

## **Northwest 221**

### *Chapter 221*

Arent you asking for that a bit too late? You should have at least asked before you ran away.

Im sorry. I did it impulsively.

Well, thats all right. Im going back to the Imperial Clairaut soon anyway If you dont want to be examined by Edgar, I will gladly do what you ask for.

Are you going back?

Levi nodded while she mixed the herbs with the water. Even though Lil didnt have many conversations with Levi or built a deep bond with her, she felt sad for no reason. At the same time, Lil now realised she had never truly expressed her gratitude or sincerity to Levi, so she asked again with regret.

When are you going back?

I need to be back in a month, so I have to leave in at least two weeks.

You mustve had a lot of hardships because of me. I didnt even have the chance to repay you as Ive been so busy

Thats all right, I dont need a reward anyway. Your case was a great experience for me too. It was like witnessing a miracle, anyone who studies medicine wouldve liked to experience that. Im actually the one who should thank you for your courageous recovery.

Thank you for everything, Levi.

Instead of answering, Levi handed over the glass of water with medicine. The familiar smell stung Lils nostrils. Lil held her breath and tipped the glass. After finishing taking her medicine, Levi grabbed Lils hand.

Whenever you thank me, please speak more casually. I really cant stand that excessive respect.

Still

But if you want to draw this line because we cant be friends, then feel free to keep doing that.

Its not like that, I just feel deeply indebted to you as my doctor rather than a friend

Then why dont you feel like were friends now? Weve been taking so many walks together. And I didnt just tell anyone about my rejection of Linhardts marriage proposal. Its a story that only a very few people close to me know.

Lil realised it a beat too late.

*Thats why she told me such personal stories during my rehab walks*

Lil hadnt made new friends in years and had forgotten all about it.

*Its been a long time since Ive had a pleasant conversation with someone I thought of as a friend.*

This made her suddenly remember an old friend who was still at Sesbrons court.

Im sorry. I didnt notice

Levi stared at Lil with her eyes clearly expressive of the answer she was hoping for. Lil eventually wrinkled her nose and replied.

I can be quite clueless

Really? Well, seeing how slow you pick things up, you mustve been having a hard time.

Im sorry Im so sorry.

By the way, Lil, can I ask you a personal question? Just one.

Lil shivered in anticipation when she was met with eyes glimmering with hope.

What is it?

Levi, now smiling, wrapped Lils hands in both of her hands.

You know, I really like you and I think that youre pretty cool too. You know how to shoot and can wield a sword. One time I noticed you sneaking out in the middle of the night, so I followed you to give you a good scolding. Only to be caught off guard when I saw the way you took out a crossbow and positioned it in your arms. I was so taken aback that I hid behind the door and watched. You were obviously practising, but it didnt appear to be working because your muscles were still stiff. It was then that I understood why you were so obsessed with meat all the time.

*As rifles arent suitable for practising at night because the sound of the gunshot would wake the whole mansion, I practised with a crossbow to avoid being noticed I never expected that Levi herself would know all about it*

Lil looked away in embarrassment at the thought that her clumsy practice sessions had been seen by others.

Oh, did you see that?

I also saw you sparring with Edgar by chance. Its the first time Ive met someone like you, so Im truly amazed. If only you had looked a little less busy, I wouldve bothered you some more. Its a pity So before I go, I wanted to ask you this question.

What

Levi rolled her eyes as if trying to pry into Lil soul. The latter just waited patiently for Levis busily moving eyes to calm down again. Soon enough, Levi opened her mouth cautiously.

Your real name. I actually dont know much about how the imperial aristocrats world works, mostly because I dont have someone to talk to about that, but Im quick-witted enough to not ask you for your last name. Id just like to remember the real you.

It was an ardent gaze that couldnt be refused. Lil looked at the flowers with a sigh, then awkwardly pronounced her real name.

Lil Liloa.

Levi was delighted and clapped her hands like a bird flapping its wings.

Liloa. Ill remember that. When I come back to Roahn later, lets talk a little longer then, all right?

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The Devito Harbour was clear.

At dawn, when the sun had just risen, the marina was still quiet. As Lil passed by, she noticed the sea dyed by morning light and small yachts moored at the dock, rolling on the shallow waves. The smell of well-cooked fish, the aroma of wine, as well as the heat from the bonfire all filled Lils nose. People gathered around a fire exchanged greetings, while young errand boys from the flower market stands were busy delivering morning bouquets.

Lil drew her collar up. The tip of her nose felt cold, possibly because she was used to living in the South or because the morning was simply chilly. Looking straight ahead, she spotted Gualtiero, which was from her position not much bigger than the size of a fingernail, on a hill on the far outskirts.

She walked through an alley and came out to the other side of the port which was bustling with auctions of live seafood and other imported goods. Crowds of seagulls flew closely around and behind the roaring crowds, looking for fish or grain that had fallen to the ground. When a wagon perilously approached from the other side while trying to meticulously avoid the street vendors and people, the flock of seagulls fluttered up in unison.

As the birds chirped and flew overhead, the carriage rattled past her. Lil swerved to avoid a shower of stale water splashing due to the wagons wheels hitting a puddle. Its black water sprang up and flew through the air like waves. After being distracted by such an incident, Lil was taken aback by the sudden appearance of a man leaning against the stake next to her. Although the man appeared to be a beggar at first glance, she then noticed that he wore fine but sloppy clothes, as if they had been washed a long time ago. The man remained motionless despite being hit by the stale water.

*He must be used to it Come to think of it In a city of this size, there are bound to be homeless people. Actually, it wont be anything special even if there are quite a lot*

Just as Lil was about to move forward, she suddenly felt a faint sense of dj vu when she saw the mans face

*No way But No two people could possibly look alike that much. And most of all, that mountain-like size is unique only to him*

Lil had already passed the man but retraced her steps until she was in front of him again. His supposedly red hair had turned almost black, probably due to dirtwater and dust, and his beard had grown thick like a bush. Everything about him appeared to be rugged.

Commodore?

Although the man flinched, he merely opened the bottle he was holding and drank it.

Youve come to the wrong place.

*Why is Commodore Sagastar standing here like this? He looks like he hasnt washed for days, no, weeks even. I knew he would be in shock from what happened, but I never expected him to be as devastated as this. Can it perhaps be that there hasnt been a response from the Retiro residence to inform him of my condition?*

Lil tapped him on the shoulder out of gratitude for her unexpected luckthough the same couldnt be said for Sagastar.

Just go on your way

While Sagastar looked down at Lil, his hand abruptly stopped pouring out the drink. Lil returned his gaze by raising the brim of her hat, which had concealed most of her face.

M-M-Miss Liloa?

Im still in a bit of a pickle here, so Id like you to keep my name quiet, Commodore.

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Confirming her identity based on her response, Sagastar dropped the bottle which then fell and rolled over the ground. The gurgling contents caught Lils eye, but Sagastar seemed to see only her. In the meantime, an actual homeless man snatched the bottle of alcohol and fled.

Youve woken up? Since when?

When an unbearable smell came out of his mouth, Lil tightened the muscles in her face so as to not commit the unconscious rudeness of wrinkling her nose.

A little over a week, maybe ten days now.

Ahh

..?

Sagastar suddenly fumbled. While reaching out with the intention to kiss the back of her hand, he withdrew upon noticing his own blackened one. He had even already bent his leg as if he was about to kneel, then, as if he remembered something, he drew his attention towards an unidentified wrapping paper next to the stake. He picked it up and handed it to Lil.

I see, Im glad you woke up.

Inside the wrapping paper were several yellowed and withered plant stalks. Lil couldnt figure out why the hell Sagastar gave her this.

*Is he asking me to throw it away for him? Or No way!*

Hesitating, Lil asked.

Um, was this supposed to be a bouquet?

Embarrassed, Sagastar pulled the bouquet and checked the inside of the wrapping paper. In it were flowers that had been stuck there til they finally had met the end of their fate.

Lil gave a moments attention to the dried petals that had already fallen off next to the stake.

Wait here for a moment. Ill get you another one.

Commodore, theres no need for that.

It will only take a minute, really. Ill call someone from the residence Oh! Whats the date today? I must have been out of my mind. Ive been holding on to this since I was kicked out of Retiros residence for the third time

Sagastars sad eyes watched the stems that began to crumble.

