about to lose his sanity It appears that only Long is beginning to understand the situation

Sagastar too loud.

Then, the navy doctor, aiming for the gap, shouted with conviction.

Hes still alive!

?!

Still shaking shoulders, Sagastar opened his eyes, raised his head and gasped. With his moist eyes and soaked clothes, he resembled a drowned bear more than he did a commodore. In addition, his reddened complexion which had turned into the same colour as his hair made him look much more fiercer than usual. So, instead of the navy doctor who was startled by that look, Captain Long spoke calmly.

Commodore, hes alive and his eyes are even opening.

Sagastar shifted his gaze to the side. The tears that had collected in the corners of his eyes continued to fall.

Also, just now, he asked us to be quiet.

Sagastar stopped crying upon meeting Eds eyes.

How How did you end up like this? Sir Edgar!

The commodore burst into tears once again, but this time he shoved his fist into his mouth, making sure there was no more wailing.

Ed closed his eyes in satisfaction

It seems like I slept for a long time as theres no more hell or pain, only my peaceful unconsciousness

As time passed, his body felt lighter and his mind became clearer. Those were the signs that Eds deep sleep was gradually fading. Then a brightened consciousness flashed into his head as if he was rising above the surface of the water. Ed opened his eyes. His vision was much wider than before he closed his eyes again.

My swollen eyelids have sunk quite a bit.

He blinked and rolled his eyes, enjoying the sensation of moving his thinner eyelids over and over.

Im also able to move my head.

Ed looked around while still lying down. The white tent was lit in reddish light as if it was hit by a sunset. A vial containing some fluid was hung high and connected to a needle inserted into his hand. Judging by the slight pressure on his left hand, it seemed that the treatment was over. When he looked up, he took notice of the bandage tightly wrapped around his head.

Ed checked his condition further by exploring each of his senses in turn.

I assume that the navy doctor has called all the other doctors and had them all work together on my treatment but its necessary to confirm it for myself.

He slowly closed and opened his eyes after carefully completing the procedure.

Damn. I cant help but laugh. Sagastar, that idiot. I knew he wouldnt listen and rush after me, but I cant believe Ive been lucky enough that he actually found me He mustve randomly searched all the islands. Really, where does he get that never ending energy from?

Ed eventually burst out laughing. Noticing how smoothly his throat produced the laughing sound made him feel good. Furthermore, he no longer had a terrible thirst.

Admiral, are you awake?

The voice came from outside, probably hearing the laughter. Even though Ed didnt answer, the tents entrance was pushed aside and a high-ranked Vishas officer popped his face in. After checking the bed, the man relayed a message to someone behind him. It mustve been an aspirant who delivered the news to Sagastar. Soon enough, the captain muttered his excuse and entered the tent.

Sir Guiad said you were expected to remain asleep for three to four days

How long?

A little over two days.

Call him.

Sir Viktor?

..?

Ah, Sir Guiad. Yes. I see.

Guiad arrived a little later and expressed great concern for Ed's brain. So did Ed. He was most afraid about the possibility that his brain might've rotted away due to the long period of poor blood circulation. Unfortunately, even if a part of it died, he would never know. For now, only time would tell and they had to keep an eye on the progress, including possible infections. Ed pondered Guiad's diagnosis before calling the captain who was waiting outside.

Yes, Admiral.

Clothes.

Yes, I knew you'd ask for them, so I already went through your closet. Well, I brought a variety of thick gowns; which one would you like?

Ed was helped up by the captain. After only raising his upper body, Ed was already out of breath. With an arrogant expression, he tried to muffle his groan.

My medicine box

Oh, I brought that too. I broke out in sweat while trying not to damage it.

The captain ran quickly and opened the lid of the medicine box. Despite not knowing where the captain suddenly got it from, Ed spoke without even looking at the box being held before him.

1, 7, 5.

Haha, are they coded too? Let's see

It was only then that Ed remembered that Captain Long was talkative. He normally paid it no mind, but now it made him feel bad as he had to hear the captain laugh while he was the one suffering alone.

Here it is.

Ed irritably snatched the bottle the captain was holding out. The captain, delighted with the fact that he was helping the admiral, smiled and lifted several gowns. This time too, Ed spoke without looking at him.

The thickest one.

Even while putting on the gown, the captain continued to run his mouth.

You must be feeling a lot lighter now.

We had a lot of trouble getting the salt out. Normally, only the medical trainees are allowed to help with that, but you had so many wounds that our officers assisted them.

Wow, just how did you handle it all?

Seeing how the grains of sand were deeply embedded in your wounds, I had to show off some craftsmanship myself.

That mustve happened immediately after reaching the island when I rolled around the sand in order to raise my body temperature. My body was exhausted from swimming to the island, but I could still clearly hear the wind-shaking palm trees and leaves, as well as the flock of birds that soared and howled. I reasoned that if birds could live here, there had to be fresh water, but I couldnt move my body any longer I was the only thing that was withering away in that scene filled with the vividness of life. Even though I stepped on such clear land, I was still dying. I shivered from the cold despite laying on the warm sand, I starved despite having deliciously ripe fruit just out of reach and I suffered from thirst despite knowing there was fresh spring water somewhere

Ed clenched his jaw as he remembered the agony of that time. The grains of sand that had been pushed into his open wounds, scraped his unhealed flesh. They eventually became so hot that it felt like he was burning in the sun. At times, the pain was intense enough that even the barely hanging on Ed would wake up from his unconscious state.

I threatened Sir Guiad that I wouldnt leave him alone if you got tetanus; every single grain should be removed; of course, I helped out, so I told him

Youre too noisy

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Yes!

The captain then neatly shut his mouth.

Meanwhile, Ed swallowed the curses formed in his mouth. Not only was he light in the head, but his body felt as heavy and dirty as ever. Even after having taken multiple painkillers, the heaviness remained the same. Moreover, he had just woken up and he couldnt walk well, so he had to leave the tent with the captains support.

Lukewarm wind ruffled his hair and the air coming through his nose was salty. He wondered how long it had been since he died in the waves and came back to life.

Its almost funny how quickly I adapt to the land despite having lived on the sea for so long.

Ed suddenly raised his head and looked around. He expected a pleasant military camp, but the immediate surroundings were just too quiet for that. He soon realised why. Honour guards* were lined up on the left side of the tent. The brisk coastal breeze fluttered the golden tassels and epaulettes on their red uniforms brilliantly.

Clutching his chin, Ed leaned over and whispered to the captain.

Are you guys trying to mock me with the honour guards even after seeing me like that?..

The captain moved his head towards Ed and whispered back.

No. Certainly not, Admiral. I actually tried to stop him, but in the end, Sir Viktor insisted

I had no idea Sagastar was this thrilled by my survival.

Ed decided to close his eyes for a moment and took a deep breath.

However, hes the one who was relentless in his search and rescued me. Assuming that I could have survived somehow even if the fleet hadnt found me, is nothing more than arrogant

While Ed was laying in the tent, his hearing came back from time to time.

If I remember correctly, the search for me had been intense. It cant be helped then

Rendered speechless, Ed tried to ignore the different flags fluttering behind the honour guards, including the imperial flag and the Mondovi naval flag.

The honour guards began to divide solemnly as Ed unintentionally passed by. At some point, the captain began steering him in a specific direction and Ed could roughly guess their destination.

