

Northwest 18

Chapter 18

Does your brother know what youre up to? How much did the Lemoine family spend raising you as a prince?

I dont want to hear it.

Ed blinked. He had so many questions that he didnt know where to start. His heart fluttered as if it was anticipating the fun.

So, you dont want to hear it, huh. Isnt this an interesting development to avoid dialogue so openly? No, in a way, its natural. A former naval Captain was caught robbing a counts mansion, and hes probably trying to get away with it. So, who made him rob someones house? Who doesnt know hes a retired navy Captain?

Ed felt like he had caught on to something.

Im sorry, is it because of Liloa?

The reaction was immediate.

Are you here under the orders of Duke Mireille?

You havent answered my question yet.

I dont want to answer.

Then I wont either.

Had you met Liloa simply by chance, you wouldnt have recognized her. But youve been chasing her around from the moment you first saw her. She is the reason you came here, isnt she? And Duke Mireilles the only one who couldve used Liloa as bait to persuade you. So, I believe that the Duke is behind this

Then Ill assume Liloas your reason too.

No.

You cant fool me

Cesar shut his mouth. Ed had no trouble seeing through his lie.

What? You suffered permanent injuries during the battle of Salana. You couldnt even leave the Lemoine compound because it was so serious. And yet you travelled all the way to Amiaeng. Who would have guessed?

I know you dont care about me. So, stop provoking me.

No. Now I cant stop thinking about you, who has an unexpected but profound connection with Liloa; whats your relationship with her? Are you two lovers? I came indeed down here to look for Liloa. But after meeting you now, Im not sure what to ask you first. Hm, this is quite interesting.

Ed touched his ear as he went through the various hypotheses that came to mind right away, but he didnt know much about Cesar, making it difficult to proceed without more information.

He looked at his opponent. Amid all the commotion Cesar was calm as if a curtain of silence was draped around him. Ed had to be patient. He already knew Cesar had a relatively meek attitude, going back as far as they still were officers, funnily enough, he never disliked it.

Cesar Lemoine. We had no special interactions. Contrary to my first impression of Cesar, whom I saw as a stubborn heir to a rather boring noble family, I now am often reminded of that interesting man. In a period where the militarys primary weapons shifted from swords to guns, only a few still knew how to wield a sword skilfully, and Cesar Lemoine was one of them. We met at a competition for highly skilled swordsmen. Cesar stood out in particular because he refused to bow his head for a higher ranked marquess myself even though my status was quite in the lift.

Ed rarely ended his sentences with humble thoughts.

If it hadnt been for that sudden disappearance several years ago, the head of the Mondovi fleet might have been Cesar. It wouldve certainly been an easy decision for the imperial family.

So, whats she doing here? What happened to you two? Why hasnt Liloa shown up? Im dying of curiosity.

Why did you follow the will of the Duke?

Ed replied to Cesars piercing gaze with puffy eyes, indicating that his words were offensive.

Dont provoke me, I dislike the Duke as much as you do. You think Im his lackey or something? Im willing to capture his merchant ships and hand it over to the Amiaeng pirates if that proves anything.

Oh, I have a good idea. Why dont you join hands with me? All Im trying to do is screw that Duke over.

Admiral.

Yes?

Dont treat Liloa as your amusement.

Eds tongue came to a halt at the unexpected answer.

Im not sure what the Duke has promised or offered to intrigue you, but dont align yourself with that lowly being.

Ha, youre so amusing. Do I appear to be that low? Since when did you become such a sensible person? Wait a minute

I cant exactly tell because Ive only spoken to you a few times. Hm, I cant pinpoint any reasons for this dubious change in your tone.

Ed thought for a moment and eventually gave the simplest answer. But after saying it out loud, he couldnt quite believe it, so he asked in a half-doubtful tone.

Im not sure Are you two truly in love? That sounds ridiculous, but theres no other explanation. Let me think, is there anything else that can cause people to become so sensitive about others?

Even though Cesar knew he was being provoked on purpose, he failed to hide his expression. Eds mouth fell open.

Ha, the Duke sure found me a good one!

I warned you to not mess with Liloa. I wont put up with it.

What, are you going to hit me again? Dont be a fool. Ill draw my sword. By the way, now that Ive confirmed your desire to defeat me, Id like to let you know that Im going to keep an eye on you. You were lucky to catch me off guard this time, but now I might as well cut off one of your arms.

Just an arm? Thats not threatening at all.

Only a few men can handle the sword as great as you do, but even fewer men have mastered it as much as I have.

Weve never decided on the winner.

Thats because I didnt mean to kill you in that tournament. You know that, too.

I dont.

You arrogant jerk. If I didnt care so much about you, youd already be feeling the stab of my sword.

Youre still conceited.

Shouldnt I be?

Ed arrogantly raised his chin.

What kind of life will I live if I dont live for my accomplishments?

There was a strange silence. Ed usually enjoyed his opponents expression full of reluctance but seeing that there was no sign of movement in Cesars face, he could only stare blankly. Ed eventually broke the silence.

This isnt any fun.

Then, he spoke seriously, leaving all jokes aside.

So, what exactly are you doing here? Why are you eavesdropping on the navy? Why did Liloa want to know about the Admiral and the fleet? Why are you so taken with me?

If you were just going to sit here and say nothing, why did you write to me in the first place? Who sends a letter in secret and requests a meetup immediately after fleeing and going into hiding?

Im here to warn you not to touch Liloa. Thats all I have to say about it.

Would you like me to leave you two alone?

What are you going to do? Do you want to capture her and take her with you?

Ed shook his head, realising the problem.

Oh, I understand what youre thinking. You might think Im moving under the Dukes control, but things have changed dramatically. As a result, I need to know how much information you have on my fleet.

Our intention was not to run into you. Nothing else.

How did she know about the Dukes plans?

This has nothing to do with him.

Doesnt it have everything to do with him? This is getting annoying.

Im going to leave.

What? No, already? But I still have a lot of questions.

Cesar stood up and turned his back, completely ignoring Ed.

Im going to stick around and follow you like a leech.

You dont like being annoying, I know youre not willing to do that.

Ill turn Amiaeng over.

Youre here in secret, I know youre not accompanied by your fleet.

What if I order a port blockade?

All you have is the counts private army, and I know theres no Visha.

All anchored vessels will be holed.

How can you do that without cannons?

Cesar

I hope I never see you again.

What?

Ed stood up and attempted to grab the hem of Cesars robe as he left. Cesar walked away from the table without much reluctance. The silent back faded and eventually vanished.

How long will you be in Amiaeng? Are you two travelling the world or something? Huh? Captain? Captain!

Lil got up and touched her face, which was a mixture of bandages and hair. As soon as she complained, Cesar approached her and carefully loosened the bandages. While Lil drank a glass of water, Cesar gathered her loose curls behind her back and tied them clumsily. When everything was set and done, Lil made her way to the table and uncrumpled the wads of paper she had brought with her.

Hmm. Maybe I was too reckless when I picked up this map. I dont think theres any trace of the Admiral.

What did you find?

Nothing. Nothing stands out.

Lil examined the chart with a magnifying glass, it looked like it was scribbled by hand. She traced down the winding coastline drawn from the centre to the southeast and back. Finally, she sighed in defeat.

Theres nothing to find here.

Cesar took the magnifying glass she was handing over.

How annoying. I might have gotten more useful documents if it werent for that pervert. This is frustrating.

Liloa.

If I could go back one more time yeah?

Theres something here.

What?