I didnt know it had withered like this Despite my shame, I went to visit, but Sir Edgar was so furious that I had to go back without seeing you

Lil mindlessly scratched the back of her neck upon hearing about the part where Ed had gone into a fit of rage.

Its the first time Ive seen him lose his temper like that. Whenever he was angry, he was rather expressionless and silent, which made us afraid enough as it was already But who the hell knew that the alternative was even worse or maybe hed been awake for a few days because he didnt even look like a human being. I actually screamed and ran away cowardly I shouldve been made to pay for my crime right away, which is making me even more embarrassed.

Lil pretended to soothe him while trying to imagine what the payment Sagastar was talking about meant. After all, she herself resented Sagastar no matter how well his intentions at that time were. In the end, he did everything to throw himself at her. Her wound wasnt skin-deep, but her whole torso had been pierced It made a fatal wound that couldnt be taken lightly. In addition, Lil still had to deal with the aftermath of the strong medicine that woke her up, and she couldnt go out like she did now without the medicine Levi prescribed. No matter how hard she tried not to blame Sagastar, Lil couldnt change her mind that easily.

*If only he had stopped himself from pushing his dagger for a moment and listened to me But of course, he wouldnt have shown such mercy to those he judged as southern pirates, even if his opponent was about to die.*

Im grateful that you feel that way. In fact, you dont have to blame yourself that much. At the time, I was an unknown person who was aiming for the Admiral, so your response was justified. Who could blame you?

But I

Sagastar wiped his face in embarrassment. As he did so, soot smeared along his fingers that ran down his cheeks.

*He probably means that hes sorry for puncturing my belly, but he cant bear to say it with his own mouth.*

Lil turned her foot toward a store and pointed to a bar near it.

We have a lot more to talk about.

What can I do with this sorry heart?

Sagastar followed Lils pace, but out of fear of getting too close, he kept his distance. He was compelled to keep even the slightest etiquette.

Lil turned her head, conscious of Sagastars presence behind her.

Dont be too sorry, actually, Im the one whos grateful that you stopped the battle.

I just did what I was supposed to do. Continuing the battle just wasnt right

Lil stopped her steps and looked back at Sagastar.

If I had been killed the way I was, no one wouldve known anyway.\*

Sagastars face, which had been wearing a faint smile, hardened in an instant. Lil observed Sagastar with her eyes hidden under the shade of her hat.

*Given that he was forced to leave the position next to the admiral because of an incident involving me, and him now seeing how entangled Ed still is with me, Commodore Sagastar is actually the one I should be the most wary of. He also knows that Ive been to the South, and more than anything, that Im alive. So, hes definitely not someone to laugh at just because he was kicked out by his superior and sat in the harbour like a beggar.*

No one wouldve known? What do you mean?

*What do I mean? Was there someone who knew me?*

This time, it was Lils turn to ask, dumbfounded.

Then who knew me?

Why else would Sir Edgar have treated you

Stop.

Lil paused abruptly, immediately feeling that she cut off Sagastar too hastily, but there was no way to reverse her reaction. However, she would rather go on pretending not to know anything than feel humiliated by this.

..?

Thats not it.

What?

That was just a rash guess. I have nothing to do with Admiral Retiro.

Ah, my bad. I understand.

*Thats what hes saying, but its hard to confirm if Sagastar really believes my words.*

Lil had lifted her chin in an attempt to show her frustration, but Sagastar straight-up apologised to her. What confused Lil even more was hearing Sagastar taking back his rude guess.

*Was Ed so obvious that even Sagastar noticed? Didnt he know the implications of all this? Lil Schweizs entanglement with Admiral Retiro doesnt look good in itself, but Liloa and the Marquess of Roahn is a much greater disaster. If it becomes known to the public that Im involved with a noble family of the level of a marquess, my brother wont stand still. My brother is a human being capable of far more than one could ever imagine*

Lils thoughts flooded in as she walked to the bar. She was unfamiliar with Sesbrons recent power structure because she had lived away from the mainland for a long time, but she was confident of one thing.

*The Emperor has a reason to leave Ed alone, but my brother, on the other hand, has no reason to do so.*

Lil continued walking with all kinds of anxious imaginations clouding her mind

Careful, my lady!

Ack!

A caravan ran right in front of Lils nose, creating a wind strong enough to blow her hat off. Her near-death experience made her heart thump widely. Looking up at Sagastar who pulled her from behind, Lil pressed down on her surprised chest.

T-thank you.

Sagastar was suddenly taken aback by his own action and quickly let go of Lil.

Im very sorry for the way I look.

Thats okay.

Arent your clothes stained now? Im sorry. I shouldnt have held you for that long.

No, its fine.

Still, Sagastar was persistent in his apologies. He didnt stop until they entered the bar and took a seat inside a cubicle.

Since it was morning, it was more like a restaurant than a bar, but Sagastar insisted until the end that he should take her to a high-class restaurant, saying that she didnt deserve a mere bar. Exhausted from his zeal, Lil slumped in her seat. Sagastar looked at the stretched Lil with pity before telling her to wait for a moment and disappeared with a servant.

*That servant mustve been watching his immobile master leaning against a stake He followed Sagastar the moment we began to move.*

Lil didnt bother to run after Sagastar. It was because the servant who was welcoming his owner who had finally returned to his senses after a few days seemed to have a lot to say. In the meantime, Lil was thinking about how to convince Sagastar. She was doubtful whether Sagastar would be persuaded by a mere woman who had nothing else but her position to negotiate with.

While internally debating for a while, a boy wearing a narrow-brimmed hat suddenly stood by the table, holding an armful of flowers.

What?

Lil shook her head to tell the boy that he mustve made a mistake with his delivery.

Are you sure? Here. Table 6 by the window.

No, you must be mistaken!

After saying that, Lil noticed the card placed on top of the bouquet. With an ominous feeling, Lil pulled it out and turned it over.

[ Congratulations on your recovery, Victor Sagastar. ]

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Lil sighed and handed some coins to the boy, who then put the huge basket of lilies down, counted the money, and walked away with a big smile. Lil rubbed her brow while staring at the blooming flowers. She didnt particularly dislike the flowers, but thinking about Sagastars intentions just exhausted her. As a result, Lil, caught in this uneasy foreboding that things wouldnt end here, sighed even deeper.

Moments later, Lil had to greet Sagastar amidst a stack of presents. Sagastar, who became much more recognizable after washing himself and changing his clothes, took off his hat and greeted her as if this were actually their first time meeting. Unsurprisingly, Lil now obediently accepted his manners.

Will this be all right? I realised I dirtied your clothes earlier, so I thought you may need this.

Lil hadn't even opened the gift box yet, but judging from what Sagastar said, she figured it contained clothes. Lil's eyes wandered towards the servant who had to buy and carry all those presents in the blink of an eye.

*The reason why Sagastar is acting like this is, firstly, because he wants to change Eds sentiments towards him, and secondly, because hes conscious of my family. If Sagastar hadn't been married, he might even have offered to take responsibility for damaging my body.*

I want to keep my heart grateful, so I won't refuse.

Yes, please accept it. Because the burden on my heart is great enough as it is.

Lil nodded gently, offering Sagastar the seat across from her. Sagastar behaved so politely that a run-down bar like this suddenly felt like a salon. And thanks to this, all the attention from the people inside the bar was on them, compelling Lil to lower her voice, aware of the dozens of eyes on her.

Commodore, thank you for all these gifts, but I actually have something else to ask of you.

Is there anything you want from me? I'd be happy to give you anything.

Even though you did the right thing back then, Commodore my injury inevitably weakened me, and both my body and soul suffered. There's something I must do, but because my recovery is slow, I'm looking for someone who could do it in my stead. If there could be at least someone

What's it about? I'd gladly offer my help.

Lil recalled the identity guarantee she had received from Cesar.

*If it were a random request of release, Sagastar would flatly refuse to assist. However, I'm now in possession of an official guarantee. I don't want this to go to trial. I want to legally end the investigation as soon as possible, even if it was only for the sailors who were held as hostages.*

If you think this request is too much, you can stab me once again.

Sagastar jumped up and waved his hands.

What are you saying?!

I mean I don't care what happens anymore. As long as the crew are all right.

