

## **Northwest 211**

### *Chapter 211*

Lil cut her hair with the dagger as if she was cutting a rope. Her hair was tougher than she expected, and she had the impression that it was getting longer and longer as she cut it. After finishing both sides, she brushed through it with her fingers. Her hair was still falling out between her fingers, but it was much less than a week ago, indicating that her health was improving. However, Lils impatience remained the same. She got even more anxious when she looked around town today.

Lil, whose confidence suddenly plummeted, slumped and chose her pyjamas. There were more than ten kinds of formal nightgowns waiting for her, ranging from a nightcap for her head to linen smocks and negligees to shawls and lace gloves. Lil took only the negligee and put it over her head. As she was about to leave the room with a thick gown over her shoulders, she looked back at her desk. The envelope she had received from Cesar caught her attention.

*It seems that he has made up his mind during those two months, he appeared much calmer than the last time I saw him. Even so, he mustve been shaken by meeting me so unexpectedly I truly felt sorry for Cesar today. He had been nothing but anxious and at a loss for the entire time we were together. I also feel sorry that it was all my fault Ive been regretting it for a long time now*

But when Lil recalled the painful days, hate was mixed with her feeling of regret.

*It was on the other hand bothersome that I couldnt finish the things I tried so hard to pursue. I was stuck.*

Lil soon brushed off her petty thoughts.

*The truth is that we were both suffering mentally. Its not about comparing who was treated more unfairly*

She squeezed the envelope tightly.

*All I want for Cesar is to be happy If he heard this, he would probably consider it as arrogance that would offend him, but I cant help but wish him well Its kind of ironic that Im now worrying that hell miss me and be unhappy for the rest of his life Thats right. Its probably my pride speaking.*

Why arent you coming?

Oh, God.

Surprised by the voice coming from the door, Lil straightened her gown.

It hasnt been that long since they told me you would wait? Why did you already come running here?

Ive been waiting a long time actually. About an hour now.

An hour?

*When did time pass like that?*

Lil put down the envelope, pretending nothing was wrong.

I like the library.

Why?

Its really grand. Ive never seen a place with so many books.

It wasnt empty talk. The library in this mansion was as large as several banquet halls combined. It wasnt an independent library\*, but the collection was nonetheless enormous. Rows of bookshelves occupied the two-story high walls, a lounge was made in the centre, and a dark chandelier descended from the vaulted ceiling. If that wasnt enough, various types of desks and chairs were arranged along the lounge as well.

*I once told Ed that I envy his access to numerous books. What did he tell me back then?*

{ This all is just shameful history. Its the history of inferiority. }

{ What are you talking about? }

{ You shouldnt be saying that youre envious when Im actually the one who should be. }

*I used to gloss over words that didnt make sense to me, but I still cant figure out what Ed couldve meant even now. Ed sometimes says things that I just dont understand, but to be honest, I dont bother to ask either. Similarly, Ed doesnt seem to feel the need to add more.*

Then I will wait for you there next time.

After silently closing the door, Ed came to stand next to Lil instead of standing opposite her.

..?

Isnt it more convenient to look at the map together?

Eds remark made Lil frown, but she couldnt deny that he had a point.

*Once in a while, he comes up with such rational arguments that are impossible to refute*

She cast a glance at Ed, who was sitting on the desk, staring down at the map. Eds glasses were always a mystery to her.

*It amazes me how two glass beads can make people look so different.*

The more Lil was captivated by Eds intelligent and lucid aura, the more she forgot she was blatantly staring at him

Just look at me plainly.

Ack!

Lil suddenly came to her senses and vainly slammed the desk.

Whenever I put them on, you often glance at me. Thats why Im wearing them again today.

No way?

Do you like them that much?

Wha, what! What?!

As she opened her eyes, something landed on the bridge of her nose.

Glasses.

*Caught I got unnecessarily caught up with him again*

Lil froze while staring crossed-eyed at the glass beads in front of her, but quickly brushed them off and threw them away.

*Nonsense! They only make me look stupid.*

Her resentment was not diminished when she thought of how ridiculous she might have appeared.

You really want to die, dont you? Huh?

It was a threat that obviously wasnt working on Ed, who was already laughing, even to the point he had to cover his mouth as if he was trying to hold himself back while his shoulders visibly trembled. Despite her annoyed expression and pouting mouth, Lil appeared only cute in Eds eyes. It was then that he heard a faint murmur coming from her.

If I get even more enraged, Ill only end up getting caught up with him again. I have to be tolerant tolerant

Lil took a deep breath like a person exercising a great deal of patience. She straightened out the map and reverently placed the paperweights. Roahns unwrinkled land greeted Lil majestically. However, the moment of peace was short-lived because Eds face suddenly intervened and covered the streets of Roahn.

Didnt you say you wouldnt come back in forever?

Lil immediately pushed Eds face away and snapped at him.

And I thought you were stoned to death?

Lil sat down on the chair she had pulled out. When she fumbled with the edge of the map for no reason, Ed likewise sat down on the chair next to her still hovering his face over the streets. Lil glanced at Ed reluctantly and gripped his shoulder sharply.

Go away.

Instead of complying with her request, Ed spoke without even looking at Lils fingers.

You cut your hair.

I dont think thats important right now, so pull yourself together and help me out here. The time for pranks is over.

Why?

We have a lot of work to do. Now, look at the map.

What made you change it?

*Again, hes unnecessarily obstinate.*

But rather than avoiding providing an answer, Lil chose to answer his question roughly. In her experience, this was the better solution when dealing with Ed.

*But, just how limitless is this persons curiosity?*

Its because Im more comfortable with short hair. Imagine that youre me. Would you like to go to Gualtiero with your waist-length hair? And with hair that falls out in clumps every day?

Then why did you let it grow till this point? Werent you uncomfortable sweeping the Bell Rocks deck with your long hair

Ed shut himself up upon realising the reason himself. Lil, on the other hand, pretended not to notice his expression which had turned in one full of murderous intent.

She didnt know what to say.

*Should I ask him to forgive Cesar? To forget him? Or should I say that Im sorry because it was all because of me?*

I looked around for possible escape routes today.

Really?

Thankfully, Ed joined their conversation in a gentle way.

Look here. Ive been to City Hall Square, but I think the plan needs to be revised. No matter how much we disguise ourselves, it will be impossible to move dozens of people all at once. With bandits and homeless people in every alley at night, there are just too many witnesses.

So Why dont we use identity guarantees?

Ed crossed his arms disapprovingly before answering.

Identity guarantees? What guarantees?

This

..?

Lil held out the envelope to Ed but hesitated. She planned to use this to turn the topic around, but this too couldnt be discussed without mentioning Cesar.

*I should be the first to admit that we met. It would be even stranger if I remain silent when I have nothing to hide. Nonetheless, Ed will be upset with whatever I say*

Lil sighed in resignation.

Today, Cesar

Ed, who was leaning in his chair, raised his upper body. As the chair creaked due to his movement, his face fell out of range of the lantern light.

As the ambient temperature seemed to drop, his cold face asked.

Where?

At the market, by chance.

Ed, who had been horribly silent at first, proceeded to speak slowly.

Wasnt sparing his life enough?

*Chapter 212*

Its not that.

You look like you want to ask why I didnt tell you about him.

It doesnt matter.

*I was indeed once concerned that Cesar wouldve been executed in Gualtiero. His execution wouldve had serious consequences and impact on my crew. Every day my stomach churned with worry, but in the end, I couldnt bring myself to ask Ed, who, by then, definitely knew about Cesars background Without knowing Eds feelings, I could never ask such an unscrupulous question*

You didnt ask. Or would youve preferred that I told you first? Why would I concern myself with the man who loves you and who you mightve loved? If I say that I felt relieved that you didnt appear that curious about him, does that make me sound shameful?

Ive never said anything to imply any of that

Im not a generous person like you; Im a lowly and narrow-minded man who has never forgiven anyone and has no intention to ever do so. Do you know why I didnt touch the Captain?

..!

*Ed isnt bluffing Indeed, Ed couldve easily cornered Cesar with the charges of attempted murder of an admiral. Cesar, after all, took part in the crime while being fully aware of Eds rank. Cesar wouldnt even have had the chance to deny it*

Because you wouldve felt unnecessarily responsible for his demise, even though you shouldnt. Youre simply that kind of person. Youre probably already living with the guilt of ruining the Captains promising life for years, right? But I can only imagine how youd react if his life ended because of an execution. Although everything is the result of the Captains choice, you wouldve found fault in yourself even for that

Its a good trait, and as a captain, its even better, but how should that trait be treated when it comes to the ordinary relationships between men and women? Whether its a matter of life or death, no one expects anyone to take responsibility just because of the others affection. If you didnt have a certain degree of resolve and be able to draw the line, you shouldnt have even started it in the first place

*I always thought that the reason for Cesars pardon was questionable, but this was the truth. Its because Ed chose to remain silent*

I didnt know you were thinking that.

Eds precision pierced Lil.

*Regardless of why Cesar and Ed fooled me by pretending they didnt know each other, Cesar really did intend to kill Ed, and Ed knew it. He was aware of it, but he didnt do anything. He didnt even seek retaliation All for my sake. Im at a loss for words because it feels like Ive been given a favour thats way too grand for me. But Ed is right, it wouldve been difficult for me to bear if Cesar had paid the price for what he did*

Lil herself knew that better than anyone else.