As they walked a little further, he noticed the majesty of a long table, which made him wonder how it even got there. In the middle of the sandy beach stood a table decorated with a luxurious tablecloth spread with various fruits and bread baskets centred around a large flower bowl, looking absolutely delicious. In one corner of such a perfect scene, was a cadet sweating profusely, trying to relight a candle that was constantly blown out by the wind. Eds eyes then fell on the large grill next to the table.

It looks like they caught some birds I cant imagine how hard Sagastar made everyone work to catch birds flying somewhere in the back of the forest

In line with the Admirals preferences, the Mondovi Fleet has grown to be more pragmatic over the years. And because their admiral didnt enjoy the rich ambiance, the officers who adhered to traditional practices could no longer rush into extravagance. In that way, Eds preferences ran counter to popular opinion.

Ed gave up on figuring out how they had moved that thing that appeared to be the table from the admirals office.

If I see this, I start to highly doubt that Sagastar has ever learned anything about me After all this time, he still engaged in such futile exploits

Ed stood by the table, staring at Sagastar, whose delighted face suddenly twitched. The admiral was unsure whether to put up with all of it or lose his cool. In the end he closed his eyes for the second time today.

But even if thats the case, I shouldnt forget that hes the one who saved me

After a short sigh, Ed stumbled along the table.

Sagastar. I didnt order you to do this, did I? First, you treated me like a dead man, and now you make it seem like everything I ever said was just bullshit to you.

Sir Edgar! What a terrible thing to say!

Dont forget that the only one feeling terrible here is me.

Because this is our second life, Ive decided to dedicate myself to my original intention of serving you, Sir Edgar. This is the first step, albeit lacking, but I did my best

Its scary to know that this grotesque display is only the first step.

Sagastar looked hurt by Eds bitterness.

Finally, after walking with great effort and the help of the captain, Ed sat down.

This chair is also from the Admirals office

As he leaned back languidly, Ed could clearly see the scene of the honour guards divided into 2 single-file rows on either side. He took the sweetened wine pleasantly in his mouth as soon as the aperitif was served. Although his torn mouth was still sore, it didnt interfere with the almost joyful satisfaction. The bitter but fresh flavour lingered in his mouth. Eds eyes narrowed and he smiled a long-forgotten smile.

How is it? Is it all right?

Ed nodded as he grabbed a stem full of green grapes and ate them one by one. Every time he worked his jaw muscles, their sweet and delicious juice burst out. When he leaned back even more, the night sky descended into his view and he heard the soft chamber music playing next to the table. Surprisingly, this wasnt even considered a luxury as the officer playing the instrument showed his skills during mealtime onboard too. Ed fumbled with his feet before lifting his ankles onto the footrest.

Sagastar.

Yes.

Ed motioned casually to the seat next to him.

Sit down.

I cant, Sir.

Does it sound like Im talking bullshit again?

No, Sir.

Hesitantly, Sagastar sat down in the chair next to him and an officer hurriedly prepared his tableware. Ed raised his torso and poured Sagasatar a glass of wine. The commodore didnt really know what to do or say, so he just grabbed the glass silently.

Who knew there would come a time when I would complement that meticulously suspicious side of yours.

..!

Despite his awkwardness, Sagastar smiled broadly. Seeing that Sagastars eyes were getting wet again, Ed suddenly reconsidered his praises.

It will become a problem in the future if I boost Sagastars morals too much. Im not sure what kind of bizarre things this guy will do next when he gets too comfortable.

But Ed was genuinely happy and had no intention of hiding it. Rather, he desired the entire world would experience his overwhelming joy.

I got to open my eyes after burying myself in the sand. If there hadnt been anyone around, I would probably have cried out in relief. With a tearing scream, I wouldve let mother ocean know that the life she was trying to take was still very much alive

You did a good job, Ill give you Maynier; please stop by the mansion as soon as you return to Mondovi.

What?

Dont you know about that resort island? I thought it was pretty well-known

Of course, I know it, but

Is it too cheap? Its the price for my life after all.

Ed focused on his meal, thereby not seeing the sweating and restless Sagastar nor the captain who was drooling from his wide open mouth. When Ed took a bite from his freshly prepared salad, the leaves crumbled in his mouth. The unspeakable pleasure of chewing and crushing the freshness took his breath away and filled his stomach with vitality. After that hellish night, he couldnt believe he was experiencing that yet again.

Wait, what kind of absurd remark is that? Too cheap? No, I didnt do it for a reward to begin with. Furthermore, its an island that has been granted

Im not the one who received it.

Isnt it the island bestowed upon the late Lord Glock by the Emperor?

Lord Glock would have been overjoyed if the new owner of the island was the one who saved me. My grandfather was very fond of me when he was still alive.

Sagastar smiled with a face that looked as if his throat was being blocked, his complexion darkened beyond red, and he barely managed to squeeze his voice out.

I cant accept

I guess you really think Im talking bullshit.

How did you get here?

Sagastar, who had been bewildered for a while, soon came to. He then wiped his forehead with a handkerchief, lifted his finger and beckoned the captain.

Let me show you. Captain.

Certainly, Commodore.

The captain approached Ed and handed him a small piece of paper.

Fortunately, the fleet was nearby, so we were able to get here quickly; these coordinates were originally written in Mandus.

Ed understood what those coordinates represented a little later. A situation he hadnt thought of before, entered his mind. His hands which had long forgotten the cold trembled and a sneer escaped through his clenched teeth.

That rat did something useful for a chance

Thump

The hatred that he had been focused solely on Lil tenaciously spread to Cesar.

Thump

Like the pounding beat of a drum an ominous sound signalled that this was only the beginning.

Thump

Ed extended his hand. The blood flowing through his forearm rushed to his fingertips, and his heart felt like it was about to burst from the rapid increase in pulse. With the movement of his hand, the sleeve of the gown moved and exposed his wrist. As a result, the dark red traces left by the rope became visible.

Thump

Ed muttered as he looked down.

I suppose he didnt want me to die.

Chapter 145

Admiral, allow me

The officer who was serving them tried to intervene, but Ed suddenly snatched the roasted bird placed before him. As he grabbed its wings and pulled them apart with force, the flesh tore with the sound of breaking cartilage. Everyones eyes widened when they watched Ed, whose eating habits had always been nothing less than refined. In the midst of their surprise Ed calmly raised his knife and cut off the rest of the wing. When he pushed the silverware into the roasted meat, greasy juice poured out. After opening it up, he began to eat the exposed reddish meat. Innocently, Ed muttered something and looked appreciatively at the rest of the roast that the officer started to dismantle.

When all the meat was removed from the carcass and placed on a plate, Ed devoured it whole. His tongue tingled at the savoury flavour as the pulp slid down his throat without pause. His teeth first ground the tough meat, which he then chewed and swallowed. Nobody dared to interrupt Eds strange predation. It wasnt until the last piece of flesh had been thawed that the sound of metal scraping on bone stopped.

Ed then asked, wiping his lips with a napkin.

Where is the Visha?

The only sound that could be heard in the tent that was illuminated by hanging balsams, was that of rustling papers. Ed, leaning against the wooden pole in the centre, watched Captain Long and Sagastar spread out different charts and journals.