What?

When Lil leaned towards Sagastar, the commodore leaned in towards her as well. Lil spoke quietly, taking care to not let her voice escape from their table.

Please release the crew before the trial.

You mean the sailors who were held hostage with you?



I know its an unreasonable request. Its a pity our first meeting turned out to be so disastrous, but Id only like to ask you this just once

Delaying their serious topic in order to give him time to think, Sagastar cleverly shifted their topic.

Our first meeting? Why, dont you remember me?

Lil pretended to be embarrassed and smiled vaguely. She figured that Sagastar was doing this to stall their conversation and come up with various conditions, but despite knowing this, she matched his rhythm for now.

Oh, have we met in Sesbron before?

Yes. If my memory serves me right, I recall us dancing. It was a court dance, but we werent partners.

Lil opened her eyes wide in actual surprise this time.

*Sagastar and myself? At court? I dont remember this at all*

At the same time, Lil realised why Sagastar stopped himself from pushing his dagger forward, albeit belatedly.

*Sagastar stopped the battle not just because he heard me declare my identity, but also because he recognized my face*

Lil felt fortunate.

Im sorry. I dont remember

You did what?!

..?

Lil turned around at the familiar voice and saw Ed standing tall by the pile of presents. After scanning the cream-coloured gift boxes and flower baskets piled on the side of the table, his eyes went over to Sagastar. Lil looked at Sagastar as well. The nervous Commodore had already stood up and saluted for a while now. Still, Ed only kept glaring at him, who couldnt bear locking eyes with Ed and kept his stance firm by looking straight ahead. It was only then that Lil realised Ed mightve misunderstood the situation.

*Should I intervene?*

Umm

Remembering Levis words, which she didnt believe at the time, Lil never expected for Ed to actually be able to come and find her. In addition, the distance from his residence to the port wasnt so quick to traverse. While the proximity was close in terms of straight line distance, he wouldve had to turn around and come down the hill due to the residence being on a cliff.

Lil pondered whether she should involve Ed or kick him out. After all, it was clear who would benefit the most from the negotiations with Sagastar.

Sit down will you, Admiral?

Lil bit her tongue to stop herself from addressing him too informally or down right rude.

She had no reason to address Ed politely, but she felt like it would be better if they didnt appear too close in front of Sagastar.

As Ed approached, the smell of the wind became stronger, and the chill of the morning breeze reverberated when he sat next to her.

*I meant for him to take a seat next to Sagastar, why is he sitting next to me?*

Ed removed his gloves and placed them on the table before stroking his unkempt hair. The seat they sat in was so narrow that his justaucorps brushed against her shoulder. The cold outside wind that came with him seemed even colder than Lil remembered, like it was getting cooled by the heavy sins he was carrying with him.

Lil had to sit close to Ed because the wooden bench was shorter than the table. Even though he had to be aware that their arms were touching, Ed remained motionless. Lil attempted to push his arm slightly but gave up for fear of appearing ridiculous.

Perhaps realising Eds mood, Sagastar quickly explained.

This is all because I ruined Miss Liloas clothes. Those gifts are from me to make amends to her.

Still, Ed kept his stoic expression despite hearing what Sagastar just said.

*I guess this is why people always say, beyond mountains, there are mountains.\**

In her mind, Lil washed her face dry. She couldnt deny her involvement with Ed seeing the way he acted. Sagastar even seemed to understand why Ed was so prickly, and Ed didnt appear to have any intention of hiding it either.

*Why are you doing this?*

Lil herself was getting more and more nervous.

And the flowers are meant to congratulate her on her recovery. Its common courtesy Yes, thats what it is.

Ed looked startled for a moment, but immediately shut his lips. It was only a little while ago that she asked Sagastar to apologise for the assumption that she had any involvement with Admiral Retiro.

The sudden embarrassing atmosphere was all Lils doing.

After that, an awkward silence passed. Ed never intended to talk to Sagastar again, and Sagastar couldnt bear to start a conversation first either. Observing the two, Lil felt that Sagastars guilt seemed bigger than she thought. She knew that Sagastar had been promoted because of Eds full support, so she initially assumed that everything Sagastar did for her so far was his way of amending his concerns regarding his rank. However, Lil was now slowly changing her opinion on the matter. True enough, there might be concerns about his rank, but more than that, the emotional tension was high between Ed and Sagastar.

*Even a stranger would hold the view that Ed saved Sagastars life and Sagastar was now the shameless one for betraying his saviours grace.*

Lil, who was still caught between the wall and Eds shoulder, squirmed and raised herself a little.

Anyway, the Commodore and I were talking about the identity guarantees. The Admiral remembers, right? That document I showed you.

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Ed just nodded his head without saying anything. Lil was unfamiliar with him being so taciturn, however, Sagastar on the other hand, seemed accustomed to it. At first, Lil didn't believe Elodie and Sagastar when they told her that Ed didn't talk much, but she witnessed it for herself now. Ed seated Sagastar, who was in the middle of standing up, without a word of command.

So Commodore, may I continue?

Ah. Please do, Miss.

Sagastar bowed his head and appeared even more polite than when it was just the two of them.

I'm in possession of a document guaranteeing the crew's identities. The guarantor is Viscount Noirmont himself, as the merchant ship is originally registered under his name. I regret that there was friction between such an ordinary merchant ship and the Imperial Navy.

Yes. Well. Come to think of it, Captain Lemoine testified that there had been a mutiny on board. There should indeed be room for consideration.

Lil thanked him for his willingness to exercise his authority. Since Ed wasn't back in office yet, the person with the second highest authority would be Sagastar, and if he refused to move, things would get very difficult.

I understand what you mean. It would truly be troublesome if this ended in another commotion. I'll handle it quietly.

Thank you.

But there's something I've always wondered about.

Sagastar studied Ed's reaction.

*What could Sagastar be curious about?*

Lil was so stung that her mouth dried up for no apparent reason. She tried using her tongue to moisten her lips, but it wasn't enough, so she picked up the glass of beer that the waiter had left behind.

..?!

Lil turned to face her intruder. Ed had taken her drink and set it down before handing her a glass of water instead.

When Lil looked up, Ed leaned over and whispered in her ear.

No alcohol yet, Miss.

..?

The way Ed's cold breath tickled Lil's ears caught her by surprise, and a tingling sensation ran down her nape. Lil bit her tongue to keep her shoulders from jerking up. She was suppressing it so much that tears welled up in her eyes. Ed, who misunderstood her reaction, stood his ground and added.

Theres nothing more to that. Im simply acting as your doctor

Ed used honorifics while whispering, possibly to mimic Lils manner of addressing him.

*Was it real or just my imagination that Eds lips brushed against my earlobe?*

Lil swallowed her saliva and pretended to cough.

Ah, I I understand.

As Lil gulped down the water Ed gave her, Sagastar also looked the other way, cautiously avoiding any chances of possibly witnessing any informal behaviour between the two. When Lil had emptied her glass, she covered her mouth with her sleeve and moved her hips a little closer to the wall. Her attempt, of course, had little to no effect because she was already pressed up against it. Nonetheless, the movement alone made her feel a little more at ease. Lil eventually caught her breath while muttering about how pathetic her behaviour was.

*Why, of all times, do I have to lose my senses now? If I could only slap myself right now, I wouldve done so already.*

Lil then proceeded to ask firmly, trying not to show her embarrassment.

What were you curious about, Commodore?

About the ones who kidnapped you and injured Sir Edgar, werent they part of the crew under the command of that captain named Julio? Sir Edgar clearly said that there would be no combat, but as soon as we got close, a battle broke out. The captain, Julio, also remained openly hostile toward the Navy even after being captured. What kind of people are they?

Who who said there would be no battle?

Confused, Lil took turns looking at Ed and Sagastar.

Sagastar. Well talk about this later.

But

Commodore?

This time, it was Sagastars turn to appear embarrassed while alternately looking between Ed and Lil. When Lil showed no signs of backing down, Ed couldnt help but merely glare at Sagastar.

The Admiral had ordered me to only bring the captain of the ship because we had no intention of engaging a merchant ship, but it turned out that the captain of that ship was Captain Julio. I never understood this. Why did he ask me to bring such a guy? And why did he assure us that there would be no battle?