Fumbling through the air, Lil reached out for Eds hand. She put her hand on the back of his, which was firmly gripping the armrest. As she wrapped her hand around his, she noticed his hand trembling with its protruding knuckles.

I dont know how to thank you.

If I kill him, she wont be able to handle it when she wakes up When that thought entered my mind, I decided that I shouldnt kill him. I was convinced that you would wake up, so I had to keep him alive. Several times a day I wanted to get him out of my sight. Only The Mother of All Things knows how much I wanted to put a bullet in the back of the head that whispered and kissed you every day

Im not generous enough to see your bond with the Captain and how special the Captain is to you, because I, on the other hand, am still nothing I want to pretend its okay, but that isnt working out the way I want it to So, if youre going to cherish something or everything he told you, I hope you cherish it only in your mind.

Lil reflexively opened her mouth but quickly shut it in surprise.

*Ed is nothing? He isnt like that at all. Hes so unique so special that I have no idea what it means because hes unlike anyone else. Hes an indefinable man, not a man of nothing I cant even wrap my head around everything Ive thought about him. My thoughts of him are about to overflow at any moment. Theyre wonderful at times and fulfilling at others. They can be painful at times, too. Im still confused by all of this. But how could someone like that be nothing?*

What do you mean nothing? Its not like that.

Lil withdrew the hand that had been covering Eds. But before she could move it further away, Ed held her hand again. Their fingers intertwined and were entangled to the point of tingling. Even though their hands were interlocked entirely, his tightened as if something was still missing.

Then tell me.

As if sensing something, Eds eyelashes trembled while a yellow light flashed in his eyes again. Lil, however, only stared at him while he waited for her to answer.

*Can we be so hasty? I still have a lot of things I dont know, so can I already put a name on those feelings?*

I dont know.

Next time.

Lil awkwardly turned her head. With the hand she pulled away from Eds, she took hold of the quill.

Ed didnt reach for her again.

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That Admiral Retiro was a doctor was something everyone in Roahn knew.

Although he didnt serve as a Navy surgeon, it was widely known that patients came and went from his mansion. More specifically, this was true for patients with incurable diseases or those suffering from some particular kind of chronic diseases. It was nothing new that aristocrats were interested in learning. Of course, compared to focusing on collecting animals and plants or building museums, the area the Marquess was interested in, medicine, was quite unique, but nobody really made a fuss about it.

As a result, the fact that there was a patient in his mansion didn't spark rumours. However, the presence of a possible mistress did.

Even those who weren't usually interested in poking their noses into other people's love lives would be tempted. Ed was, after all, unmarried. Because Roahn was home to aristocrats from various families, a lot of lords were eyeing the position next to Ed for their daughter. And even though he was past the usual marriageable age, for those in power like Ed, age was never that important. The same was true for the horrifying rumours about the Marquess's exploits at the Imperial Clairaut, including tales of cutting open the stomachs of other races and collecting their corpses. The young noblewomen who witnessed his gleaming appearance during the fleet protocols firmly believed that such rumours were all nonsense.

So, when at some point his patient turned into his mistress, the windows of the mansion began to slip open. According to the rumours flowing out, not only his mistress but Ed himself had arrived in Roahn. Then, out of nowhere, the original rumour was overruled and word spread that Ed was actually hiding in his mansion with his mistress.

And the possible source of this new rumour was

Roahn's dressmaker passed through the salon of a mansion while humming a song. He opened his eyes wide and looked around as he entered the gallery.

*As one would expect from Roahn's finest villa, the interior is lavishly gilded with lambris, glasswork decorations, and jewellery pieces!*

There was no time for him to rest his eyes.

*This is a mansion that can only be rented by a Royal. Villa Somemei is said to be the most valuable villa in Roahn, except for the Retiro mansion, which cannot be sold or bought.*

The dressmaker happily imagined his customer's identity who would be waiting for him in the boudoir. He then looked back and checked the imported furs and silks on his procession.

Even the villa's exclusivity didn't help him escape his awe. He shrugged and stood frozen on the landing until a man who looked like the manor's butler glared disapprovingly at him. The dressmaker was about to greet him, but the butler struck him first.

I told you to come simply. Why did you take your whole procession?

The dressmaker rubbed his hands together and lowered his head.

No, but I'm still meeting a lord, right? This is how simple it can get.

Send it back.

Sorry?

The master only wants to see you.

Then the clothes

I'll take care of them, so hurry in.

The butler scorned the dressmaker's proud procession with contempt. Meanwhile, the dressmaker himself stumbled around and passed through the door like he was being pushed. This whole ordeal gave him an ominous feeling.

*They obviously know Im a dressmaker, but it doesnt appear that the lord has called me in to have his clothes tailored So, for what other reason would they summon me here?*

As threatening imaginations shook his mind, the mansions hallway seemed to freeze over.

*A person with this level of power could easily play with my life and twist it in whichever way he wants to*

### *Chapter 213*

The dressmaker was surprised to see that the people standing on either side of the door werent simple servants but soldiers. At some point, his knees started to wobble and he kept looking behind him for no particular reason. The man he first thought was a butler now looked like a soldier as well. He entered the inner chamber shaking like a leaf and before the butler could say anything, the dressmaker already knelt down on the floor and cried out.

Its nnnice to meet you, Sir!

A man sitting in a chair had his back turned towards the dressmaker. One leg stretched over the console. From the dressmakers position, all he could see was the tip of this mans well-polished shoe.

From somewhere, the sound of a knife sharpening could be heard.

*Sshhhk Shhhk*

The dressmaker stiffened and looked around. As it turned out, one of the men in the room was trimming his fingernails with a dagger. The dressmaker closed his eyes quickly and sank to the floor, sensing that the sharp blade could easily slit his throat at any moment.

The mans voice then crept up the back of his neck.

What did you do when you went to the Retiro residence?

What?

His request for clarification came out as a reflex, but the dressmaker innately knew that he shouldnt make this man ask him twice. As a result, he responded after slapping his mouth.

My clients name is Levi. I went to receive an order for the ladys clothes.

Was she really the one who called for you?

Is the Marquess in his residence?

S Sir! Sir! I dont know anything!

The dressmaker fell flat on his face, his nose crashing into the floor. A crunching sound came from behind his high-raised buttocks, it sounded like the soldiers approaching him were pulling their swords from their scabbards.

Pl please spare me! Please spare me!

Is the Marquess in his residence?

Oh, if I tell you that, I



As the footsteps neared, the dressmaker flinched his hips and moved his body slowly forward. The moment he was about to start crawling, the soldiers passed him and shoved something in front of his nose. The dressmaker raised his head, startled by the sound, and saw a box the size of a parcel. The butler lifted the lid, revealing a stack of gold coins. As the dressmaker held his breath, the man in the chair tilted his head and laughed low. Before the dressmaker lowered his head again, he caught sight of the mans black hair that drooped to the side.

If you answer truthfully, Ill double it.

The dressmaker gulped and swallowed in agony.

Of course, if you dont answer, I wont let you go so easily.

Yes, yes! He is. Hes in his mansion!

Is it true that the bastard himself ordered his mistress clothes?

From the moment the man called Ed a bastard, the dressmaker appeased his own heart for betraying Ed, thinking that he had done the right thing a hundred times. Simultaneously, he began to further comfort his own troubled mind.

*With so many employees at the mansion, even if Sir Edgar tries to find the source, he wont suspect me, a mere dressmaker.*

Have you seen the woman?

No. I havent

So, how can you be sure the clothes are for his mistress?

He ordered several pieces of womens clothes in great secrecy.

Hmm

And the only woman in that house is Miss Levi. But shes as tall as the Marquess and the clothes werent her size. So it must be for another woman! Of course, shes also slim, but not as tall as Miss Levi

Do you have records of her measurements?

Yes, yes! Of course, I have.

The dressmaker quickly took out a booklet from his inside pocket and flipped through it.

Here it is.

The butler snatched it and brought it to the man. The man looked through the booklet and muttered annoyedly.

I cant even remember how tall she was

The butler stuck close to the man and whispered his answer.

I think she was indeed as tall as this

How can you be sure of that?..

Why else would he try to keep all of this under the radar? The Marquess kept his whereabouts a secret for a reason, so what made him compelled to do that? It must be to deceive the Duke of Mireille. That dukes lackeys will also be waiting for her to appear here

Why would he be cheating on the duke? Lilo is he planning to take her for himself?..

Im sorry, but isnt it looking like thats the case? Why else would he be keeping her without sending word to the dukes residence? No matter how eccentric and far from women he is, at the end of the day, he is still a man with desires

What?!

The chair swayed as if the man would kick out of his seat at any moment. Meanwhile, the dressmaker kept his posture as crouched as possible in an attempt to erase his presence from the room.

That madman

In addition, hes a very clever man He might want to use his title as a marquess as a shield. That could be the reason why hes hiding in his own house Or maybe the rumours are true and a relationship between the two

Shut up!

The man jumped up and slapped the butler on the cheek. The butler immediately straightened his dishevelled body and then lowered his head.

Im sorry.

How can you afford to talk about such nonsense!

I made a mistake.

Damn it!

Suddenly, a dagger fell far away when the man brandished his arm. It made a whooshing noise on the marble floor when the blade scraped against it.

Get her right now! Bring her to me before she gets dirty!

Yes!