I dont know how they managed to get this one in here either, but this appears to be Longs conference table. Due to the limited space they probably couldnt fit the conference table from the Admirals office in here

The space surrounded by tents gradually took on the form of a headquarters. Contrary to the two men appropriately dressed for their meeting, Ed wore only a gown and was still holding on to his glass of wine. Despite their leader being in such an unkempt state, Sagastar kept quiet and held back the criticisms that he would have uttered under normal circumstances. No matter how much it irritated him, he couldn't possibly tell Ed to wear a tight uniform when he was injured all over his body.

With his arms crossed, Ed occasionally took a sip. As he slowly emptied his glass, the two officers, who had finished preparing, looked at him. Ed quickly scanned the pictures and writings that were neatly spread out. Sagastar then cleared his throat and drew his baton.

The Visha is here.

Sagastar's baton pointed to a loopy coastal spot. He explained it was anchored there after it was used to look around the sand island for two days when Ed was still unconscious. Sagastar was visibly conscious of his words, but Ed had no intention of blaming Sagastar for leaving the Visha in such a crude area during that time. However, he also didn't say anything to reassure his Commodore.

We anchored it on a nearby island in case you awoke.

Status?

It's the best condition; I didn't want the Visha to get engaged in anything.

Ed responded while holding out his wine glass to the cadet who was waiting with the bottle.

Engage?

Yes. There were several engagements while we searched for ships that left Marchand. The dates and locations are

As Sagastar's gaze shifted to Captain Long, the latter then hurriedly ushered the Hangyang Islands. The map, which was placed after being flipped over several times, had clear marks as if it had been torn in the middle. So, when the captain met Ed's puzzled look, he quickly lowered his eyes. Ed remembered that Captain Long was often a bit sloppy, but he wasn't in the mood to appease him with some kindness.

First of all, among the ships that left Marchand, the ships we encountered were

While the captain moved the records, Sagastar gave a brief explanation. His baton frequently travelled to and from the Hangyang Islands. Ed listened to reports while scratching his bandages and tilting his glass.

And, in the last two days, the 3rd provisional squadron safely arrived, all the squadrons are currently anchored and standing by.

Are those the Majel Islands?

Ed's index finger pointed somewhere near the Hangyang Islands. Sagastar and Captain Long both looked at the finger at the same time. It was the captain who first realised something was wrong.

Oh, oh! The b, b baton!

Astonished, Sagastar cast his gaze to the back of the captain's head. The captain quickly crossed the tent and came up from the corner while carrying a long decorated box. As he bent down deeply and

opened the lid, Ed pulled out a baton that was placed on a red satin cushion. The baton was as thick as the hilt of a sword and was as long as his forearm. Both ends were adorned with the same gold ornaments and with a short but strong swing, a thin rod protruded from between those decorations. With his now longer baton Ed then pointed out the Hangyang Island with ease.

About southeast of the Majel Islands, and from an unknown island* to here. Now that I see it, it sailed northeast. But its too rough an estimation Are there any overlapping routes in our records? It sailed in great haste and had about fifteen days worth of supplies.

The captain hurriedly flipped through his thick booklet.

We followed the route to Serlio ourselves for a while, but lets see. Yes, theres only the island of Serlio. Serlio is even on the tight side if its only 15 days, however, I dont think its possible that that ship is heading anywhere else. The wind around here often dies down Unless they planned to stop at an intermediate base to replenish supplies.

No. It was intentionally loaded that way.

Sounds credible, complementing supplies from a base is expensive, so most ships want to avoid that. In that case, theres really only Serlio, however, Serlio is imperial land

Although Ed didnt explicitly state it, the captain assumed that the ship Ed had in mind was a pirate ship. Longs and Sagastars speculation became more valid when Ed didnt say anything to correct them.

Whats there?

Its similar to Marchand, but because Serlio is closer to the mainland than it is to the South, therefore its considerably better in terms of security than Marchand. Since its still under Legardons jurisdiction, shall I call for a Legardon officer? But why on earth would they want to go to such a place? Whats their business?

The captain, who was pouring out questions, quickly dropped the subject when Sagastar scolded him and said he only had to relay information about the Island and nothing more.

Ed looked back on his memories. He remembered when he inquired Alain as to why they were in such a rush to leave Panichi.

We were stranded in Panichi due to a lack of sailors, but after meeting Anunchio, they could suddenly complete the preparations for departure overnight. Alain then told me that the Bell Rock had similar experiences before. For a while, I wondered what he meant with the Bell Rock had times like this What distinguished the Bell Rock from the other ships in the League was, above all, its captains similar appearance to imperial citizens. Its a distinguishing feature that even caused a stir on board If other captains were so willing to give up their crew to help, is the Bell Rock carrying out a mission that takes advantage of that trait?

The report I saw at the Count of Amiaeng only stated that Lil Schweiz was of mixed blood. The islands in the Ingres sea have quite a few inhabitants of mixed blood due to the merciless assault of the pioneering squadrons. But on top of that, the Bell Rock, disguised as a merchant ship in Marchand, has a fictitious character with an accurate Sesbron accent as its captain. That identity could have come in handy for the League. An accent isnt something that could be faked by merely learning and imitating a few sentences Then, the places that need such a clear identity are

government offices, libraries, naval attaches, banks Banks Isnt gold a helpful incentive in any situation?

Is there a bank in Serlio?

Yes, there is.

Although other islands can still be their destination, for now, all clues are gradually pointing towards Serlio. And if the former is the answer, I cant help it as there is no way to know for sure anywhere. The League is more complex and well-organised than I initially thought. After all, the ordinary sailors like myself were unaware of the details. Only the Captains Association and senior officers like Alain know about the Leagues state of affairs. The majority of them did have a strong sense of purpose Well, it doesnt really matter anyway I dont care what kind of secret theyre trying to hide so badly. Ill burn the whole Ingres sea to make them crawl out if I have to. And even if my guess is wrong, its the least I can do to make up for what they did to me

Only the 1st Provisional Squadron will remain, and the rest will be sent back. The Return Squadron, which combines the 2nd and 3rd Provisional Squadrons, will be commanded by Vice Admiral Sagastar

Im not going anywhere. Dont even think about sending me away.

Under the command of Vice Admiral Sagastar, the requisition of the Legardon from Marchand will be lifted and put on standby.

I dont like it.

Eds brow twitched. Sagastars face hardened when he met Eds glare, however, he didnt back down.

Didnt you say you wanted to go back to your original intention of serving me, but now youre protesting already?

Ill protect you as best as I can. Your condition is still critical, so I cant return. Id rather bite my tongue

Chapter 146

Sagastar was just as stubborn as Ed. Ed could ignore Sagastar all he wanted, but the latter would always stick around. As a result, Ed had to escape every time as if he were fleeing in the past. But now, the admiral didnt have time to waste, so he gnashed his teeth and changed his order.

Then Commodore Guillaume will take command instead. But youll get on another ship.

I dont want to.

Climb onto that ship.

Youll run away again.

I wont nag you. Ill keep my mouth shut.

Fine, do as you please. Get on it or not, I dont care.

I can move the Visha even before Sagastar wakes up anyway. It seems that the senior officers temporary accommodation has been set up on this island, so all I need to do is cross over to the

Visha while hes still asleep and leave first Sagastar nagging has already started even if he thinks it hasnt.

Staring at the map, Ed tilted his head and pondered. There was something else that he didnt like. Before long, he pushed away the models of battleships one by one with his baton.