So, I investigated the case separately and found that the original captain of the ship was a registered imperial citizen. Sir Cesar himself testified that he was the owner as well as the captain and that Julio became the captain after initiating a mutiny on board. Meanwhile, the other sailors of the merchant ship all kept silent. And in anticipation of a dispute with the Viscount, the interrogation and trial were postponed What on earth happened on that ship?

Sagastar.

Despite Eds warning, Sagastar boldly continued.

No, no matter what happened, they must take responsibility and pay for their sins.

After estimating how high that payment would be, Lil answered.

Commodore, the Southerners have always maintained their initial principles well. There had been no friction with the Navy before this, and this incident was even accidental. Have you forgotten that this incident started with a regrettable cannon shot? How can foreigners prove their innocence towards the Empire if they don't even have the right to defend themselves against the Navy? In the first place, is there even an investigation underway to determine the source of the canon shot?

No matter which side the first shot came from, the result remains the same. How can you defend them? Navy officers died.

They had casualties, too.

Are you comparing the life of a Navy officer to those of the Southern race?

Sagastar affirmed Lils words without the slightest bit of hesitation.

Yes. That's precisely what should be done. We must immediately conquer the South. The League of Southern Pirates is nothing but a ruse, they must've been hiding a plot to turn against the Empire. Let us use this incident as an example to prevent it from happening again. We need to make certain that they don't ever consider challenging the Empires authority. It appears that the lessons they learned from Marchand were too insufficient to bring them to their senses. I'm not sure how many more islands those barbarians should lose before they'll become enlightened.

Lil managed to hold herself back from what she wanted to say and tried her best to put on a non-hostile face.

*This is why I have to do whatever it takes to get even Julio out of prison. If Julio is accused of being a pirate and executed, the hunt against the whole Southern race will begin with his execution. The Navy clearly has no intention of holding a proper trial*

I can't stand to see a tragedy like that happen again, that's why I'm asking the Commodore about the status of the investigation process. I'm equally hoping that this can be concluded as smoothly and fairly as possible.

How can you be so emotional? You also served in the military.

There's a difference between a war fought in compliance with war procedures and prisoner of war laws agreed between countries, and a one-sided massacre.

Massacre? It's simply justifiable retribution.

I believe the Commodore knows what justice means, right? If even only one officer dies, the South in turn has to sacrifice its entire race. Is that what's just? I think that's far too cruel.

What? I don't understand. They're barbarians, not the people of a civilised country. They have no reason and are closer to beasts. Are you saying this out of pity for them?

They're not pitiful. It's just that the Empire's conduct makes me feel sorry for them.

My lady! What in the world are you saying?!

Eds voice cut off Sagastar, who had been hyped up by Lils outrageous remark.

Sagastar.

The red-hot face immediately lowered its head.

I made a mistake.

Lil shook her head and leaned back in her chair.

No.

Mercy and forgiveness are beautiful virtues. Please forgive me for being clumsy and not understanding delicate emotions.

Cant we see them as human beings? Theyre human beings who experience emotions and suffer just like us, theyre born as children and die of old age. Just as the massacre of the people of the Empire is unacceptable, their massacre is also an unacceptable crime that will never be washed away

My lady, how many times do I have to tell you this? Theyre nothing but animals. Not one of us feels guilty about slaughtering a cow or a pig.

Then you would rather have me

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Lil was about to tell him to hang her instead, but her hand was suddenly grabbed by the man beside her. As anticipated, Lil paused at the surprising sensation and Ed didnt miss the gab.

Youre getting very passionate, Sagastar. Were you expecting me to just sit back and let this happen?

Its not like that, Sir. But I have my own doubts

The doubts were clearly directed at Lil.

*Judging from the fact that Ed had asked Sagastar to bring the captain, and that Cesar had suddenly pretended to be the captain in addition to being the ship owner, Sagastar is probably almost certain that the captain was actually me. And hes now trying to draw it out from me*

Lil quickly changed her mind.

*Whoever he might think I am, I only need to emphasise to him that he could be at risk to keep him in check.*

Even if youre not so motivated anymore after this conversation, the case needs to be handled by principle, so dont get any funny ideas.

Yes, Sir, I understand

Sagastar adjusted his expression and lowered his head.

Thank you for agreeing to do me this favour, Commodore. I will send the Viscounts guarantees by today, and I apologise for our slight altercation just now.

No, my lady. Its me who made a lot of mistakes. Im ashamed that I raised my voice against a lady.

Instead of consoling the Commodore, Lil drove her premeditated stake into him.

I'll do my best to keep my brother and His Majesty from finding out about this.

*Sagastar can never reveal this to anyone anyway. That's because no one else but him pierced the stomach of Liloa Obernyu. All he can do now is wish that I had been a nobody or that he hadn't been the one involved in this incident. The longer this goes on, the more dangerous it becomes for him.*

Lil extended the back of her hand to him, appearing to be an accomplice.

Thank you for your mercy, my lady.

Like you said, mercy and forgiveness are beautiful virtues. There are times when my delicate emotions prove to be useful.

Sagastar, who was about to press his lips on the back of Lils hand, paused for a moment, debating whether to raise his head or not, but eventually

Yes.

He kissed her hand and decided to step down. However, just before he was about to get up, he hesitated once again and then looked at Lil.

My lady, I have one last thing to tell you.

Go ahead.

He agonised for a moment, then looked straight at Lil and spoke.

No matter how much Sir Edgar denies it, I definitely believe that an attempted murder occurred on that ship.

Sagastar, stop now

But because Lil held up her hand to stop Ed, Sagastar nodded his head at her and then continued with his words.

This is an incident I can't possibly tolerate. When Sir Edgar was found, he was as good as dead. His blood had been drained to the limit, and in addition to the wounds covering his entire body, he was suffering from severe hypothermia. This scene is still fresh in my mind. His skin, torn by wounds and exposed to the water's temperature over an extended period of time, didn't look to belong to a human at all. After learning about his condition I wasn't sure whether I should be relieved that Sir Edgar was even still alive. The navy surgeon predicted that even if he awoke, the aftereffects would be severe. He also stated that he couldn't guarantee that his brain would work properly.

My lady, you must've been unaware of it.

Sagastar. Don't take wild guesses. This is getting more and more difficult to tolerate.

However, Sagastar continued to speak while looking only at Lil.

Shortly afterwards he found my lady on the verge of death, bleeding heavily. What did Sir Edgar, a doctor himself, do?\*

Lil couldn't take her eyes off his red eyes.

Looking at you two, I felt like my blood was drying up, too. Ive committed a great sin to my lady, but Im also very sorry for Sir Edgar. I wanted to tell you this, thats why I tried to visit Sir Edgars residence several times.

Sagastar finally stood up and picked up his hat.

I shall take my leave now. I hope youll accept and enjoy my gifts. And I apologise once again for my rudeness earlier.

Sagastar cast a glance at the gift. He too was trying to drive a stake into Lil. His eyes that were directed towards the gifts brought out a mix of a burning desire to massacre the Southerners as well as tears for his respected admiral. The sight left Lil breathless in a way that even after Sagastar completely exited the bar, she was still rendered speechless.

Then, out of nowhere, Lil gasped for air at the realisation of how messed up things had become.

*Where on earth did I think I was headed when I steered the ship? And where should Ive started turning the bow? When my trust towards Ed shattered? When I borrowed sailors from Jarles and Valtano? When I agreed with Cesar to leave for the principality? When I failed to stop Cesar from retiring my crew? When I was taken by the remnants of the Western Pirates? When we docked at Amiaeng? Where on earth*

Ed abruptly cut off her wandering mind.

You cant turn back time. You know that.

Lil mulled over what to say to him.

*Im sorry? You went through a lot? I thought I had managed to get away from him, but Im lingering in apology and regret once again*

You almost died because of the Bell Rock. Anyone wouldve been enraged after enduring such a situation. I bet you wouldve wanted to tear the entire crew to death. And I cant blame you, I would probably have thought the same if I had been in your shoes Contrary to what the Commodore believes in and despite you getting to that point yourself, you turned a blind eye in the end

Ed didnt seem to have any intention of leaving the narrow seat beside her, even though the seat across from them was now empty. Meanwhile, Lil thought it was ironic that she was sitting next to him and they were both facing the same direction.