When the butler beckoned the soldiers, they grabbed the dressmakers arms.

Ack!

Only then did the man realise that the dressmaker was still there. The dressmaker met the mans eyes who looked back at him with an eerily atmosphere surrounding him. The mans dark blue, darkly sunken eyes wriggled. His dark blue justaucorps contrasted his pale skin, making him look even paler. He was a handsome man with a somewhat sickly and decadent impression due to the dark circles under his eyes.

The dressmaker lowered his eyes in embarrassment at the face he had never seen before.

How far have you gone with your eavesdropping, you rat?

Oh, no, I didnt hear anything

In front of whom are you telling lies!

The butler hurriedly stepped in between the man and the dressmaker.

This is Sir Venua\*, the prince regent of the principality of Obernyu. Hurry up and pay your respect!

Agh! Its an honour to meet you for the first time. Im the dressmaker, Lou

Wouldnt even a lowly person like you have a wife and children?

..?!

The dressmakers eye rims along the shaded corners of his eyes were burning red. The mans smile was cruel when he mentioned the dressmakers wife and children. This added to the dressmakers woes. His involvement in such a dangerous situation had been a terrible mistake, so he closed his eyes tightly and nodded his head. Furthermore, his opponent made it clear what the dressmaker would lose when he opened his lips.

Youll have to take todays affairs to the grave.

..!

After that, the soldiers dragged the dressmaker out. While the butler also followed them, Venua couldnt overcome his anger and shouted.

Be sure to confirm that mistress identity! Be very sure!

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Even after Ed managed to shut his eyes, he barely slept. In addition, he woke up not long after that. He decided to get up at first, but that idea didnt last long, so he laid down again and pulled the blanket up to his neck. Still, he couldnt sleep at all.

Ed finally kicked off the blanket and got up.

*Its a waste of time to try to hold on to a sleep that wont come anyway.*

Ed, loosely dressed in a gown, walked to the fireplace while holding a candlestick. The fire was out, so he worked the bellows without much sincerity. When the flames were revived, he threw some firewood into it.

From the simple desk in front of the fireplace, Ed picked up Lils portrait. Since Lil was still not aware of the involvement of the Duke of Mireille, he had to deal with it alone.

*Mireilles move could be either of these two possibilities. He can either send his subordinates directly to Roahn or this mission can be assigned to the Garni merchant guild officers who are already present. In the first case, those visitors would need to stay in a rented mansion or inn. In the case of the latter, searching through the Garni offices should be more efficient. But going to one of their guilds buildings today was a complete waste of time. Their departments in Roahn are heavily guarded. And because theyre constantly involved in commercial disputes, I had a more difficult time investigating the guild, especially since I couldnt afford to reveal my identity*

*Lets focus on the first possibility for now*

Staring at the list of rental villas on his messy desk, Ed skimmed the fine prints dejectedly.

*It would be much easier for me if I could consult with Liloa, but thats a hopeless case. Theres also no way to make Liloa naturally aware that the Duke is after her No, even if I could, I shouldnt As I dont know why the Duke suddenly became interested in her again, I have to consider the possibility of another group some third party could be involved*

When can I even try to inspect all these places

*Liloa wants to concentrate on the Gualtiero plan, so I dont have much time to go out either. After all, the situation with Gualtiero is equally pressing. Her crews escape has to be handled flawlessly. Until then, Liloa will never try to settle personal matters*

Ed sighed and went through the list again. As he had no time to go out, he had no choice but to send someone. Ed was marking the places he needed to prioritise when he spotted Villa Somemei on the list and his quill came to a halt.

*At a glance, this guest seems to have used a pseudonym. Its common to use pseudonyms in Roahn, but what makes this doubtful is that a person with enough wealth to rent this entire expensive villa has never contacted the governor.*

Ed made up his mind to go to this place himself.

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## Chapter 214

Lil

Hmm

Lil!

Uhmm?

The sun is already high in the sky!

..!

Lil, who had her face pressed against the desk, raised her upper body. As she sat up, she saw Levi standing near her with her arms crossed. But before she could fully wake up, Lil found herself being dragged to her bed and had no choice but to trudge helplessly after the doctor before sitting down.

The moment the window opposite the bed opened wide, the gloomy room brightened and the fresh dewy air of the morning blew in.

Are the two of you planning a trip together or something? Whats with the map?

Lil, hesitant to give an honest answer, looked at the map of Roahn on which she had fallen asleep.

Ah, yes just

Oh then, did you fight about the trip? Edgar looked like he was in a really bad mood today.

Lil was reminded of last night. The night she avoided answering Eds question about whether he was truly nothing. Ed eventually left, saying he didnt expect anything from her, but at the same time, he actually seemed to be expecting something.

*What was I feeling when he said that?*

Lil thought, rubbing her sullen eyes.

*Why didnt Eds longing words sound burdensome to me?*

I guess, Lil is in a bad mood too.

No.

Lil managed to create something resembling a smile. However, as Levi kept her attention towards Lils arm, she didnt see it.

Levi shook her head with a sigh.

He cant even make my patient feel good, what the heck? I should just put a ban on Edgar.

That will make things difficult

Oh my.

Lil meant that it would be difficult because it would create a setback in their jailbreak plan, but Levi covered her mouth to hide her faint smile, probably misinterpreting it. As expected, a faint murmur was heard.

The love feud is as trivial as cutting water with a knife\*

Lil suddenly decided that when the time came, she should set a date to correct Levis inscrutable delusions.

After a brief treatment, Levi ended the medical examination with an injection.

Very healthy. Excellent.

All thanks to you, Levi.

Its fine to do more intense exercises now. Of course, as long as you dont overdo it.

Lils fists clenched for no apparent reason. Her grip was firm, and her muscles were much bigger than when she first awoke. Obviously, she wasnt as strong as before, but it was fortunate that she was able to recover this much before the prison break.

Feeling motivated, Lil looked up at Levi.

Ed, no, Edgar where is he now?

I guess hes still in his room? You can go there.

You mean into his bedroom?

Well, thats okay. Its more like a lab in an office but then one with a bed.

Lil changed her clothes and headed for the third floor.

*Even though we worked closely together for the past week and we have to for the coming week, I cant help but still feel awkward*

Lil ascended the stairs while pondering on what to say to Ed.

She pushed open the door to the room Elodie had directed her to and peered inside. Surprisingly, it was so cluttered that she had trouble telling whether it was a bedroom or a lab. Five or six desks were scattered around the space and on one side were sculptures and prints of unknown subjects.

Lil stepped inside, completely oblivious that she was about to enter the bedroom of someone of the opposite sex.

Hey

It was quiet as if no one was there.

Where are you?

Lil walked further into the room. She did so because even though she couldn't see anyone from the outside, that didn't mean there couldn't be someone buried somewhere behind a stack of books.

While waiting for Ed, Lil finally came to a halt in front of the cold fireplace.

Ed?

Looking around, she discovered a familiar map on one of the smaller desks. However, unlike the map she studied with Ed last night, this one included detailed descriptions of various buildings, most likely for a different purpose.

Villas, inns, and hotels

Not thinking much about it, Lil raised her head.

*He doesn't appear to be in here!*

The moment she decided to go to the library, something flashed into the corner of her eye. A fragment of an obscured figure lay beneath the map. It was too similar to the oil paintings Lil had seen to be ignored.

Lil slowly lifted the map

It was a portrait the size of a book.

A woman in a white satin gown was surrounded by colourful flowers. Her face was bright and cheerful, but Lil knew the woman had never laughed. It was the painter himself who added the illusion of joy. Lil remembered vividly the day this painting was made. She, of course, remembered the where and how as well. In addition, she knew where the original portrait was hung and who owned it. This frame was merely a miniature replica.

Lil asked the most obvious question.

Why is this here?

Lil had a foreboding feeling.

She hastily flipped the frame, which was still lying on the desk, pretending she never saw it. At the same time, her head began to spin and she had to prop herself against the desk's corner. Her fingers tingled as she pressed her palm firmly against the corner. With a heartbeat that matched the pounding of her neck and temples, her gaze wandered around aimlessly, but always returned to the frame, hoping it had magically disappeared.

Unfortunately for her, the frame was still right there. She had flipped it over to avoid seeing the picture, but she instead discovered some writing in the corner. Even at first glance she already recognized whose handwriting it was and she couldn't bring herself to read it.

The eyes that read the sentence were hot and bloodshot.

[ Im glad youre interested in Liloa. I hope you catch her and bring her to me soon. ]

The line below was the authors signature. Lil couldnt take her gaze away from the familiar but revolting handwriting.

[ Your faithful friend, Rene Mireille. ]

Lil slowly raised her head as another door to the bedroom opened. Ed, who seemed to have just finished washing up, appeared somewhat embarrassed as he moved closer. It was understandable. After all, he and Lil usually met in the library or her boudoir.

Why are you

Eds gaze fell on the desk.

here?

Lil turned over the picture frame Ed was looking at. As its golden edge rattled, he met the eyes of a woman wearing a bright smile. He didnt want to look at it, but Ed had no choice but to stare at the face of the woman surrounded by flowers.

What is this?

Lil stood dumbfounded as she looked at the speechless Ed, realising that she hadnt misunderstood the situation. Her chin started to tremble. She squeezed her jaw tightly, knowing she couldnt get any words out at this rate. Only after a while did she manage to squeeze her voice out.