Cadieu, Rodi, Rou, Clue, and Soberun of the 1st Provisional Squadron will also be taken by Guillaume. Keep only Justorin, Simon, Clida, and Baor also reduce the number of the remaining sloops by half.

Are we retaining only these small ships? There may not be enough guns

There is no need. Well capture them alive instead of engaging.

What do you mean capture them alive? And what do you mean by not engaging?!..

Take the Serlio route. Well depart tomorrow. Bring enough supplies for ten days and move the rest to the side of Guillaume.

Sagastar, who was muttering alone, suddenly raised his head.

Yes? No! Tomorrow? Thats way too short a recovery period, as Guiad stated, you should definitely rest for another week.

Theres something I left behind.

Sagastar barely held his nagging back. It was definitely questionable that the reason for pursuing an unidentified pirate ship had nothing to do with the admirals kidnapping and attempted murder, but he quickly accepted it.

In fact, Sir Edgar complaining about losing his belongings isnt unusual Robbing a commercial ship, which is a civilian ship, or robbing navy property are two different things after all.

Furthermore, the Admiral has 40.000 Mondovi navies at his disposal

But Sagastar was unfamiliar with Eds authoritative demeanour. Even the Navy wouldnt move the fleet to find an officers goods, so Eds command was only possible because he was the admiral. This was the first time this had happened, so Sagastar inquired, puzzled and cautiously.

Should we hurry?

Very much.

With all due respect, may I ask what they dared to extort?

My sword.

Sagastar almost reflexively blurted out, Are you talking about the very same sword His Majesty bestowed on you?! but it had only been less than a few hours since he declared that he would return to his original intention of being in service to Ed, so he had no choice but to bite his tongue. In the end, Sagastar nodded his head with effort while diligently straightening his ever-narrowing eyebrows.

There must be another reason why he cant make this an official mission.

Even though Sagastar knew that Ed wasnt looking at him, he appeared eager as if he was trying to convince himself.

Away from that fervent effort, Ed held his unfocused gaze somewhere else. He thought to himself while his eyes were grasping the memories that were floating in through the air.

My sword, my Surihe, and my

His eyes crawled a little higher. The balsam, hanging from a thin rope, was bright.

Like when it shone alone in the pitch-dark sea Why did she throw that after me when she threw me to my death? At first, I thought that they had thrown all of my belongings into the sea, but that wasnt the case. Only the balsam was thrown out.

This was all Ed could think about while he was drifting on the surface of the sea.

Only Liloa knew about the balsams existence, and that it was a very effective means of survival in the night sea. Nobody else couldve gotten their hands on it

Amidst his boiling hatred, conviction haunted him with a slither of hope.

Ed shuddered and looked at the light. As he continued to stare, a cloud of light spread across his vision.

Did you change your mind again? Did you feel guilty all of a sudden? Didnt you already kill me? What kind of denial and self-serving behaviour was that? And when are you going to stop shamelessly playing with people? Im disgusted with my past self who had been so hopeful. To allow my mind and body to die, I mustve been crazy. I mustve been so out of my mind back then that Im only realising this now Indeed. How can I still say I love her without sounding insane And when I dont understand her at all?

Eds gaze dropped at some point. Sagastar looked in wonder at those bloodshot eyes.

Ed then tossed his glass to the ground and walked over to the bed.

We set sail at dawn, go to sleep.

Jericho paced along the doorway, his gaze fixed on Lil. When Lil returned his gaze and motioned for him to leave, he hesitated as if he had something to say. Jericho was startled when her gaze turned colder and opened his mouth.

I brought Courant with me.

Send him in.

Uh, what are you going to do?

Lil, who was flipping through Eds notebook, raised her head in surprise.

Whats wrong? Do you think Im going to kill him?

That Youre going to expel him

So?

Oh, why, you know his sibling, the little one is still on Panichi, right?

What do you want to say?

Uh, how can you do that? Huh? What about her?

You make it sound like Im about to do something horrible to Mellie. The one who did wrong to Mellie was Courant himself, not me. The guilty should take responsibility, dont lay the blame on me.

You know the circumstances, how

Who do you want to take care of when you couldnt even take care of Courant? Huh? You guys killed a man for your own benefit Now youre expecting me to just sit here, doing nothing and be pushed over, is that it?

Bring him in now and get the hell out of here.

Jerichos shoulders shrank and he quickly left. While rubbing her face roughly, Lil felt like stabbing her eyes with her fingernails.

Damn it!

I shouldnt get so worked up, but I can hardly control myself The change in my emotions, the ups and downs, these are all so unfamiliar to me.

Lil buried her face in her hands and tried to stay calm.

After a while, the door opened and Courant stood in the doorway, shaking. Lil couldnt bear looking at that pitiful gesture. The mere fact that she was in the same room as him, gave her goosebumps. Feeling tenser than she had anticipated, Lil crossed her arms and tightly gripped her upper arms with her hands.

Im personally angry with Courant. I want to punish him not just for breaking the code, but also for Eds pain, Eds time and Eds life It disgusts me that Courant is still alive and will be able to enjoy the time and opportunities he has robbed Ed of. So much so that I even want to deprive him of his future

Lil was impulsively encouraged by meaningless things like vengeance or retribution.

Its ridiculous. I should only be feeling this way if it had been for someone in my family, but Ed was neither a family member nor a close acquaintance of mine. Then why am I so troubled with this personal desire for vengeance? Is this all because Ive developed feelings?

I must be insane. Its obvious that Ed has died cursing me, so who would retaliate against whom?

In the end, it was Lil who gave the order. And she was the one who couldve turned it around but didnt because she couldnt stand up to Cesar. Lil vigorously shook her head.

Get off my ship as soon as we arrive at our next destination.

Courant lifted his head.

Because of him?

Yes. The crime of beating a fellow sailor, an officer even, until he died is condemned by deportation.

Ha, but Captain! He

What about him?

He deserved to die! Im innocent!

Does that give you the right to do whatever you want to a guy whom you think deserves to die?

I was just inter interrogating!

Really? Interrogation is required for an accurate investigation, but can your actions be called an interrogation? What have you been investigating? What did you get from Ed? Did you believe what he said?

Hes from the Navy! You cant believe what the Navy says!

If you werent going to believe anything he said, why did you interrogate him in the first place?

I was trying to sort out the truth from the lies!

Ah, so you decided whether it was true or not at your own disposal and tortured him until you got the truth you wanted to hear. How very convenient. It couldve been true or false depending on your judgement.

Ill tell you again. Interrogation is the process of examining in detail how something happened and investigating it accurately.

Now answer me. What you did to Ed, was it really for the sake of an accurate investigation?

Hes in the Navy. Theres no way hes innocent! He was communicating with the fleet using that pigeon! The Captain saw it, too! You were there! Who would believe a spy when he says hes innocent?

Even when he was caught, he was still acting so proud! I saw it with my own two eyes!

The boy, who was trembling all over, became lost in the shadow of betrayal. The realisation that he had been betrayed by a being he thought would protect him weighed heavily on him and that was clearly seen on his innocent face. Eventually, he found himself wanting to strangle that very being

Chapter 147

You thought he wouldve come clean if you poked him a few times. Because you know how much it hurts. But how did you feel when nothing came out? You mustve thought, a little more just a little more. How much more pain did you think you shouldve inflicted for the truth to come out of his mouth? You of all people know how painful it is. But in the end, you didnt even get your truth. Did you honestly believe there even was one? Did you think that when you cracked open his head, youd find your truth in there?