So, you dont have to sit here like this. I dont blame you anymore.

Its said that the bundle that the God of Fate has created is too complicated for humans to comprehend No one wanted this to happen, but it somehow has become so twisted and intertwined anyway.

I want to unravel the present rather than the already tangled past

Lil touched her forehead tiredly.

*Its much more advantageous to keep Ed by my side in preparation of the jailbreak. It might be possible on my own, but I dont know how many more days or even months it will take. If I miss the timing, the trial will be held soon.*



Lil was a pragmatic person, who held no intention of competing with her pride over the lives of her crew.

*If one would strip away all the noble things in the world, only survival was left at the bottom. Survival is as shameful and miserable as being naked I dont have the time to be concerned about losing face*

Besides, this isnt something I would do just because you loathe me and Im trying to get back on your good side, this is something I would also do if you didnt hate me and I had nothing to gain from it.

Lil hoped that Ed would help her, but only after telling her to lick his shoes. She hoped hed intimidate her and force her to repay him. But he never made any such demands.

*He does favour after favour for me of his own accord like when he helped me free the mermaid.*

Lil looked at Eds face. He felt her gaze and similarly turned his head towards her.

I promise you that I wont bother you like I did last night.

*Although his complexion is gloomy, Ed isnt showing any signs of tears or pleas.*

Lil picked up the hat that she had left on the table.

*In any case, we cant discuss prison escape over a blueprint in a restaurant. I dont want to go to the mansion either, so that only leaves us with my own accommodation.*

Lil spoke after pressing down her hat.

Follow me.

## Chapter 226

Regardless of how magnificent the mansion in reality was, with all of its exterior lights turned off, the building was rather gloomy. The foreboding atmosphere was heightened by protruding decorations along the windows, resembling distorted faces hiding in the dark.

A faint light leaked through one of the windows. Behind it was a butler checking the outside from between the curtains before immediately closing them meticulously. The man moved away from the window and soon enough lit up the wall lamps throughout the interior. When the room was suitably bright, Venua burst through the door and came in, instigating the butler, who was up on a ladder to light the chandelier, to come down hastily.

Venua grumbled at him and sat down on the sofa in the middle of the room.

Im getting sick of this.

The butler bowed his head instantly and soothed his complaining master.

Please, we only need a little more time.

Venua glared angrily at the half-lit chandelier. The villas resident manager and servants had all been sent downstairs, so the butler had to do all the chores on his own.

This is getting frustrating!

We still need to be careful. The people of Roahn are all incredibly sharp in a way that we cannot underestimate them. How could I let them come face to face with the Prince Regent? The squad will arrive soon, so I apologise once more, but please wait two more days, no, three days.

Damn it, what am I supposed to be afraid of that I should hide in the dark? I am the son of Obernyu!

News from the Mireille family hasn't yet arrived, and Admiral Retiros intentions are unclear. Until then, it will be better to hide our claws, that's all there is to it, so please don't consider this a disgrace.

You're incompetent! If you hadn't been so lazy, this wouldn't have dragged on like this.

My apologies, Sir Venua.

Damn, you bastards. It appears you're elite in name only, but in reality, you're all useless. I brought you here after hearing how excellent you were, but what have you done since arriving here? When we return to the principality, I will reorganise the royal guards first.

The butler, no, Maxwell, the elite platoon leader of the Obernyu guards, endured and swallowed his master's verbal abuse with dry saliva.

I received some news just a while ago. Would you like to hear it now?

Venua gestured without his expression showing any signs of calming down. As Maxwell pulled the string next to the table, a shabby-dressed man came in through the side door of the inner room. The man, who came to Venua's side and bowed down to the Prince Regent, immediately opened his mouth.

I have confirmed her face at the Devito Harbour. You were right, it's Miss Liloa.

Sipping his drink, Venua's shaking hand came to a halt. Maxwell spoke on his behalf.

Are you sure?

Yes. She has been going out more frequently recently, so I was able to confirm it several times. I'm also not the only one who witnessed her. For now, she's mainly moving around the port.

Venua slammed down his glass, causing his wine to overflow. Maxwell quickly wiped the back of Venua's hand with a handkerchief and continued his interrogation.

Any chance of us being found out?

We remained undetected.

How can you be sure?

It's said that the Marquess has no interest in matters outside the residence. I heard that the Marquess of Roahn isn't even in charge of the administration of the city. Therefore, it's highly likely that he's unaware of this villa being rented.

Venua shouted and jumped up from his seat.

What a complacent way of thinking!

No, Sir. In fact, the private soldiers dispatched from the Retiro residence appear to only keep an eye on the activities of the Garni Merchants, belonging to the Duke of Mireille. So, you don't have to worry about us being discovered. However

However?

Miss Liloa herself also appears to have several escorts. It looks like a very tight structure, so it must've been ordered by the Marquess himself. She's clearly under the protection of the Marquess.

Are you saying that those mere private escorts caused this delay in your task? If you're bluffing, know that I'll cut your head off right now.

*The Marquess can mobilise not only a private army but also the city guards. Security is tight throughout Roahns downtown. And with the monsoon season approaching, merchants will move their supplies in large quantities, too. Nominally, it's said that the city's security is being strengthened for this purpose, but even we, who aren't affiliated with any merchant association, will be subjected to inspection if we move even slightly too hastily. Due to these restrictions on our movement, we can't simply*

I knew I'd have to slit your throat!

Although he shouted, the Prince Regent's cracked voice wasn't very intimidating. Soon after, the sound of coughing mixed with sputum echoed in the inner room for a while, only to be silenced when Maxwell handed his master a glass of water. After taking a sip, Venua stroked his pale face. His clumped bangs fell helplessly down his brow, casting a deep shadow over his sunken eyes.

What about my father?

Venua, who had been staggering, sat back down on the sofa. With his head leaned back, his sweaty neck glistened in the chandelier light. As he loosened his cravat as if his soaked shirt became too bothersome, he looked at Maxwell. Sensing his master's persistent gaze, Maxwell lowered his head and opened his mouth.

He has a new woman. A widow who already has six children.

Damn it.

Didn't they say that the last woman also had four sons? Still, she couldn't even conceive in the end. So don't worry too much.

But we're running out of time, time!

Venua muttered and gulped his glass down. As his hands trembled, the ice in the glass clinked loudly. Apparently, he didn't mind the liquid flowing from the corner of his mouth down to his neck, seeing how he only wiped his face after he finished his drink. Venua's red, bloodshot eyes darted around before settling on the top of the head of the prostrated man.

No matter how many guards there are, there will always be a blind spot.

Whether you lure her in or wait for an opportunity, I don't care as long as you bring her here right away. I'll give you a week. After that, I'll

The butler at Venua's feet further bowed his head.

Yes.

I'll hang your neck in front of your squad's lodge. Tell your men that. Maybe they'll finally come to their senses when they see you those slow-moving bugs

\*\*\*

For the longest time, Avar, the owner of Cocoon Merchants, hosted a weekly banquet in Roahn. The banquet, which was originally held at his mansion, continued in Gualtiero after he was imprisoned. Due to his influence extending not only in Roahn but throughout the whole Empire, many people came to admire him even while he was detained.

Standing by a window inside Gualtiero, Lil watched the spectacle of luxurious carriages entering the gloomy front yard and lining up before the entrance.

Fucking madness.

She couldn't help but curse. In Lil's imagination, there hadn't been a more hostile and frightening place than Gualtiero. Although she heard about the recent changes from Ed, seeing it with her own eyes was completely different.

*Who knew that even someone imprisoned could still host a banquet and wield so much power.*

Lil took a look around the corridor where she was standing. The ground-floor hall was meticulously decorated to reflect the tastes of the recently visiting nobles. It was so extravagant that it put the reality of being a prison to shame and created a phoney sense of cosiness. Despite all the luxury, garrisons were still stationed all along the parapet. Lil's ribcage tightened with tension as she made eye contact with one of them and swallowed her dry saliva upon feeling a sharp pain in her chest.

She lowered her veil and adjusted the hem of her dress. There would be no one to suspect her as she was buried beneath the frills of her hat, but that didn't mean she could easily escape her nervousness.