This woman, do you know who she is?

The towel Ed was using to dry his hair dropped in silence. His face hardened without showing a single layer of denial. Despite the miserable affirmation, Lil couldnt accept the situation at all.

*How can I even connect the Duke from the darkest parts of my past with this man in front of me?*

Lil turned the frame over again.

[ Im glad youre interested in Liloa. I hope you catch her and bring her to me soon. ]

*Mireille asked Ed to find me. Ed accepted it, out of interest in me. What the hell Why? For what purpose?*

I can explain it I can explain everything.

If you listen no, its not what you Damn it

Ed muttered a few nonsense words at first but then shut his mouth again. His servile voice faded as he rubbed his face with his fingers. Lil couldnt believe hearing his lowering tone, clearly crushed by all the mistakes he made.

*Ed knows very well what he has been doing*

Please, listen to me for a second

*Knowing very well how he spent all those days with me Laughing, playing pranks, and building intimacy*

Ed, who seemed to be frozen, moved his feet after coming to his senses. His pace became odiously cautious when Lil locked her gaze on him.

As letters formed words, and words formed sentences, the distant and vague form of the Duke of Mireille completed itself.

The dictator of Mireille.

Lil vividly remembered the days of her endless naivety, crawling on all fours under his reign. Mireille, towering over her head again, was still menacing. Her position now was also far different from when she mocked him by attacking the Garni merchant ships. Here, Lil was once again a mere possession. One owned by Mireille.

*If the Duke and Marquess of this Empire traded between themselves, what would the price be?*

The dirty pacts that were exchanged, the secret conversations that took place, and other various imaginations pulled Lil down like a swamp. Her thoughts continued to sink into the bottomless pit

Chapter 215

What did you get?

You are misunderstanding it! Yes, this is absolutely not what you think

Ed, who was just around the corner, attempted to hold her hand. But when Lil simply hit his hand away, his hand stopped mid-air before trying again. Lil, however, felt repulsed. She associated Ed's hand with Mireille's, so she instinctively swung her hand back at him.

Don't touch me.

Ed's face twisted in pain. Even though her slap wasn't powerful enough to cause any physical injuries, it still hurt. And witnessing Lil behave this way broke his heart.

*No, this can't be. She can't be this apathetic towards me*

Please

Tell me.

Lil wasn't sure why she hadn't run out yet. She figured she either wanted to hear an explanation or she tried to gather more reasons to convince her mind to hate Ed.

Ed exhaled hesitantly. For a moment he was just standing there, with his head drooping seemingly out of resignation and his tightly closed eyelids

Every one of Ed's actions confused Lil.

I was told that you were in possession of an artefact. At first, the Duke didn't know the necklace was an artefact, however, his recent investigation had identified the possibility of it being one, so to me

The Duke did. Rene Mireille told you that you could have the necklace?

So if he hands you the artefact, what will the Duke get?

Ed couldn't bring himself to open his mouth. A minute ago he had been determined to explain everything to the fullest, but seeing the obvious answer in front of him, his shoulders slumped dejectedly. Not only Ed saw it, but Lil did too.

Say it with your own mouth.

I really



Hurry!

I swear I never meant to take you to the Duke

Hah!

Lils temples ached and her face seemed to boil to the point it would melt.

*After all, Ed recognized me the moment we met in Amiaeng*

From their very first meeting in Amiaeng till now, all her doubts and all the questions she asked herself along the way, were all answered at a terrifying pace. Now, there wasnt a single situation that didnt make sense anymore.

You even knew me before Amiaeng. Which means, all of this was your plan, after all? To make me be a part of your game?

Im sorry, but

You knew everything! You knew

..!

Lils chest tightened.

She felt dizzy for a moment and stumbled. It was a similar sensation as when she passed out a few days ago. Before she knew it, her body fell helplessly backwards and Lil reflexively grabbed around her. Fortunately, her forearm found a chair that could support her body. At the same time, however, Ed had grabbed her other arm, but Lil pushed him away with all her might almost immediately.

Dont! Dont touch me!

Lil turned cold. As firm as an anchored ship, she secured her heart.

*No more change of direction and I no longer will be blown away by Eds gust of wind*

You treated me like an object and sugar-coated the whole situation with your sly mouth.

Despite how hard she tried to deny it, Eds touch left an afterglow. She was naturally reminded of him holding her body and rubbing his lips against hers. As soon as shame took over, a sensation of irritation crept up her throat and, whether it was nausea or a cough, eventually burst out of her mouth. After throwing out several chunks of breath, Lil tried to raise her body, using the support of the chair and stand upright again.

*My strength is draining away, its as if Im getting closer and closer to losing consciousness*

She wiped the cold sweat from her brow with her arm. Although there was still a lot of resentment left, her body couldnt keep up.

Facing Ed, Lil muttered weakly.

I cant understand you

Looking pale himself, Ed cautiously clutched a handkerchief from which he had no idea where it had come from. Upon noticing the handkerchief that Ed was holding out for her, Lil instinctively brought her own hand to her mouth.

Butler! Lord Grits! Elodie!

While Lil was checking the bloodstains on her hand, Ed called for his servants at random. Lil stroked her lower lip. When she checked her palm again, there was considerably more blood than before. As she stared at her palm, that, due to a dizzy spell, multiplied in two and then three, she spoke so softly that it appeared like she was talking to herself.

I told you back then. That if you were planning on telling me the truth, you would have told me at some point\*

Im sorry, Im sorry, so please dont

Lil didnt even look at the handkerchief Ed was anxiously holding out. Ed similarly seemed reluctant to approach out of the fear that she might snap again. Lil found that fact rather fortunate, for she didnt want to lose her mind over this as well.

You shouldve told me so back then instead of being exposed like this Like getting caught.

Lils nasal passages became sour and hot liquid flowed out. Although her consciousness gradually became hazy, Lil stubbornly wiped her face with her hand.

Ed turned even paler upon seeing Lils worsening condition and spewed out hasty answers.

Because when I started seeing the real you\*, I couldnt bring myself to tell you. I had barely made it that far, and thats why I became even more afraid of telling you. Because everything we had built up so far mightve gone to waste I wanted to know what you thought of me and what was on your mind. I got greedy, damn it It was my greed that I shouldnt have had, I know that but thats the kind of spirit I deceived you with

What kind of tricks cant you sell with that mouth of yours? Im starting to get sick of it.

Ed was holding his breath and Lil sensed it. She stared blankly at his wet cheeks.

*Those are probably water droplets from his wet hair that hasnt dried yet.*

However, they had been falling since a while ago. The hand clutching the handkerchief hung down as well. Ed remained deafeningly quiet for a while as if he was enduring something. Eventually, the hand holding the handkerchief formed a fist and stopped shaking. It was then that he let out a voice that was pressed down by his unsteadily shaking throat.

You

Ed wiped the corner of his eye as if the water had finally become too bothersome for him.

I never thought Id fall in love with you.

Sobs were mixed with his words as Ed clearly struggled with his breathing.

I didnt know that

A group of servants burst into the room, causing a small commotion. In the meantime, Lils demeanour turned even colder, like she had been hit with cold water in the middle of all the noise. A sudden realisation came to her

Then I was nothing but your plaything before that

No!

Lil coldly took her eyes off Ed. She turned around, wiping the blood dripping down her chin.

Please

Thank you for confirming.

\*\*\*

When Lil returned to the boudoir, she packed everything at random. Elodie, who had followed her through the wide open door, wandered around the entrance, not knowing what to do. As maids carrying towels and a water basin trailed behind her, Elodie nervously looked down the corridor and asked one of the girls.

Where is Levi? Didn't I ask you to bring her?..

The Viscountess of Bonfi came to see the doctor. Miss Levi seems to be still in the southern building

But this is an urgent situation concerning the Madame, so ask for forgiveness and bring Miss Levi quickly! Now!..

Regardless of the whispers, Lil focused herself on gathering her clothes and packing her weapons when she suddenly realised they were all paid by Ed.

She cursed inside.

*Even the clothes I'm wearing are no different*

She pulled at her sky-blue dress smeared with blood with a desire to tear it apart.

Damn it!

*Even so, I can't just take off my clothes and leave this residence naked.*

Lil looked around her and grabbed the stack of bills. She ripped Ed off, using the value of her necklace as an excuse, but upon seeing the Retiro seal, she immediately threw them away. She'd rather get her necklace back and sell it somewhere.

*I've been relying on others this whole time. I don't have any possessions here, the only thing that is truly mine is my body*

A sense of hopeless desolation came over her. Lil felt dizzy for the umpteenth time and had to steady herself with the help of the desk. Through her clouded vision, she could faintly see the blueprints of Gualtiero.

*The day the merchants from the Western Continent enter the Devito Harbour will be Roahn's busiest day. I only have a week left before that. But can I really get the job done on that day?*

*Mireille's followers are probably already camping in Roahn to complete their deal. Knowing Mireille, he would do anything to achieve his goal. That's the kind of man he is*

Lil also realised why Ed, till this point, had kept his whereabouts a secret and why he had placed both her and himself in the restricted west wing without a single outsider.

*Ed really didn't intend to hand me over to Mireille. He occasionally tried to explain how he had ended up aboard the Bell Rock. Whenever this happened, I was the one who said I couldn't afford to listen to such things. Instead, I prioritised our mission regarding Gualtiero above all else. That being said, he didn't appear to be pushing it either*

Lil instantly cut off all speculation about Eds sincerity and resolved not to think about why Mireille had hired Ed to find her. She believed there was nothing she could do if she speculated by herself, and she was determined to save her crew first.