So, did you succeed?

Courant froze, shocked at her words. Lil knew why.

It mustve been a painful experience for him as well. The madness that had possessed him was completely unfamiliar and he fears it even now.

Lil understood it all, but she could hardly calm down. She felt that if she would ever go mad due anger, it would be right now.

Snap out of it, Courant, youre still not sure whats true, arent you? Youre just trying to justify your murder. If you keep going down this path, youll only commit to a life of butchery, thinking moment by moment about how to hack a person more brutally.

No, no. Hes in the Navy! Theyre definitely here to kill us!

I also wonder why Ed did that. I really want to know, thats why Im investigating him.

Did he really come to kill us or did he have some other purpose? This is what people call an investigation. When any questions arise in the process, we interrogate the prisoners. But you cant know the truth just by fanning a prisoner. You have to move the prisoners mind.

No, Captain. Hes the Navy hes the devil. Hell soon come with a fleet and cut us to pieces, cut off our noses and ears. Like my mother, like my father! I had to find out before that!

No, you know better than that. Ed isnt the devil you fear so much. He was a mere human who bled when you tore his flesh. Ed wasnt part of the bastards you mentioned earlier, and Ed wasnt the one who killed your parents. Dont you understand now? He wasnt the Navy, he was just Ed. You were never interested in the truth. You just took your personal grudge out on him.

Human?.. Oh, no. No, theyre all devils.

The heavy trembling of Courants shoulders withheld him from completing his sentence. Before long, his face including his lips were getting wet with tears and he was panting so hard that not only his shoulders moved up and down, but his entire body started to shake, signalling that he was losing his mind. Lil locked her gaze on the boy, who kept rambling that the devil was coming to kill them.

Were you unfamiliar with the way you killed Ed? Or was that exactly how you wanted it to be? If you like the life of practising how to brutally kill an Imperial Navy, go for it. If you dont admit your fault here now, Im afraid thats the kind of life youre going to live for the rest of your life.

Why cant I? They kill us at random and torture us. Why am I the one being scolded? Nobody tried to stop them!

The Empires pioneering squadron was a horrible group. Theyve done things that humans should never do. I hate them, too. But when you fix your mind into hating them, youll learn their ways and act like their thoughts. Who knows, you might even end up having a lot of respect for the Empire. To imitate their actions is to admit that the Imperial Navys methods were equally effective. You used the same methods that brought you down to bring Ed down. You must never give in to it. The more you do the same things as them, the stronger the Empires method of forcefully slaughtering the South becomes. Youre just a blind follower now.

Courant rubbed his face with his sleeve and turned.

Drreukk

Lils chair scratched the floor. Till the very end, he showed no sign of remorse or apology. Courant walked toward the doorway without saying anything else.

Courant.

The footsteps stopped. Lil squeezed out her voice.

Admit it. No more excuses. Admit youve done a terrible thing and swear youll never do it again. I dont want to hate you.

But Courant left the captains room without answering.

Lil quietly held her breath as her body slumped down on her seat. She felt terrible for herself. This was because Lil would be the first person who would lose herself in a world without Ed.

These tragedies wouldnt have happened if I had trusted Ed a little more. Ed died because I couldnt. I couldnt handle the simple truth, so I passed it on to Cesar and took it out on Courant I was horribly pathetic. Im not suited to be a Captain or a judge. Even sitting in this Captains room makes me feel shameless

It wasnt until a while later that Lil opened Eds notebook again.

She had ordered Jericho to get Eds stuff, so her desk was full of notebooks and books both large and small. In the end, this was the only thing that she could do, so Lil clung to the proof of Eds existence and lost track of time, not knowing the day versus the night. She wanted to get rid of the stigma on Ed as soon as possible. No one would know about it, and Ed wouldnt come back because of it, but doing this was very important to her.

The first notebook was in bad shape and from around the time Ed boarded the Bell Rock. It held no evidence in Eds favour. A few pages, presumably the most recent ones, had been ripped out, so there was nothing to look at.

Lil bitterly picked up another notebook. It was a fairly thick sketching album, about the size of two palms. It was full of detailed descriptions rather than short captions.

These seem to be about herbalism and medicine, judging by the drawings of trees, grasses, and bodies.

Occasionally, sketches of animals with bizarrely long noses and abnormally large ears appeared. Lil had often seen Ed sketching, so she turned the page without surprise.

But the more I looked at it, the less he looks like a deserter. He shouldnt have been able to afford the luxury of time to pack all of this, right? Its strange that he clung onto his belongings if he was truly on the run. If all his belongings disappeared from his ship, it meant that he had planned his escape. It also meant he destroyed the opportunity to disguise his disappearance as an accidental death In addition, these arent the belongings of a spy.

Among Eds belongings were some expensive clothes and hats.

And why would a spy carry such a conspicuous object?

Lil grabbed a strange wooden sculpture from his bag.

Why did he carry around such a sculpture of an unknown minority? The things he brought with him have been unpredictable. The intermittent collections are also of the highest quality, made from unparalleled luxurious materials.

If he isnt a spy nor a deserter, then what was this ex-navy up to? These pieces of evidence tell me he didnt board the Bell Rock due to accommodation or income problems. I think he couldve easily survived a few months just by selling his fancy clothes. These are valuable items, so he couldve sold these, but he didnt. I also cant shake the feeling that he brought all the clothes, hats, and accessories at random.

Who the hell is Ed and what the hell was he doing on the Bell Rock?

Her hand turning the pages suddenly stopped. The next sketch looked a little different. It looked like an unfinished drawing of a coast at night. The moon was high, and the beach and the sea were low. It looked like something round was lying in the sand by the coast, but the abstract painting-like drawing wasn't particularly detailed. From the point of view of an observer, descriptive sketches and works of art were distinctly different. If this sketch was a work of art, it didn't leave a strong impression.

When Lil turned to the next page, she almost screamed. A mermaid was roaring toward her. Bellus razor-sharp teeth and ferocious face were so vivid that they appeared to tear right through the paper. As if she were being chased, Lil flipped through the pages quickly. Bellus was sketched on several more sheets, followed by a group of stingrays, a coral colony on the seafloor, and a whale shark. Next to them was always a lot of text in an unfamiliar language.

Is this Goe?

She felt strange looking at it.

Lil continued to flick through it with her hand until she reached some empty pages. Then there was nothing else but Goe for a while.

She concluded that it was an archaic language rather than ciphertext or semantic evidence because at first glance it appeared to be a very suspicious way of writing and without a password that anyone could look into. Furthermore, traces of uncertainties, including parts that were thinly drawn and erased, were common.

There was another sketch on the last page. This time, it was a woman who was not at all suitable for a sketching album that was intended for research. Lil was a little taken aback and looked at the woman who appeared out of nowhere.

Chapter 148

The faint curve portrayed a figure in deep sleep. It was a woman whose face was half buried in her pillow. The lit-up hairline was most likely caused by a close lantern. The light flowed over her forehead, down to her closed eyelids, and eventually to her cheeks. The bridge of her nose pierced the pillow. As Lils gaze went down as if to touch the figure, she got the impression that Ed had purposely drawn it that way. Lil inadvertently looked at the woman's lips, and her face heated up. There were dense wrinkles on her parted wet lips, and the smooth teeth peeked through the gap with her tongue slightly visible.