The closer she got to Avar's cell, the louder the orchestral music became. The place, reminiscent of a banquet hall, was full of laughter. Lil opened her mouth wide upon being sucked into the ridiculous sight

\*\*\*

About half an hour later.

That's right. I heard that the Marquess rarely leaves his residence

Yeah. I also only saw him from far away during the fleet protocol

Still, I heard he's very handsome. He's one of the best-looking men around

Those are the rumours that are all going around, but who knows if, in reality, he's short and very odd-looking, given how he hasn't gotten married yet?

Well, everyone who hasn't seen him in person would say the same thing

Did you actually see him?

No. Not me, but my friend's cousin's brother-in-law is a Lieutenant. The Lieutenant's daughter was watching a ceremony from the front row, and she nearly fainted because of the Marquess looks. She got dizzy and almost fell behind her chair. That daughter is a friend of my friend's cousin, and a friend from my friend's cousin is also a friend of mine, so in the end, it's like I confirmed it myself

Well, he likes corpses. So, he's probably not interested in living and breathing women

But doctors generally have a bit of an odd side, haven't they?

Chapter 227

Its also funny that the head of a prestigious family like a Marquess chose to become a doctor. I mean, why would someone like him disrespect himself like that?

Lil sipped some fruit juice as the ladies gathered together talked about their secretive lord, the Marquess of Roahn. She didnt sit near them on purpose, it just happened that she found herself in that particular spot. As Lil listened to their conversation indifferently, she turned her head to look for that Marquess, the one who was said to cause people to faint due to his incredible aura.

However, Ed couldnt be found in the banquet hall.

*It seems like he hasnt completed his side of the mission yet Sooner or later, Ed and I will let ourselves get escorted to a small room by one of the guards. To outsiders, it will look like were desperately in search of an undisturbed space to make love, but in reality, its to reach underground for a guard-free route*

*After changing our clothes in the room, well head down to the basement, split up and release the sailors from their respective cells. Well then all escape through the back door and into the garden, where the men will be loaded into the wagon already waiting for us. Today is Avars big banquet, so Gualtieros backyard is filled with wagons carrying food, utensils, and servants. It wont at all be suspicious if some of those wagons will leave the perimeter first. Ed will take the crew with guaranteed identities, while Ill transport Julios group to the port. From there theyll all board the Bell Rock and be sent out of Roahn.*

Lil observed a man and woman who began to sneak out of her peripheral vision. She was surprised that these people really couldnt control their heat even after being locked up in prison. To make matters worse, Gualtiero actually encouraged it. Everything Lil had seen so far was a manifestation of serious corruption, but Ed had told her he couldnt do anything about Gualtiero as the prison fell under Sesbrons jurisdiction and not Roahns. Nonetheless, thanks to this, Lil and Ed would be able to blend in and complete their tasks.

Lil lifted the fabric covering her chest while her eyes wandered in search of Ed.

*This damn dress has no shoulder straps, so if I dont pay attention to it from time to time, it will fall down and expose my chest.*

After adjusting her clothes, she looked up in annoyance. It was then that her eyes met

Alains.

Lil and Alain were facing each other across the long table. Lil was so embarrassed by their surprised encounter, that she slowly blinked her eyes.

*Why on earth is Alain here?*

As soon as she asked herself that question, Marenzio, who was sitting next to Alain, came into her view. Of course, he didnt seem to have seen her yet because he was too busy devouring the duck leg he was holding. As Alain glanced at Lil and tilted his head, her heart sank. He merely squinted at her while lifting the glass in his hand and sipped his drink.

*If only they would recognize me here, things would get a lot easier.*

Lils heart pounded. Just in case, she slowly lifted her veil, hoping that theyd realise it.

Now, with her fully exposed face, she stared at Alain quietly. But as soon as their eyes met, Alain spilt the drink that he had already taken in his mouth. The stream of liquid went straight down into his empty glass, refilling it again. Lil didnt know what to think of such a reaction, so she turned her gaze to Marenzio. However, Marenzios reaction was no different. He looked at Lil mindlessly and dropped his duck leg. The ripped flesh in his mouth fell as well.

Lils nose suddenly wrinkled.

*Well, it was never realistic of me to expect them to recognize me first anyway. They must be thinking Im dead Its overwhelming to think about the sadness and suffering they had to endure here in this prison*

Lil was about to call them in a way without anyone around her noticing

Al

However, her efforts were in vain, for Marenzio winked at her out of nowhere. It was the first time she saw him smiling with such a greasy face, so Lil almost threw up. It was a good thing she managed to swallow the irritation. Being on the verge of losing hope, she placed her last bet on Alain and focused on him again. The old man seemed to be misunderstanding it as well and was smoothing out the few strands of hair on his head with his spit-covered fingers.

Flabbergasted, Lil decided to give up and pulled down her veil with a shaking hand.

Marenzio rested his chin on his hands, popped up on the table and made a face that made Lil want to beat him up even more. He continued to offend Lil by sticking out his tongue and licking his lips.

Lil firmly raised her hand and gestured to slit his throat from the other side of the table.

*Ill kill you.*

That was what she meant, but Marenzio seemed to get it wrong and nodded happily. He even made a similar motion to slit his own throat and pointed with his index finger at Lil.

*Apparently, Marenzio is happy to die at my hands*

Lil gritted her teeth and clutched the barrel of the gun under her petticoat. She mightve actually pulled it out if it werent for the guard who happened to be approaching them.

What are you two doing? Im so sorry, my lady.

Seemingly, the guard got the impression that they had been rude to her and repeatedly apologised to her while pressing the heads of Alain and Marenzio down. Lil covered her angry face with a fan.

Its okay. I dont want to make a scene here, so just throw them back in their cells.

Yes, my lady.

Remember to handle it quietly, all right?

Okay. Consider yourselves lucky, you crazy bastards.

The guard struck them both on the back of the heads and led them away. At the same time, Lil pretended to spew arrogant insults from behind her fan while watching the guards remove Alain and Marenzio. While in reality, she couldnt help but admit to herself that she was almost moved to tears for a moment because she felt sorry for those crazy bastards.

Lil drank her glass of juice all at once.

Oh. My lady.

An annoying voice called Lil from behind.

What now?

Lil turned around angrily, not bothering to hide her annoyance. She was contemplating how to get rid of the man who was already irritating her, but the man snatched her hand and kissed it. His finger slipped in at once and secretly tickled Lils palm before she could even check his face. Lil, clearly fed up, glared at the man with a rotten face.

Standing in front of Lil, was a luxuriously dressed man, with a well-trimmed beard and adorned by several rings, accompanied by a group of people.

The man mustve noticed that Lil was looking at his clothes as he confidently introduced himself.

The name is Avar.

..!

*Did I hear that right?*

Lil, still hiding behind her fan, muttered incessantly.

*Shit. Why is this guy here?*

Hahahaha! Today is a fateful day. I always thought I was lucky, but I never thought I would be this lucky.

..?

*What the heck?*

You only lifted your veil for a moment, but I cant believe I got to see your face in that short period of time.

In an instant, the look in his eyes changed to a creepy one, and a blatant gaze swept Lil up and down. Her dress might only reveal her shoulders, the fabric itself was thin and airy, so the slightest movement exposed her curves.

Lil once again cursed at the dress.

*The dress that looks like a fucking nightgown.*

Avar came forward.

The atmosphere is pleasant right now, isnt it? Care for a dance?

He tucked her hair behind her ear. When his hand actually touched the shell of Lils ear, she was tempted to hit his wrist with her fan, but she held back. Lil became worried that if she made a fuss here, the owner of this cell as well as the host of the banquet would make a fuss. After all, Lil was made aware of his particularly prickly temperament by Ed beforehand.

*What should I do? Ed hasnt returned yet. It seems like it takes him quite some time to process the identity guarantees and prepare for the crews transfer.*

Lil checked the moon rising outside of the window.

*If Ed ran late, we agreed that I could move first meaning I should go ahead with the plan now.*

As Avar held Lils hand, she internally vomited several times while moving her body to the music. She pondered while deliberately avoiding his perverted eyes.

*Thinking about it calmly, it wont be a bad idea to go into the room with Avar. There, I could deal with him and wait for Ed. Besides, Avar already seems quite drunk. I can beat him up with my eyes closed.*

Lil smiled at Avar with the intention of bewitching him.