*I had planned to go back to Sesbron anyway. I was even prepared to be taken back to the Duke the moment I pulled off my necklace in front of Sagastar Thats right. Eds involvement doesnt really change anything.*

In the end, Lil left the boudoir without a single bag

\*\*\*

## Chapter 216

As Ed couldnt even bear an hour of silence, he ended up in front of Lils boudoir.

*Based on Liloas reaction earlier, it appears that she doesnt want to meet me any time soon, but I cant just sit back and wait*

He couldnt afford to remain passive when Lil might never speak to him again, so Ed cautiously knocked on the door, mumbling doubtfully.

Its me

Thinking that Lil perhaps couldnt hear his voice because there was no response, Ed stood closer to the door and spoke a little more forcefully.

Please open the door. Please.

When the door actually opened, Ed was overcome with joy. It was as if the gates to heaven had been unlocked right then and there. However, instead of Lil, he was met with Levis arrogantly frowning face peering through the crack.

What are you doing? What if Lil breaks for real this time?

Youre well aware of who is currently the least helpful in stabilising my patient, right?

How can it be that she lost consciousness and even coughed up blood? Seeing her progress from the past days, does that even make sense? In addition, I heard she passed out while making a scene about leaving the house

Yes, of course, you have no obligation to tell me, but I know whos to blame. So hurry! Get away from here.

Levi stirred a hand through the closing door as a gesture to send him away, but Ed drove his fingers into the rapidly thinning gap, causing the irritated Levi to come to a halt.

Ed spoke nervously, not even considering widening the gap.

Is she asleep? I just need to see her and then Ill go.

Oh no, dont even dream about it. God, youre so thick-headed.

Levi clicked her tongue and removed each of Eds fingers one by one from the door he was still holding.

Go to Linhardt and wait. I tried so hard to put her to sleep so that she could have some rest, but you might wake her up just like that. Right now, Lil is really, really sensitive. What if she wakes up when you come in to see her? If she loses her trust even in me, then who else can treat her?

When Levi mentioned losing Lils trust, Ed couldnt be persistent anymore and the door shut as soon as his last ring finger fell. Standing in the hallway for a while, Ed started to move in a daze at some point. With each step, his feet felt more heavy, as if he was stepping through the mud.

*I still dont know if her bleeding has been controlled or if she has calmed down I had no intention of letting her know about this whole ordeal with Mireille without giving a single warning. Why did she have to see the portrait first? No, whats the point in leaving it like this?*

Ed went back to the boudoir. But as he couldnt get himself to open the door, he finally turned around and walked down the hallway.

\*\*\*

Linhardts cabinet was crammed with administration officials and attendants carrying important documents. Linhardt, who was in the centre of such a crowd, cast a glance at the entering Ed, who then slipped inside the tea room next to Linhardts cabinet and sat in the first chair he could find.

Reflecting on the eventful hour, he regretted every second of it. Useless assumptions spread out in dozens of directions, creating all kinds of absurd endings.

*Would she have reacted differently if I had said this at the time? Or would Ive been able to hold on to Liloa if I had said that?*

His heart skipped a beat every time he realised that the scenarios filling his head were purely fictitious

What are you doing?

Linhardt, who sat across from Ed, leaned on the backrest and crossed his legs. The cabinet beside the tearoom had quieted down, so Ed assumed that Linhardt sent the rest of the people away without him realising it.

Ed remained silent, unable to even raise his head.

I heard that Visha is recovering well

Seeing you like this is reminding me of the times when you used to cry loudly and it would wake us all up. And if that wasnt bad enough we had to drag our feet. It was so annoying.

He chewed on the grass stem he was nibbling on.

Anyway, I guess childhood habits are hard to get rid of, huh? When you were this small, you would tend to cry loudly. And now, even when youre this old

Shut up.

Instead of sounding tough, Eds harsh remark lost all credibility when it was muffled by a sniffing sound. His reaction stemmed from the tears hed shed earlier, not particular from now, but because Ed didnt want to explain it and appear pathetic, he ignored Linhardts mockery.

That Visha, I didnt like her at first, but it mustve been a mistake in my judgement. I feel like shes turning you into a man. I take back my words about her.

You need to suffer a little more. In fact, I think you grew up a little too comfortably. Even Grandpa said it himself, that you were so engrossed in your own life that you were always alone and only thinking about yourself.

Dont try to act like a brother.

You arrogant tsk, no respect. Biologically, Im ten days older than you, but I bet my mental age is much older.

What bullshit

Actually, I heard it from Sir Grits. He said it seemed like you had a fight with Visha

At this point, Linhardt could no longer hide his laughter and he let out a clear, low chuckle. However, as Ed couldnt deny it, he had no choice but to remain silent.

This is the first time Ive seen you as distraught as this in all my years of living.

However, just because Ed couldnt refute it didnt mean he had decided to put up with the humiliation. Ed jumped up from his seat with the intention of leaving. When he turned around his chair, Lindhardt called out to him with the same excitedly teasing voice as before.

So, any idea on how to turn an angry persons heart back around?

Ed involuntarily stopped. Instead of pondering hard on an answer as he had done, he thought of a much more straightforward approach.

*Perhaps a gift?*

*Instead of any regular gift, shall I clear out Gualtiero right away? If I bring the sailors back to Liloa However if I do that, I wont be able to avoid treason.*

Ed managed to put an end to his self-destructive imagination thanks to his own undeniable rebuttal that a superficial gift that was only shiny on the outside would never be accepted.

*Because doing so wont address the root cause of Liloas rage No matter how much I apologise, her feelings wont be alleviated Yes, Id need something more than an apology, but Im out of ideas for now*

Ed became surprised at his own realisation. He was someone who had never apologised to anyone and he had never tried to change someones heart.

As if Lindhardt had read his mind, he added.

Once you find out, thats what it means to be human.

In the midst of Eds confusion, Levi came into the room and looked at Ed awkwardly.

What are you doing? Sit down.

Levi, who had passed Ed and kissed Linhardt on the cheek, sat close to him.

Linhardt immediately held her by the waist and kissed her on her forehead. It was behaviour that Ed usually didnt mind, but it was something he didnt want to see right now. Ed returned to his seat while attempting to hide his annoyance.

Is that the medical journal?

This is something I secretly brought out. Lil is still sleeping, so she couldn't say anything, but if she knew, she wouldn't like the fact that I showed you.

While Levi handed over the medical journal, Linhardt intervened.

Wait, her name is Lil?

Yes

Is it just Lil?

Yes. But the servants don't know this yet. Only we do.

That's interesting. It's a pseudonym and not a full name, right? So, there must be a reason why you're hiding her identity.

Why do you even have to say that out loud? Just pretend you didn't hear anything, Linhardt.

All right.

Linhardt and Levi didn't hesitate to show their affection for each other. They cuddled and rubbed each other's foreheads while Ed checked the journal.

Eventually, Ed slammed the journal down, expressing his displeasure with them.

Tone it down will you.

Linhardt sneered at him.

Why are you taking it out on us?

That's right, don't take it out on us. Instead, beg for Lil's forgiveness. Do it properly. And don't ever piss her off again. I can only imagine how angry she must've been that she actually passed out!

This poor guy has no tricks. He probably doesn't know anything.

Oh, yes. Now that you mentioned it

Levi raised her brows and covered her mouth, obviously surprised. Ed felt the momentary urge to tie the two perfectly matched beings together and toss them somewhere, but he wasn't in a position to throw cold water on them\*. In front of a couple who has been in a successful relationship for several years, Ed was nothing but an infinitely shabby idiot.

He opened his mouth.

How

..?

Anticipating Ed's following words, Linhardt suppressed a smile and closed his lips tightly.

What should I do?

As she couldn't believe those words really came from Ed, Levi exclaimed with her mouth wide open.

Oh my God

\*\*\*

## Chapter 217

### Dialogue

### Thoughts

[ Text or letters ]

{ Dialogue in the past or a memory }

flashback/end of flashback

Returning to his cabinet, Ed rummaged through the desks drawers for some stationery.

*Neither Levi nor Linhardt gave me a straightforward answer.*

In response to the request for advice from his cousin, which happened for the first time ever, Linhardt reacted mockingly.

{ Look at him trying to take the easy way out again. Im telling you, this guy is far from being a decent human. }

While Ed had turned away from them, Levi asked him to do his best to express his sincerity whether it was verbally or in writing.

Ed interpreted the unexpected word writing as a hint.

*Come to think of it, writing is the most preferred and valuable means of correspondence throughout history.*

But because Ed hadnt written a letter himself in years, even the most common pieces of stationery were out of his sight.

*After Grandpa passed away, I never had to write a personal letter to anyone*

Finally, in the third drawer he opened, Ed found high-quality stationery made of thick paper. He sat behind his desk and took the entire box out. However, even with its thickness it felt like there were way too few sheets. He had a hunch that it would take some pages to express himself without being misunderstood. Unsatisfied with his find, Ed looked at the handful of papers with a solemn expression. He then searched through the fourth and fifth drawers for another box of stationery. After piling them all up like a mountain, he took out one sheet and placed it neatly beneath the paperweight. Every move he made seemed to be part of some kind of sacred ritual.