What the hell was Ed thinking when he saw and drew such a detailed scene? The expression stimulates my senses even though it's the face of someone fast asleep and oblivious to the world around her.

It was sensual enough to make Lils cheeks flush. Lil lifted her head out of wonder.

Who the hell did you draw, and why is it as detailed as this?

Don't tell me.

No way.

Lil stuttered and lowered her eyes again. She needed to check if the face indeed belonged to a woman. Despite seeing the figures hair hanging down her neck and shoulders, such figurative confirmation didnt help.

Her gender is clear enough to be recognised even at first glance. This could never be a man

Lil flipped to the previous page so forcefully that she almost ripped it out.

Bellus on the back of a whale shark

The hand holding the page slowly moved again. Lils sweat was making the pages damp, and her heart raced nervously as if she was seeing something she wasnt supposed to see.

Its on the next page, which means that he drew this after meeting Bellus. In that case, it doesnt make any sense. No, this drawing itself doesnt make sense! This figure belongs to a woman who couldnt possibly exist anywhere in this sketchbook. She never should have been like this.

That woman is me

Lil had no idea what her own face looked like whenever she has the necklace on, but she was certain it wasnt the face she was seeing. This sketch was clearly Liloa.

How did this happen

Lil flipped through several pages again.

Theres nothing more to it. Only this portrait. This is all thats given to me.

Her heart felt constricted as if she was trapped inside the drawing.

Lil pulled the necklace over her shirt, feeling the presence of the crude jewel clearly.

I can see a string around the neck of the sleeping woman in the sketch. While theres no guarantee that it had been like that in reality because its merely a drawing, the necklaces presence or absence doesnt matter to me. Ed knew who I was even though he pretended not to. And I have no idea when or why it happened

Could it have been from the beginning? Was there no difference between the courtesan from Amiaeng and Lil Schweiz for Ed? No, he thought the Captain of the Bell Rock was a man. He acted that way in public, and his actions towards Lil were all as expected, too. He couldnt have been treating the Captain that way if he had recognized me as a woman from the start. Then he mustve been perplexed as to why the gender had shifted.

Or did he realise it was due to magic?

Hm However, the necklace has always been covered by my shirt. Ive never shown it to him I did say I had something to find when we were kidnapped by the Western pirates, but I never mentioned anything about the necklace Its nothing more than my own speculation that he detected it was magic even though he didnt know the medium. Is that kind of magic even possible? As far as I know, only artefacts possess powers No, I cant rush to conclusions in fields Im unfamiliar with. I never really believed Eds stories, but he mightve heard ancient tales on his way to and from the Imperial Clairaut. If thats the case, Ed held more knowledge about ancient history than I thought. Its a side of him I know too little about

Then, theres another possibility

Did he did he come to find Liloa in the first place? While looking for Liloa, he met a woman wearing a strange disguise in Amiaeng and found out about my identity. If he did, its questionable why he didnt immediately grab me by the hair and drag me away Well, he mightve wondered what Ive been up to while I pretended to be dead. And he may have wanted to check those involved. But then theres no way he didnt recognise Cesar Why would someone like him even be sent to find me if hes that dull and ignorant?

Anxiety surged all the way to Lils toes.

Has my relationship with Cesar been discovered? No one is eager enough to find me, but some people will establish justification according to their needs. Whom can it be? Which one of them is it? Mireille? Obernyu? The Imperial family? If so, its foreseeable that Cesar wont be left alone either. Even the Lemoine family could be damaged. Theyll all fear the leak of my bloodline the most, so these people wont stand still since theyre from prestigious families Theyll go out of their way to find out if theres an illegitimate child, even if they have to search the Lemoine house

Lil wiped her face nervously.

Count Lemoine, Lady Maribella, Amelia, Ellen and Dylan. The entire family will be in danger

Lil knew how much Cesar cared for them. Until the first year of their relationship, not a day got by without him talking about them.

Cesars and Count Lemoines story is extraordinary. Cesar was the second son who stood out too much but voluntarily postponed his marriage to give way to his older brother. Without settling down, he devoted his teenage years rigorously to the fleet and refused to be promoted to senior officer. Those actions really showed his humanity.

Thats also why Cesar never asked for a child, even though he loved children and envied his older brother who has three, both daughters and a son. He naturally wished to have children of his own, but he had been patiently holding back till his brother had completely settled down. After abandoning all of his loved ones, of course, hed still worry about them until the very end

The reason Lil came up with wasnt an implausible one either, because her children would have the right of succession. For most people, the meaning of Liloa was no wider than her womb.

So, did Ed stick around all this time to check if I had a child? What the hell did he want from me? Hes someone who gets to eat well and live well, so what else was there in it for him?

No, no How many times have I already killed Ed? Doubt truly is a scary thing. How can I treat someone who is dead like this?

Lil grabbed the slanderous thoughts and threw them out.

Its only been a few hours since I vowed to prove his innocence, but now Im adding more dirt to the pile again.

She felt so guilty that she couldnt even lift her head.

I cant guess Sesbrons dark intentions from far away

Lil needed to bring her mind back to a reality that she did know, instead of speculating over something she had no knowledge about. And that reality was Ed.

If you think about it, Ed was well aware of my appearance, eyes, and other body parts that are unique to a womans. It reminds me of that strange gaze I had felt from him that one time and his overly gentle attitude towards me as a man. It was strange, overindulgent behaviour Was it all because of this? If he saw his opponent as a woman all along, everything starts to make sense

Lil realised she had become overly reliant on her artefact. Although she was once sceptical of mysterious jewels, she now believed in them as a spiritual human believed in God. Because of this, she missed such an easy answer even when it was right in front of her. She never for a moment thought that the magical curtain couldve been lifted and had naively been wondering if Ed was interested in a man.

Slam!

The fist that hit the desk trembled, and papers fluttered at the force. She felt so pathetic that she couldnt stand it. Lil glared at the drawing of her face, her eyes shown to be closed in peace without a care in the world. A woman in a rare, deep sleep.

Why did Ed draw this? Why did he pretend to be asleep without waking me up until morning came? He didnt even have the perfume. If he knew he was in danger, he shouldve let me out of his room as soon as possible. But I cant figure out why he wasted his time doing this. Did he want to keep an eye on me? Did he want to make me sleep longer so that he could draw a picture of me like this? Did he risk his life because of that?

Or was he simply a fool?

Chapter 149

Headnote: Hi guys, were sorry for the late upload. Unfortunately, Pru got Covid and needs time to recover. Thats also why well have a small hiatus and skip the Monday/Tuesday and the Wednesday/Thursday upload. Well be back on our regular schedule from Friday. Happy reading and see you soon!

Pru and Formidable

I find it even hard to laugh because its just so ridiculous! But there arent a lot of reasons to separate common sense from causation. No, rather, Im convinced, humans cant be made to move without a purpose. If I exclude factors like the Navy or Sesbron and focus only on Eds motivations

Lil slowly lifted the tossed-aside notebook again. It was obvious that her figure wasnt drawn the way Ed drew herbs or trees. It was a completely different sketch style. From Eds point of view, he could see the nape of her neck extending to her bare shoulder. Lils face heated up, it felt as if she was eyeing herself through the gaze of that man. The blood vessels in her neck thumped and sweat dripped from her clenched fists. Lil curled her lower lip inward and bit it.