Heavens, youre so beautiful.

A hand with a bunch of rings wrapped around Lils cheek. His fingers rose higher and higher in an obvious attempt to lift her veil. Lil grabbed his wrist and shook her head shyly.

You can see it for yourself later, Sir Avar.

Still, Avar stubbornly stretched out his hand. The moment she twisted her face to the side, Lils eyes met Eds, who had just entered the banquet hall. Her blood ran cold in an instant. Lil shook her head nervously as she looked at Ed quickly closing their distance. Of course, she knew she did nothing wrong, but that frighteningly expressionless face of his made her feel uneasy

Chapter 228

Lil was reminded of Sagastars remark about him.

{ Whenever he was angry, he was rather expressionless and silent, which made us afraid enough as it was already }

Meanwhile, Avar was engrossed in his perversion. His hand, which had been on her shoulder earlier, suddenly moved down to her waist and pulled her in.

Dont act like you dont like it and come closer, my lady.

While contemplating whether or not to break the hand that was reaching for her buttocks, Avar fell back. Although his body was moving away from her, his arm was still struggling to reach for her. His dirty intentions completely failed because Ed pushed Avars shoulders further from Lil. Avar glared at Ed and tried to push his body forward until his face and even the back of his neck turned red. Still, even after all the effort, Avar couldnt budge an inch.

Ed, whose needed effort to keep Avar at bay wasnt even straining enough to furrow his brows, spoke rather calmly.

Stop it.

What?

Belatedly realising his tone, Ed corrected himself.

Stop leave her alone, Sir Avar.

Avar eventually managed to regain his footing and slapped Eds arm away.



*Fortunately, Ed didnt push or knock down Avar completely, so it hasnt attracted anyones attention yet.*

Lil flapped her fan as she watched Ed, trying her best to not show her surprise despite her heart becoming anxious.

What? Are you two lovers?

For the first time, Eds expressionless face twitched, and his adamsappel moved slightly as he swallowed.

Lil looked back and forth between Avar and Ed, chewing her lip in frustration. Avar stroked his beard before declaring.

This woman seduced me first.

That cant be possible.

So, are you two lovers? Why are you making me repeat myself?

Huh? Cant you answer? What are you two? Why would someone whos nothing to her act like this  
Im sorry.

*Damn it Ed, just say yes!*

However, Ed kept his mouth shut after the apology.

Who are you? And what are you? Where do you come from? You huh?

Avars expression, as he pointed at Ed, turned strange at that moment. He paused, as if recognizing someone. Lil instantly realised what was going on.

*Ive been told that Avar isnt only quite influential, he also holds a noble status. So chances are that he mightve seen Ed somewhere before And even though Eds still wearing a hat in an attempt to obscure his identity, Avar is shorter. In fact, most people here can easily see the face underneath the hat*

Without a second thought, Lil got in between the two.

Ah, oh my goodness. Sir Avar, youre asking the obvious. Ho Ho, ho, ho, ho

..?

She knew she was putting up an act that most people wouldnt fall for, but with the conviction that if they couldnt get past this point, everything would end in failure, Lil quickly threw herself into Eds arms. Of course, Lil didnt forget to make a big scene out of lifting Eds arm and placing his hand on her waist. Then, when she pressed the side of her face against his chest, it was actually Ed who almost lost his balance out of perplexity. Sensing this, Lil discreetly pinched his side in frustration and Ed quickly came back to his senses, wrapping his arm around her waist. Lil then smiled happily and pressed her body close to him.

However, because she happened to lean on Eds left side, the incessant pounding of his heartbeat rang in her ears. She wasnt sure if it was because he was still angry or for some other reason, but Lil tried to ignore the sound and spoke softly.

This person runs a fairly large clothing store, and he came to visit to supply sails for Sir Avars next voyage. But now something like this happened Ho, ho, ho, ho Seeing him this surprised, Ill feel the need to provide him some comfort If you know what I mean After he calms down well look for you again, so leave it to me and please excuse us for now.

Lil smiled desperately at Avar. She could only hope that Avar wasnt so crazy as to split up a happy couple and take the woman for himself in the full view of his guests.

Avar looked back and forth between Lil and Ed with a confused expression. Similarly, a few people around them stopped dancing and paid attention to the slight commotion. Avar glanced at Ed closely with a puzzled face but soon withdrew his gaze.

Lil inwardly sighed in relief and agreed with the confused thoughts Avar would probably have right now.

*Yes, you should think that the real Marquess wouldve no reason to be here like this. Even addressing you respectfully.*

Realising he needed to save face, Avar ordered a servant to light a cigarette. He blew out a long puff of smoke while pretending to agonise over it, then leisurely returned to his seat and nodded his head.

Okay. Well, lets talk again later then.

Avars persistent gaze followed them all the way out of the banquet hall. Thanks to this, Lil had to exert a lot of effort just to successfully act out their unexpected love affair. What certainly didnt help was that Ed was extremely uncooperative with her.

*I cant understand this guy. He had always been such a pervert in the South, but now hes become so reserved all of the sudden.*

The guard who had led them to their room walked away with a knowing look on his face. The room they stepped into had a bed that took up most of the space, making its main purpose very obvious. Lil, who would normally have cursed the existence of a room for this purpose in a prison, had no time to think about it because Ed pushed her away as soon as the door closed. No, rather than pushing her away, it was more accurate to say he slipped away from her shoulder, which he had been holding till now in an awkward manner.

Lil exclaimed, tossing down the small hat she wore to keep her veil in place.

What were you doing? Were you out of your mind? Why didnt you say anything? It couldve turned very dangerous.

Pouring out her frustration, Lil quickly took off her gloves. Taking off his justaucorps a little distance away, Ed answered hesitantly.

I had no idea what you were thinking.

I was just faking it, so what did it matter what I thought about it?

I was afraid it might be unpleasant for you

Ed answered in such a gloomy tone that Lil lost the will to argue any further and instead shrivelled up helplessly. Her shoulders, which had been raised high, sank down.

Throwing aside her coat, Lil roughly unpacked the luggage which the servants had placed there in advance.

Just change your clothes.

Lil pulled out an old but clean vest and shirt which she then tossed to Ed. Ed had already undone his cravat and caught the clothes mid-air before draping them over his shoulders. Lil herself sat down on the bed and lifted the hem of her skirt. With her dress still on, she slid her legs into her pants while muttering the rest of her frustration.

Then at least act properly

I was suddenly so surprised

Before Ed fully looked back at Lil, he jerked his body to turn away again.

I didnt mean to. I know its a pathetic excuse, but your dress was too

Too what?

It was too thin

Lil looked down at the dress she was wearing, then closed her mouth, pretending not to hear Eds remark. She clearly remembered the smug smile he had when he first introduced the dress to her.

*Chemise la reine.*

For no reason, Lil snatched her shirt with a big movement and stretched her arm out. As they were both silent, the only sound in the room was the sound of fabric rustling. No, actually, if they listened closely, they could hear the moans from the room next to theirs

Time passed and Lil became more and more conscious of the noise. Perhaps due to the strange mood in their own room, the sound even seemed to get louder. Lil hoped that it would disappear quickly on its own, but she also knew better that it probably wouldnt.

Despite Lils earnest prayers, Ed, who was changing his shirt, suddenly turned his head. To the wall to his right to be more precise. Surprised by his slight movement, Lil turned her gaze to the back of his head but quickly turned her gaze when she noticed that Ed hadnt pulled his shirt completely over his head yet. Shed seen his bare back a few times before, but the situation this time was so embarrassing that it made her break out in a cold sweat.

They were undressing with the lamp beside the bed as the only light source, so the atmosphere gradually turned strange. To make matters worse, they had been groping each others bodies just moments ago

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On the other side of the wall, the heavy breathing and screams of the man and woman nearing their climax gained momentum. Ed and Lil could both hear it, albeit muffledly. To divert her attention, Lil ripped down her dress as if she were ripping off skin and stamped the heels of her new boots on the floor.

*This prison is insane. Nothing about this is normal. Even the laughter from the banquet hall can still be heard from afar. I don't want to comprehend how insane the world has become for things like this to occur in a prison*

Coming back to her senses, she raised her voice deliberately while putting on her belt and sword.

Did you see Alain and Marenzio earlier?