However, with the snow-white paper in front of him, fear suddenly engulfed Ed.

*What if Liloa doesnt accept it even if I tell her the whole truth? What if she still despises me and refuses to see me?*

Ed was at a loss for what to do and had a difficult time deciding what to write.

*Liloas heart How can my will penetrate abstract feelings that cant even be seen with the naked eye? Its all just so distant and secluded. It seems impossible unless a miracle occurs Looking back on it now, even the smallest acts of kindness that Liloa has shown me in the past feel so valuable How could I have overlooked that marvel and taken it for granted? This was something I should never have done Then again, it was a planned betrayal from the start, and I knew it would cause Liloa only pain But maybe*



As ink dripped from the nib, Ed decided to start at the beginning and called for Lil.

[ Captain, ]

*But Liloa is no longer my captain It might just offend her if she reads this.*

Ed crumpled the letter and threw it somewhere before placing a clean sheet in front of him. After rubbing the sweat from his palms several times, Ed took hold of his pen again.

[ Lil, ]

*This, too, is equal as offensive*

Ed flicked his pen. His attempt to erase what he had just written down ended with a new piece of paper.

[ Liloa, ]

Suppressing the emotions that arose when he read the name, Ed cleared his throat for no apparent reason. His pen moved once more after a brief pause.

[ I first saw you at LeBrun. ]

*Aspirant Liloa To be honest, I didnt like her at first. Every time I saw her, I experienced an unpleasant and strange sense of defeat.*

*When the Ruwa tribe was annihilated, and only the ruins remained after everything burned down, those ruins were all I had. So, I clung to them desperately. Obsessed with the idea that the answers couldnt be found in any other way, I dismantled the buildings and dug the ground of the meadows. Back then people called me crazy, but it was an unbearable time for me not to go crazy.*

*Thats why it was astonishing for a mere child\*, who grew up seeing and hearing only good and pretty things, to understand the same truth that I had to obtain in such a hard way. Now, years later, I would describe such an ugly and stuffy reaction as a damaged pride*

In addition, Lil went further, she was able to discover reasons that Ed was unable to. Whereas Ed was still investigating a case, Lil had already reached abstraction, and when Ed had only just reached that same abstraction, Lil had already leapt to a higher deduction.

*Liloa never gave me a chance to become her equal and that fact was unpleasant and hard to endure*

Around the time he still denied such reality, dismissing it as nonsense, Ed realised that Lil wasnt someone who lived an easy childhood. It suddenly became so clear and noticeable, that Ed often asked himself how he didnt recognize it before. Even with him actively trying to find out more about her, stories and rumours ridiculing her reached him faster and in larger quantities than any other investigation he tried to do himself. Anecdotes differed from how she was an unscrupulous and reckless girl since she was a child, to how her mothers education and her brothers admonitions were futile. Similar stories and even worse were excitingly passed on from one person to another. Her brother became increasingly concerned about his marriageable-aged sisters dowry, so he tried to put an end to all rumours about her. But the more he did, the more interested people became.

*Fun fact was that most of the guys who cursed at Liloa behind her back were also the same guys who were lined up in an attempt to dance with her.*

But while Ed didnt dare to go that far, he was no exception to those who had taken her lightly.

*She was just a child in my eyes and I often wondered if there was a way to ignore her achievements and devalue her.*

But whenever he looked at Lil again after meeting her, he found himself peeking longer and longer, and unable to even stand upright out of shame.

*She was and is a being Ill never be able to reach. Her enlightenment came not from cutting open her friends stomachs or killing her loved one with her own hands, but from the enlightenment that came so naturally to her.*

*If theres a word to describe Liloa, it will be genius. And from the moment I admitted that, it became difficult for me to bear how much Liloa stood out to me.*

Ed wasnt mature enough to overcome his painful inferiority complex and face her. With his archaeology in its infancy, he thought that perhaps this gap in their knowledge could be bridged in a matter of time. If given another year or two, he could accelerate his research

Nonetheless, while Ed was limited by his immaturity and inexperience, Lil grew day by day. Just when one would think she couldnt be more dazzling, she shone even brighter the next day. And she remained unwavering in the face of mockery. In contrast, Ed became increasingly nervous. He couldnt receive any spoils of war because he hadnt yet been commissioned. He longed to decipher the ruins and relics scattered across the continent, and if he could do so and bring them together, he might be able to make a leap forward.

This was the course of his life until the Duke of Mireille told him something.

*flashback\**

Shes that bitch.

That bitch?

If you hear the stories about her, you would want to catch her right away. A bitch like her should be snatched by the hair and dragged into a dungeon.

Its embarrassing to admit, but there was such a beast-like bitch in my house. One who couldnt be tamed at all. Unsubmissible and untenable, that crazy Hmm! Kheum! Anyway, she was at least very nice to look at from the outside. I dont know if you know

Who the hell is this person youre talking about?

Liloa. My little birdy.

..!

Eds body froze. If he had been standing, he wouldve most likely stumbled. After a pause, he looked at Mireille, suddenly conscious of his heavily pounding heart.

*He couldnt possibly have noticed this, but Im not sure.*

But no matter how much Ed tried to calm down, his heart felt like it was about to explode.

*Wasnt she dead? I even heard that they held a funeral a few years ago.*

I dont know if you know Liloa

No.

After responding, Ed quickly gauged whether his answer was too fast. Fortunately, Mireille only held his head high.

Actually, shes not dead. Allow me to explain. The truth is, she didnt die, she just left the house. Completely disappeared with my jewels, including a relic. That cheeky bitch.

You know about artefacts?

Not at first, no. But because of a business Ive been interested in these days, I was going through books to do some research. And look at this. Isnt this my familys necklace?

Ed pretended to read the book Mireille held out. With all of his nerves focused on Liloa, he couldnt think of anything else. So, he waited for a while before taking his eyes off the book, assuming enough time had passed to safely say that he had read the page.

Ed then asked, as calmly as possible.

How can you be sure shes alive?

A terrible bitch who disappeared just like that, how could she be dead? I tried to track her down but to no avail. But I can assure you, though, that bitch is still alive, no, she has to be alive. She cant just screw me over and then die. And if she really is dead, that would screw me over even more. If thats the case, I want you to find her body and dig it up.

## *Chapter 218*

Somehow, Mireilles voice was pushed into the background, so Ed didnt really comprehend the Dukes request for strict adherence to their agreement. Even the threat Mireille made, saying he wouldnt stay still if Ed abandoned Liloa after retrieving the necklace, didnt enter Eds mind.

In the carriage leaving the Dukes residence, Ed looked down at the portrait given by Mireille. A sinister phrase was written on the back by the man himself. Feeling uncomfortable, Ed retraced their previous conversation to see if hed successfully made it appear that hed been hired. He checked it two or three times more to be sure if hed really made it appear that Liloa was only treated as a trading target.

*Mireille should never find out about this. I cant let anyone else know what I feel. Never. Not, until I reach Liloa.*

Ed turned the frame over again.

*Her smiling face looks strange. Judging from Mireilles words, at that time, Liloa had already given up her commission. Yes, I remember that I did hear before that Liloa hadnt been commissioned. I was greatly disappointed, and after, I didnt give her a second thought or look for her, who was no longer following her will. I was shocked when I heard the news of her death, but as I already had detached myself from her due to that huge disappointment, and to me that was it. But, looking at this portrait now, Im not so sure Liloa couldve been smiling here. Moreover, having experienced Mireille myself, I found him to be a much lower individual than I initially imagined and I dont ever want to associate myself with him again. It never occurred to me that Liloa might never have wanted to give up her commission. On top of it all, theres even a chance that shes still alive.*

The tingling joy excited Ed and his heart thumped heavily.

*end of flashback*

Because Eds hand had come to a pause, the period at the end of his last sentence transformed into an ink circle that was rapidly increasing in size.

Ed removed the nib of his fountain pen from the paper. The childishness and pitiful feelings from his younger self suffocated his breathing. He eventually let go of the pen when he felt a tightness around his throat.

*I shouldve approached her back then, but I missed the opportunity due to my pride and hurt self-esteem. In the end, I mightve accomplished it through Mireille now, but his involvement only made the situation more difficult This is my retribution for blowing everything up from the beginning Liloa asked if it was all part of a game, but was that truly it?*

Ed instantly wanted to deny it, but he couldnt. After all, while tracking her whereabouts, Ed clearly had a desire to test Lil. He wanted to see for himself if she was still glowing and ecstatic, he wanted to confirm she still had her light. He wasnt sure what kind of great judge he thought himself to be, but Ed was arrogant until the end. And Lil had turned a blind eye to his arrogance.

*She has already forgiven me once for cheating on her about my identity, but thats no guarantee that shell do it again*

Ed penned down his last sentence.

[ So, if you truly were alive, I just wanted to see you again. ]

After finishing his letter, Ed buried his face in his clasped hands.

*Crazy Stupid Youre the worlds worst moron*

His own voice rang in his ears for a long time

\*\*\*

It had been awhile since he sent the letter through Elodie, the head maid. He didnt know how long hed been waiting exactly, but it was agonisingly long for Ed. And no matter how long he waited, there was no response at all.

Ed checked his watch. The needle had already passed midnight.

*She must be asleep. Or she mightve never woken up since she collapsed earlier today. Either that or the maid has left the letter in a corner where she couldnt see it Or, perhaps she has finished reading it just now and is writing her reply*

But Ed knew best that Lil would never write back.