As she continued to stare, it seemed as if the scene before her was coming to life. Her shoulders in the sketch rose and fell as she exhaled in shallow, regular intervals. While the light illuminated her face with a soft crimson light, a hand slowly stretched out, adjusting the brightness of the lamp, possibly to create better lighting. Soon, the hand let go of the lamp, grabbed a piece of charcoal and moved to the drawing book.

He mustnt have drawn this all at once He was also watching

Lil knew with what kind of eyes Ed had been looking at her.

In his quiet cabin, the sound of charcoal scraping on paper due to the making of curvy lines could be heard continuously. Drawing thinly, the tip of the charcoal pressed between his fingertips, drew Lils face, neck, and shoulders. The paper reflected the yellowish light, and that same hazy, thick light illuminated the face of the person who was drawing. Lil followed the ray of light and looked at Ed as if she was truly facing him.

I think I know why you drew me.

Because you couldnt touch me. If you couldve touched me, there was no reason for you to draw me. You drew this because you wanted to touch me How odd. He was always acting like such a confident pervert, so where did this sudden shyness come from? I know I wouldve been offended if he had told me, but this is too

As if avoiding Ed, Lil took her gaze away from the sketch.

This is too pitiful.

Her head throbbed as if it was about to burst. Lil placed one of her hands on her cheek and washed her face dry repeatedly. Nonetheless, her emotions kept raging. Her body, which had been getting more and more agitated, turned stiff and feverish, just like when she was angry. Even though she knew he wasnt here anymore, Lil wanted to cling to Eds dead body and release her anger onto it.

You idiot! You knew I doubted you and you knew how jealous Cesar could get. What drew you to me so much that you followed me all the way here?

{ Ive been wanting to say this to the Captain for a long, long time }

You stupid

{ Its an honour to have met someone like you in this short life }

Youre so stupid

Eds stunned expression flashed through Lils mind.

When I asked him about artifacts, he just stared blankly. And when I went to him to give him the pearls he couldnt even make eye contact and hid his face from me. I cant believe I mistook that as his gratitude for finally being accepted as a member of my crew!

A vain laughter came out. Lil laughed as if she had lost her mind.

I still have no solid evidence, but it already seems that I treated Ed too unfairly. He was so pitiful that it probably turned him crazy. I cant even fathom how cruel it was for him

Courant spent hours in Eds cabin standing guard. Ed, tied with double and triple knots, had no way of resisting it at all. I cant stand the thought of how he had to endure such a brutal beating. So much so that Im on the verge of putting a gun in the mouth that ordered it

Lil imagined Ed standing right next to her.

He always walked so casually into Mortus castle and blew the wind. And every time I flinched and tried to run away, I could hear his faint whisper: Why dont you just stay in the wind? Come to think of it, the wind was always warm. But I cut it off several times when it tried to wrap itself around my tattered ankles I probably appeared miserable when I pulled the hem of my skirt down

That same wind suddenly whispered a very self-evident fact.

I couldnt have done thatThats right. Even if I was from the navy, even if I was in correspondence with the fleet, there was no way Id intend to sink the Bell Rock Youve got it completely wrong

Lil didnt know Eds initial motive on why he joined the Bell Rock. She didnt even want to know. But there was no way Ed wanted to kill her or get rid of her ship.

Lil looked around as though she was looking for traces of him. Her fleeting vision passed by the corner of the desk, the legs of the bed, and the wall. Like following a ray made of light and dark, her sense of reality faded. Her normally colourful surrounding suddenly turned into that of a black and white painting. Her eyes, which could no longer warm up to the orange light, were unfamiliar with the dark grey masses. It felt like time escaped her.

As she was drowning in the shade of grey, someone suddenly knocked on the door.

After hearing the sound, Lil realised that she had been wasting her time alone. Even when she looked at her watch, she couldnt tell how much time had actually passed.

In the meantime, the visitor spoke.

Captain. Its me, Alain.

Lil hastily closed the sketchbook.

Come in.

She wasnt sure if her voice did come out well, but she knew her face would be even worse. When Alain entered the cabin, he immediately noticed it. Lil, on the other hand, straightened her shoulders to show that she was fine.

Why have you come, Old man? Did you come to defend your actions like Jericho did?

No, Captain.

Alain hesitated at first, fiddling with the hat he had taken off. Lil unexpectedly focused her entire attention on Alain.

Alain feels just as repulsive to me as the others, but hes probably the most reasonable one of the four. Not to mention that Courant, Jericho, and Cesar werent thinking clearly at the time. Jericho and Cesar wouldve only stood by if Courant tried to beat the unconscious Ed again, but Alain would probably have stopped him

Still, she couldnt find any words to comfort him.

Then what? Tell me quickly and leave.

Theres something the doctor told me

What? When?

He said it when he was locked up.

Alains face was painfully crushed by guilt. He pretended to be calm, but the weight was visible. Lil had an uneasy feeling about it. In that brief moment, before Alain opened his mouth, she already knew what kind of words were coming out.

He said it was unfair.

Hearing this, Lil wasn't sure if she wanted to ask further or not.

He said that the Bell Rock wasn't in any danger.

But why

Of course, at the time I thought it was all bullshit. But now I'm starting to feel uncomfortable about it, so I had to tell the Captain

Why now

I gagged him after he asked to see you. I'm saying this now because it's all over.

Alain continued, constantly looking around.

If I had said this to you in the middle of our deliberation, wouldn't the Captain have adjusted his judgement? It was a crucial and dangerous time. When I think about it, I feel bad too, but what else could I have done apart from making sure that luck would be on our side? Can't we allow just one or two people to die? For a sailor, falling off the ship and dying on a sunny day is probably the best way to go, so is it really any different for a doctor?

Alain loudly cleared his throat and added some more words to his shameful rationalisation.

Anyway, I'm telling you this because the Captain seems to be worried about it all the time. But how could we have known if he truly was innocent or not? Look, Captain. I know that you want to uphold the Bell Rock's code. But with our current situation, it's not that easy. Half of the sailors on the Bell Rock are still wet behind the ears. I'm sure you're well aware that it takes a lot longer to discipline them with writing than with fists, right? Julio, for example, isn't the kind who can be talked to. He doesn't listen. He's already been broken by the Empire way back in Marchand. So for now, hide the code of laws of the Bell Rock. Even if you oppose this kind of ruling, the one through guns and swords, codes just aren't applicable in a dangerous situation like this. Our safety should always come first, right?

Captain?

Did you hear me?

The boatswain's voice faded behind Lil as she opened the captain's cabin door and stepped out onto the deck. As she started to walk absentmindedly, her crewmen were taken aback and hurriedly stepped aside.

{ He said it was unfair. }

After hearing that, she couldn't think of anything else. Lil's entire focus was now on Cesar.

If Ed is innocent, what happened to the letter proving his spying? What did Cesar read

Chapter 150

There were two ways to counter incriminating evidence. One could either seek additional evidence to prove one's innocence or call the existing evidence into question. Till now, Lil has been spending her energy on the former. The latter method didn't even come to mind.