Eds pale hand rubbed his earlobe out of habit. It wasnt until his hands started to shake, that he left his room. His legs moved on their own without any conscious thought. Not knowing where he was going, Ed walked through galleries and corridors until he eventually entered an empty boudoir. When he swung open the door to the terrace, the night wind howled fiercely and the waves crashed like a tide. He stepped onto the terrace and leapt over the railing without hesitation. Ed landed on the second-floor terrace directly below and looked at the tightly closed curtains through the windows.

Seeing the familiar sight, he only then realised where he had gone.

It was just a week ago that he knocked on this window with an excited heart.

This realisation finally brought him back to reality. Bewildered, Ed stared at the windows and curtains that would never open for him again. The area around his chest burned and he let out a breath as if he had been holding it in for too long. When Ed raised his hand and covered his mouth, his chest wheezed as his shoulders rose and fell heavily. No matter how much he tried to calm down, his body wouldn't listen. Eventually, his laboured breathing became too much to bear and his head began to ring loudly. Ed stumbled and slid down with his back against the window. Wrapping his arms around his crouched body, he poured out his despair.

Suddenly, the glass door opened, causing Ed to raise his head reflexively. Lil, who was coming out to the terrace, stopped walking and looked down at him. But as soon as their eyes met, the door banged shut.

Ed hid his face in frustration.

*As expected, she hasn't even read the letter. I should consider myself lucky if she hasn't already used it as firewood. Who in their right mind would want to read a letter? But what should I do now? How can I hope that she will understand how I feel if I can't reach her through letters or words..?*

Then, with a squeak, the door opened again. As Lil remained out of sight, only her voice could be heard.

Come on in.

Stalling for a bit, Ed wiped his face with his sleeve, hoping Lil hadn't heard his obnoxious sobs. He tidied up his eyes, using the reflection in the window as his mirror. Despite his efforts, his red eyes didn't improve. A part of him even started to wish that when he entered her boudoir, Lil would feel sorry for him.

*I'm in desperate need of a little pity or something. Then maybe there's a chance.*

As soon as Ed entered the boudoir, he looked around. The curtains stopped fluttering the moment the door was closed. Searching for spots where the head maid might've left his letter, he found it on a silver tray at the corner of the desk. He'd been worried that the head maid might have left his letter out of sight. But seeing Lil walking to the desk and simply passing the silver tray made his heart sink. And on top of that, the letter was unopened.

Ed blurted out his question unconsciously.

Didn't you read the letter?

The way his voice choked and shook felt embarrassing. Ed quickly shut his mouth in surprise, partly due to the unfamiliar sound of his own voice and partly because Lil looked back at him coldly.

Without changing her expression, Lil turned her eyes to Roahn's map.

Is the wagon ready? You said it's due to arrive today.

Even though it took a while for Ed to answer, Lil never looked at him again.

Oh, uh It should have arrived by now.

Ed finally realised what was going on and walked over to the desk. The illusion he had made with his own selfishness shattered.

*Liloa has neither read the letter nor is showing me any mercy The only reason she let me in was because we still had work to do*

Even if Lil didnt leave his house right away, Eds hopes vanished without a trace. Despair weighed him down and swallowed up all the possibilities that he had been holding on to.

Can a wagon pass this way? Our jailbreak coincides with the day of the arrival of the merchants, so there must be cargo piled up on the roadsides.

Standing next to Lil, Ed studied the map. However, the familiar sight that he could draw with his eyes closed, suddenly looked blurry.

Yeah, it should be fine.

In addition, Ed realised one more possible ending.

*Liloa will leave as soon as the job is done. And by then, Ill no longer have the reasons nor the right to hold on to her anymore. Maybe everything will come to an end like this, and I will never see her again*

When a teardrop fell on Roahns town hall, Ed panicked and fumbled around his eyes. Lil, whose finger moved over the map as if she had seen nothing, pointed to the next area.

What about here?

Its

..?

His voice was still terribly hoarse. Ed covered his mouth and cleared his throat a few times.

Its also okay there.

Just in case, well have to try pulling the wagon out before the scheduled date.

Lil continued as if she didnt care about him at all.

*No doubt, she decided beforehand to consistently ignore both the letter and me. Its making me feel a little embarrassed*

Chapter 219

*Looking back on this whole ordeal, and despite what my purpose was, my behaviour truly was shallow and disrespectful. The crazy things I did in Amiaeng, the words I used to threaten Cesar with Liloas life as the collateral, everything And unfortunately, I cant undo that past*

Even though he knew it was useless, his mind still wandered in regret. And like an inescapable maze, it only led him closer in. Now, Ed couldnt point out when the regret had exactly started and whether there was even an end to it.

Ed tried to suppress the sadness that was about to overwhelm him.

The rustling sound made by papers being overturned suddenly stopped. Lil didnt say anything for a while, but then.

Why are you crying?

It didnt sound like she was actually expecting an answer, nonetheless, Ed tried, with a clear stammer in his voice.

Sorry, I did

it just hurts my heart but

Even if you go on like this, nothing will change.

With difficulty, Ed nodded his head. He was afraid that if he opened his mouth even slightly, a sound that Lil didnt want to hear would escape. But instead, his neck contracted and hiccup-like breaths were expelled involuntary. Eds attempts to stop it didnt go his way and in the end, he had no choice but to hold his breath. Ironically, it was the kind of sobbing he had forgotten about since childhood.

Stop.

Lil rubbed her forehead exhaustedly. As she never looked back at Ed, he could only see her sighing from her side profile.

Im already tired enough as it is.

Lil spoke firmly. It was a tone that didnt allow Ed to look forward to anything.

*Just until yesterday, we were able to hold hands and properly face each other*

That sense of loss, even though they were together now, kept stirring up his emotions.

And you know everything anyway, so you know what is waiting for me when I leave this place. That alone is enough to give me a headache But what the hell is this? Are you asking me to read that and somehow understand you? If you had any sense of shame, you wouldnt have put such a burden on me

Ed was overcome by short, intermittent breaths and couldnt bring himself to stop. Thinking that he could calm down if he managed to hold Lils hand, he carefully extended his fingers towards her. Lil, however, swung her arm before they could even touch.

The sound of gritting teeth was heard from between her pursed lips.

*Perhaps I made a mistake*

Finally fed up, Lils twisted mouth spewed out the words she had been trying to hold in.

Ah! In all this chaos I nearly forgot. Youre a human being who doesnt even need to do that kind of thing; understanding others. In your life, did you ever try to understand someone else, or could you simply never be bothered to do so?

How How could you possibly think Id still want to be involved with you? Who in the world is that hand reaching for? Do you perhaps believe you are entitled to it? Im truly appalled by the fact that such an arrogant thought process is even possible

Is it because you lived a life surrounded by power? Im so sorry for not realising that sooner! You see, its so far from my own reality that I cant even imagine it

Unfortunately for you, I dont have a big enough heart to forgive your rich arrogance.

You have everything! So why should I, who has nothing, try to understand you?

Agh! Did you really think I wouldnt mind because Ive lived a life similar to that of a bug? Did you expect me to cry and shed tears out of emotion if you told me that you would never betray me again?

Why are you all messing with me? Every single one of you! Im so sick of it!

No! I never thought of you that way.

Eds desperate reply never reached Lils ears because her excited breath ran irregularly. Her arteries were flushed in the nape of her neck and throbbed unbearably.

*Just as Levi said, the most harmful person to Liloa right now is me*

Even so, Ed couldnt get out of there right away as he couldnt get his feet to move.

Youre so damn self-absorbed! Thats how you could do this. You have no idea and obviously dont care how youll make the other person feel or how long they had to put up with you. Because you were simply born with such power!

Your mindset! That mindset you showed in Amiaeng, the one where you can treat another recklessly as long as it isnt someone close to you, thats the kind of mindset I hate the most! What was it that you first said to me in Amiaeng? You asked for my price You! You asked me how much! And now I have to discover that you knew me all along?! You even saw my portrait!

And despite all that, you still dared to stand her before me? Acting like you cant stand being hated? Being all shaking up because I didnt read one measly letter?

Did you think Id feel sorry for you after hearing that confession? Its already disgusting enough as it is how this whole messed up situation came about just because you developed some feelings for me, but you even dared to use it as an excuse right into my face?! Do you know how much I wanted to vomit when the word love came out of your mouth?

Ed couldnt even think about denying it. He was already disgusted with himself, but Lils disgust towards him was even worse. Ever since he had come face to face with her in Amiaeng, his behaviour had been nothing but ugly.

Dont appear in front of me like this just to put your own mind at ease.

Lil looked at the city of Roahn again but threw her quill down almost immediately.

Damn it!

Ed couldnt ask for forgiveness nor dare to ask for understanding. He just stood there dumbfounded, succumbing to the feeling of helplessness he was facing for the first time in his life.

Unable to do anything about it, Ed watched the rapidly paling Lil. Her complexion reflected in the dim light of the lantern wasnt looking good at all. Lil, whose face had been down for a long time, lifted her head with difficulty. She then folded the map and tidied up around her while her voice sounded distressingly subdued.



Im leaving.

Where to?

Lil didnt look at him. Ed stood back and watched her pack the maps and blueprints. He realised that what he had long feared for was finally happening. It was the moment Lil was about to abandon him, who was nothing but pitiful. Ed instantly became as immobile as a man in shackles and as quiet as if he had reached the eye of a storm.

When Lil turned her head towards the silenced man, Ed was met with a pair of eyes filled with hatred. It was deeper and more blatant than any hostility Lil had ever shown him.

It was arguably the most painful moment of the day for Ed, but strangely, no more tears came out.

Lil turned around straight away. She turned around and walked resolutely. The distance between him and her widened again as if they had never been close to begin with.

Ed closed his eyes as he watched the door close and Lils cry echoed in his ears for a long time.

{ You have everything! So why should I, who has nothing, try to understand you? }

Up until now, Ed had been completely misguided. After all, in his eyes, Lil was the one who had everything he wanted to hold. Between the two of them, he was the only one who felt drawn to her and her radiance. He longed to hover around her and was eager to get closer. Whenever he saw her in front of him, he was reminded of the side of him that made him feel miserable and deprived, but Lil never knew that. She didnt know how great she was and how much he adored the world inside her. So it was only now and terribly late at that, that Ed understood the void that Lil had been keeping.

It was pierced, cut open, and brought out for him to see

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## Chapter 220

Psst Psst! Psst! Psst Psst!

A hand sticking through the narrow bars was clutching some leftover food. However, the pigeon they were trying to lure merely waddled in front of it and tilted its head as if contemplating whether to eat it or not.

Ah, come on Grandpa! Do it right!

At the complaints from inside the bar, Alain pressed his lips even harder in an attempt to attract the bird.

Psst Psst! You damn pigeon, Psst Psst!

But while his hairy arm waved to urge the bird, the fluctuating food only frightened the pigeon instead. So after snapping at it once, the bird hastily flew away.

Frustrated, Alain forcefully threw the food down and grabbed the bars.

Since when cant birds be bothered to eat when they are presented with such an amazing feast?

Sensing Alains failure, Joe, who was supporting Alain on his shoulders, tapped Alain on the ankle. Then another sailor shouted annoyedly.

Just come down already, get down!

The windows of the underground prison were as small as two palms, with hideous bars embedded in them. From the outside, they were in contact with the ground, but from the prisoners perspective, they were where the wall and the ceiling met, high up in a corner, appearing like a small moon in the dark sky.

Alain, who came down to the floor, smacked his lips and looked at the bars with regret. Words criticising his failure poured in as soon as he hit the ground.

Damn it! Forget escaping, wed be lucky if we dont starve to death before then!

Hey, who wouldve known that we would be born as a human and die as a grape?

Damn it. That vineyard reminder again

The sailors, who expressed their dismay in turns, quickly grabbed the forks and knives, and began poking at their own shackles, as if they were suddenly reminded of their vow to escape. The tableware was provided to Alain as a joke, but while the tines of the forks were already bent in all directions like the foot of an octopus, the knives had been bent beyond recognition after having been used as levers.

After being engrossed for a while, the guards footsteps began to echo from afar. Instantly the rattling noise of the irons stopped at once and someone belatedly hissed to warn the others. The sailors held their breath and waited for the jailer to pass. The sound of rats crossing the ceiling was particularly loud. In the dark, where there was only faint moonlight coming in, the white reflection of their eyes lifted up as they looked at each other alternately.

*Rumble, thump!*

The jailer who locked the iron door went away.

Sighs of relief flowed from everywhere. Just as the screeching of metallic was about to resume again, someone threw a fork away in a burst of displeasure.

I cant do this!

The sailors, who had to work all day in shackles while eating only bread and soup, were extremely sensitive. Prior to this, when the utensils werent provided yet, it was only necessary to eat and sleep. But now that locking picking was added to their list of activities, the atmosphere in the cell became increasingly threatening. And now that todays duty failed and they were unable to catch the pigeon, the grievances they thought they had buried poured out again.

Who the hell was that bastard who shot first anyway?\* Hes the reason why were all locked up here and having a hard time!

Why are you holding on to the past again? Who knows? It could be Julio or someone from the Navy for all we know.

Another pointless debate was about to begin. For the past month, a fight between sailors was guaranteed whenever this subject was mentioned.

Stop! Dont start with this again!

Alain became agitated.

You morons! It makes no difference whether it was Julio or the Navy. What matters is that were in Gualtiero. And the longer we stay here, the smaller our chances of survival are. Even if the Navy opened fire first, we still wont be getting a fair trial and are just destined to become one of those hanging grapes. That is our truth!

And how does Grandpa know that?

A different voice intervened the irritated one.

Dont you know? Grandpa used to work for the Imperial Merchant Marine, basically licking the Empires ass at that time. So he understands how the Empire works!

You crazy bastard! Dont you know how many were rescued by Grandpa back then, so why do you even have the right to talk about asses in front of our old man here?

Those Empires bastards, the old men who worked under them, and the Black Whale are all the same! This Empire, this damn Empire!

Is this guy out of his mind, why are you dragging the Black Whale into this again?

The voice next to the sailor interrupted with a sharp blow.

The Captain is dead, asshole. He wasnt even given a proper funeral, so what are those insults for?

That bastard in a uniform as flashy as the Admirals pierced his stomach

At those words, silence shrouded the room. Even the sailor who insulted Lil couldnt dare to resent Lil any more. Before long, someone muttered a prayer.

Lil Schweiz, the Black Whale, rest in peace forever

Wise and merciful. Rest in the arms of Mother Ocean

In the suddenly solemn atmosphere, everyone threw a eulogy.

To die before this old body Killed by the damned Navy no less

Alain muttered with wet eyes. Alain, who had become a leader in the absence of a captain, felt the captains absence more than ever and gazed out the window where Lils neck was most likely hanging

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As a bustling city, there were many luxury inns in Roahn. Although it was rare to have a place that would welcome guests after midnight, there were at least a few who did, so Lil was able to avoid homelessness.

After successfully renting a room, Lil opened a window and stretched out on the bed. The air in the room was still stuffy, despite the low temperature of the chilly autumn night. threatening dark clouds gathered as if it was about to rain. The dark grey mass covered the clear sky and was followed by a sound similar to the skys guts twisting. There was no rain yet, but the thunder had already started.

Lil took a deep breath. The resentment that had risen to the tip of her throat slowly descended.

*I was the one who really wanted to cry, and the urge to scream Why do you keep making me suffer? boiled over. Ed has told me countless lies with a straight face, yet he dared to send me a letter At the end of the day, whether we talked about it now or later, this relationship wouldve ended anyway*

Lil had no regrets.

She shuddered, not in disgust but because she couldnt get rid of her pouring thoughts.

*Ed really cried like a child. Not to mention, he couldnt control his breathing while shedding tears like that. His clumsy attempts to hold back by squeezing his eyelids only led to his tears flying through the air It was a pitiful sight, especially considering hes a head taller than me with a formidable physique*

Lil turned over and buried her face in her pillow.

*It wouldve been easier if Ed truly had been evil*

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The rooms only furnishings were a bed, a tea table, a simple desk, a bookshelf, and a chest of drawers. Because there was no suitable space, Lil spread Gualtieros blueprints on the bed. When the map was touched by her quill, the paper sank like it was going to pierce a hole through the spire of Gualtiero.

A knock was heard at the same time. But when Lil initially ignored it, a knock on the door was heard again.

*I definitely told them the room doesnt need any cleaning*

Irritated, Lil opened the door as much as a span.

Levi poked her head out.

Lil, good morning.

Levi? How did you

Levi laughed softly, and Lil abruptly opened the door. Entering the room, Levi placed her bag on the tea table. The bouquet she brought with her, was put in the empty vase already standing on that same table. She then proceeded with shutting the window and inspecting the furniture for cleanliness, as if she had come to look after Lil.

With no more outside air flowing through the window, warm sunlight could permeate the room.

As you are aware, I currently reside in the Marquess residence. And because Edgar knows where you are, which can sound bleak and creepy, I know, he insisted on forcing me to pay you a visit, so he gave me your address Remember, Lil, that this is his land. If you want to flee, you must travel far, far away Of course, you couldnt leave the city because you left after midnight the night before and even today

Its fine.

Lil expected it anyway. She came out because she didnt want to be in his space anymore, she never had the intention of hiding in a place that no one knew. In addition, she simply couldnt afford to waste time by looking for a place like that. That was what she meant when she said it was fine. But Levi stopped unpacking the bag and looked back at Lil.

*Shes probably thinking that its just another love fight and that I hope Ed will come after me*

That was what Levis expression was telling her to some degree, but Lil was so accustomed to being misunderstood by Levi that she now lightly overlooked her gaze.

Oh, is that so? I misunderstood.

Levi saw the messy bed and led Lil to the tea table instead. Lil obediently sat across from her and noticed that the flowers Levi had bought gave off a pleasant scent.

Then, if thats the case, why did you simply choose to leave? What about your treatment?

Im sorry.

Youve gotten a lot better, but you shouldnt be leaving the house without medicine. Or else, your whole body will start to ache right away. What kind of recklessness is that?

*Shes right. I actually considered contacting just Levi separately.*

Anyway, so you two just dont want to see each other for now thats what it looks like

Lil didnt want to hear Levis murmur, so she only asked what she was curious about.

Umm, Levi, could you prescribe some medicine in advance for me?

Levi, who was carefully grinding the herbs, squinted her eyes at Lil.