Cesar is a very honest man. I know all too well how morality is ingrained in his life Is it acceptable for me to not doubt Cesars sincerity or should I feel sorry for not confronting him?

In fact, no matter what I did, I wouldve suffered either way. If I had stood up against Cesar, who threatened to kill Ed himself if we didnt dump his body in the sea right away, I probably wouldve had to block his sword aiming for Ed myself But there werent just two options, there had been a third solution all along. It was an answer that I probably already knew the moment I made my choice, but I chose not to Cesar didnt allow me, and in the end, I ignored it I was the traitor, not Ed Since Ed insisted on his innocence, theres no way I can back down now. He pleaded that he was innocent. Thats the most valuable evidence to me.

Lil descended her steps and was gradually pulled into the artillery deck. While passing by, the sparsely spread hammocks wobbled in the air.

She opened Cesars cabin without knocking. At that moment, Cesar was sitting at his desk, resting his forehead on his hand. Feeling someones presence, he immediately raised his torso toward Lil.

Captain?

Lil crossed the cabin silently and started to pick up the papers on the desk at random.

No, it wasnt this letter.

Lil rummaged through the desk for the correspondence. After doing it three or four times, Cesar grabbed her arm.

Liloa. What are you doing?

Where is the letter?

What?

The letter from the Navy.

Lil twisted her gripped wrist and pulled it out. She then browsed through the book on the desk followed by looking into another drawer. Cesar moved back and pulled out his chair. He stood up, rose high behind her and turned her around.

Lil shouted.

Where is it!

Instead of answering, Cesar only stared down at her. Lil turned again in order to find the letter.

Forget it, I can find it by myself. It isnt that hard to search through his desk.

When Lil shrugged off the grip from her forearm, Cesars complexion hardened at once. In complete disbelief, he tried to make eye contact with her, but Lil didnt turn back to tell him anything, she only squeezed her trembling chin shut. Cesar, who couldnt wait any longer, tightened his grip and before Lil even got the chance to twist her body, he spoke.

Its not there.

What?

I lost it.

What?

She couldn't comprehend what he just said.

You

A navy was caught acting as a spy on one of the League's ships. It's an unprecedented event that should be treated with utmost confidentiality even within the League, so evidence from such an important case should never get lost. Its evidence that has to be transported from the Bell Rock all the way to Anunchio on Panichi I can't believe Cesar simply said he lost it! Does he really expect me to just accept this ridiculous excuse?

Lil quietly raised her other hand and pushed back the hand that was gripping her arm.

What the hell have you done?

What the hell have I done? What do you mean by that?

There's no doubt that the pigeon knew Ed. But the letter from the Navy

Lil's lips moved with difficulty, feeling as if every word she uttered brought her one step closer to hell.

Did he really communicate with the Navy?

What do you want to believe?

The truth.

Do you trust him more than me?

I said the truth! I trust the truth! Neither you nor Ed! How can you all afford to lie to me?! What the hell is the truth now? What have you done?!

Lil reached forward and grabbed Cesar's shirt, her fingers easily clenched his collar and her damp, wet eyes looking up at him. Even if she had to climb the white castle wall, she climbed tenaciously.

I

Flustered by the sudden situation, Cesar immediately tried to calm her down. However, Lil, who firmly gripped her hands, looked straight at him.

His red eyes were like flames blazing from the watchtower on top of a fortress wall that stood firm. The heat emitted from them was incredibly fierce. Lil cried out at the flames she had never dared to face before.

I What have I done! What did you make me do!

...!

His dilated pupils drift between anger and patience. It seemed that he needed time to fathom Lil's shocking treachery. Seeing those emotions from the man looking down on her, her heart ached even more, making her feel like she was the criminal who committed a crime. The words she had been forging and sharpening without hesitation, seemed to have stabbed Cesar right in the face.

The face that has been radiating nothing but warmth for years and showed a smile every time our eyes met, looks

Does it even make sense to say you lost it when you're well aware of the League's circumstances? Is there any reason why you think I shouldn't read the letter? Huh? Is that why you lost it? What the hell was on there? Why did you do that? Why

Cesar roughly grabbed one of the wrists that was clinging to his collar. He squeezed it so tightly that it felt like he was about to crush the back of her hand.

Where's the pigeon?

Despite it all, Lil persisted in her interrogation.

Did you dispose of the pigeon, too? Why? Destroying military assets is a felony under Imperial law. You shouldn't have done that. Or did you send it back? Is it going back to the fleet? Then what?

Cesar stood motionless, still holding Lil's hand. The back of Lil's hand became white and numb. Eventually, that same dull pain travelled to her chest, neck, and head. However, Cesar remained unresponsive and it was putting her on edge. She hoped he would be equally angry for her show of unsatisfying defiance and defence of Ed. But soon her anger started to soothe out by the calmness she faced, even if she didn't like it. However, Lil didn't want her anger to die out. So, in one way or another, she attempted to fight against the silence. She was about to open her mouth again when

Why? Why are you asking me this?

You know why.

I know you aren't the kind of person who does this without a good reason.

Reason? You mean the same reason you used when you casually lost the message?

Lil's sarcastic remark stiffened his relaxed eyes.

Liloa. Calm down.

The voice warning her was as low as an echo in the deep sea. The temperature of the sea floor, which had never seen the sunlight, hit her ears coldly.

Why do you keep asking me this when you already know the answer?

I can only think of two reasons why such an important piece of evidence would disappear. Either it's due to carelessness, or you're trying to cover something up. I simply can't associate you with the former.

Then, are you saying that it's the latter? How can you say this to me?

I asked you a question. Answer it.

I guess you don't believe in me anymore.

Lil knew exactly what Cesar wanted. It was the absolute faith she's had for him so far. He wanted her to show it to him again this time. Don't ask, move on. Whatever the truth was, it didn't matter anymore. Because tacit acquiescence has always been the foundation of their relationship. It has always been the truth for both of them.

But Lil couldn't accept Ed's fate in this way. Lil was supposed to be in charge of the interrogation. As captain, she had to personally investigate Ed's story, determine his motivations, and then sentence him. If the verdict came out as guilty they should've extracted as much information from him as they

could. But in the end Lil had never been a moment alone with Ed. She was afraid Cesars watchful eyes would cause her to stumble while speaking with Ed.

And because I didnt, Courant took matters into his own hands and conducted his own interrogation in a manner he only saw and heard of I shouldve stood up to Cesar no matter how angry he was. I shouldnt have allowed my role as the Captain to be overshadowed by Cesars role as my lover. Because Cesar didnt allow me, I ended up making a terrible choice, making me a pathetic human being I ended up denying my inner desire to prove Eds innocence Or did I unknowingly want to prove that I held no special feelings for him?

It was I who emphasised fairness to Ed by citing my beliefs about natural laws. But when that true test of fairness called for me, I simply ignored it to the point of burying my own rhetoric. If he was no different from the others, I shouldve treated him the same way as the others. It was pathetic of me for being harsher, especially as I only acted that way to him. And now, I cant believe someone died because of me

Lil was the only one who could correct her own blunder. It was a mistake that happened on her Bell Rock and no matter how its society was crumbling down, the Bell Rock was still the Bell Rock to Lil.

Its not that I dont want to believe you. I just want to check the contents of the message properly.

Ill ask again. Do you believe the doctor or me?