No.

Why on earth were they in the banquet hall? They were happily eating meat no less.

Ed had already changed into his shirt and vest, and approached the bed.

Those crazies didn't even recognize their captain and completely lost their minds

What do you mean lost their minds?

No, never mind

So, Alain and Marenzio were in the banquet hall? That explains why two sailors were missing from their designated cells.

Yeah. Now what?

It's impossible for the guards to know the names of each of the imprisoned sailors, and since there were only two missing, they said they must've died somewhere, sometime ago. Discipline has become very lax in Gualtiero. You know what they say, wherever money flows and stagnates, that place is bound to rot.

To let prisoners enter a banquet hall solely for personal reasons, this place is truly insane. Damn it, then where can I find Alain and Marenzio?

Chances are, they're where Julio is. Cell designations are normally fixed.

Understood.

After finishing their preparations, Lil stood up. Sensing this, Ed placed a gun in the inside pocket of his jacket and turned to face her. Lil tried to say something different but quickly changed her mind.

What about the guards?

The streets should've been cleared by now.

*The Devito Harbour has recently been filled with sailing ships from the Western Continent. It's one of the most chaotic times of the year, with merchants trading cargo carried by dozens of ships. As a result, security tightened, and a network of sentries was established throughout the city's alleys. Even though these sentries were hired by Roahn, seeing multiple suspicious wagons speeding through the city will still be alarming. So, with Linhardt's assistance, Ed cleverly altered the guard deployment and created empty alleys.*

Lil took the map from her pocket and double-checked the route.

Devito Harbour. Second dock. No. 14.

*The Bell Rock can be found there. On paper, it had been captured by the Navy and converted into a merchant ship. But because a little more than a hundred people is such a notable number, Ed and I*

*will bring the wagons through different routes to reach the port. Weve also employed a dozen wooden crates to avoid suspicion when boarding. The crew will board the Bell Rock by pretending to be these crates carriers.*

Whoever arrives first will take the crew onboard and prepare to set sail.

She was stating the obvious, but Lil was caught up in anxiety, causing her to obsessively repeat even the smallest details.

*The crew needs to leave Gualtiero without leaving any trace. Not even a single footprint should be found.*

If we dont all arrive by midnight

Only those who are on board will successfully depart.

Nodding her head, Lil folded the map and placed it in her pocket again.

Her heart pounded. She tried to suppress her nervousness by pulling on the wide-brimmed hat, one similar to the ones worn by the guards. After pacing back and forth for a while, Lil finally walked past the bed and wiped her sweaty palms on her pants. Meanwhile, Ed handed the bag of luggage containing their clothes to the servant outside the door. The servant, brought from Eds mansion, bowed his head and disappeared in an instant.

Lil moved closer to Ed and gently touched his arm. The latter had opened the door and was peering down the hallway, but turned to look back at her upon feeling her touch. Lil hesitated about what to say and ended up standing idly without saying anything. Her throat had dried. Noticing her complexion, Ed spoke calmly.

There is nothing to be concerned about. You will undoubtedly succeed.

Lil barely managed to swallow her dry saliva and nodded her head. But no matter how hard she tried to calm down, her mind went cold as she recalled the war that would erupt if she failed and the images of the sailors who would be beheaded or hanged.

Theres no one in the hallway right now.

Ed opened the door a little more to be completely sure. As Lil approached the door, it was now Ed who hesitated. It was like he wanted to say something as well. Lil ignored his overly cautious attitude by getting past him.

When she finally glanced back, she only left a short remark.

See you at Devito.

\*\*\*

As Lil descended the stairs, the noise of the banquet went away. The air around her gradually became humid and a strange odour filled her nose. Two chatting guards approached Lil from the other side. Putting her guard up, she glared at them, but the moment their eyes met, they just laughed and simply waved their hands at her. Lil could clearly smell alcohol as soon as she passed them in the relatively narrow hallway. Although she had no idea if they had stolen the expensive alcohol from the banquet or if Avar had given it to them, Lil was relieved nonetheless. After all, for her it was the ideal state of mind for them to be in.

Lil walked with more assurance.

The murals and lambris vanished after making her way through the ground floor. She briefly took a look up at the ceiling, where the lavish banquet was still going on and the moans of unbelievable pleasure sounded like auditory hallucinations. Looking down again, there was nothing but darkness on the staircase leading to the dungeon without a single lamp. Ed had given her some balsam, but it wasn't enough.

Lil returned the way she came for a moment and retrieved a torch that was hanging on the wall.

The empty sound of wind echoed along the spiral space enclosed by a mouldy stone wall, while water drops falling from somewhere could occasionally be heard. Lil took her time descending the stairs. She had to be cautious with each step she took because she was afraid she would step on a rat and slip.

*I don't even want to think about the problems that will arise if I fall*

As sweat ran down her brow because of the heat of the fire, the smoke billowing from the swaying torch captivated her senses. Her nose began to become runny, and her vision started to blur. Her face was so hot that it was bothering her, while the hairs on the back of her neck were still standing due to the tension she felt.

Soon, a massive iron gate appeared at the bottom of the stairs. Lil rummaged through her pocket for the round key ring. Keys thicker than her fingers clanked with every movement. Eventually, the sound of heavy iron scraping against the stone floor rang through the air. It was so loud that it sent chills up her spine.

Keeping the gap between the wall and the door as narrow as possible, Lil quickly pushed her body through it.

In contrast to the staircase, several torches were hung on the wall beyond the iron gate. Despite this, the environment didn't improve due to the foul odour that permeated the increasingly humid air.

Lil paused for a moment and peered through the opening of a small guard post to her left, witnessing the guard, who apparently had awoken briefly due to the sound of the door opening, resuming to doze off again. Fortunately for her, he too was holding a bottle of alcohol.

After hanging the torch she held, Lil moved more stealthily in order to conceal her presence.

*Turn left, right, then right again and into the second room.*

*Only the Bell Rocks crew can be found in the eastern dungeon. If so, there should be nobody else beyond this, but why do I keep feeling like someone's watching me*

Lil hastened her steps and recalled the blueprint for this place. The structure was close to a maze and in addition to the corners she recognized, there were countless narrow pathways.

*One wrong turn can be fatal*

The intermittent torches in this part of the dungeon were neither spaced well nor bright, so Lil had to rely solely on her memory to find her way.

She eventually entered a section where there were no torches at all. Due to the dark space being so unnervingly quiet, a chill seeped into her collar. Lil took the balsam out of her pocket, but she couldn't completely remove the cloth wrapped around it, out of fear that a guard on patrol would see

her face. Although her current attire was that of a guard, they would quickly realise that she was an unfamiliar face.

Lil turned the final corner.

*One, two the second room.*

Lil groped for the wall and put her ear against it. But there was no sound. She tried to find the food outlet to check inside, but it was nowhere to be seen. With no time to spare, Lil gave up quickly and decided to open the door directly.

*There should definitely be a keyhole here somewhere found it!*

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Lil grasped the protruding handle next to the keyhole. Her chest tightened from extreme anticipation, so much so that the sound of her heartbeat even seemed to echo throughout the hallway. Lil was about to take out the keychain from her pocket again, but then

*It rattles?*

Being able to move the door without unlocking it first, Lil looked down at her hand on the handle without understanding the situation. She then absentmindedly pushed it.

*Screech*

Just like the last one, this iron door also made an eerie sound as it was pushed aside. Lil couldn't think of anything else as she looked around the room in a daze. Handcuffs, chains, and iron balls were all illuminated by faint moonlight. The metal fittings that this cell's prisoners had left were scattered sparsely in the empty space. There was no one there. All she could see were forks bent in different directions and spoons with their heads ripped off.

Lil muttered dejectedly at the unbelievable sight.

Crazy these crazy people

Lil treaded into the cell as if possessed. Whenever her foot stepped on something, a clanging sound was heard. Cutlery such as knives and forks were kicked every time she walked. Lil was so shocked that she couldn't even help but snort.

*What kind of crazy prison gives its prisoners eating utensils? Anyone with enough patience can open a lock with a fork. Its because you can try it thousands of times and you only need to get it done once for it to be a success*

In a panic, Lil clutched her head.

*So what should I do now? Since when has this cell been empty? I didn't see anyone on the stairs either. So where are they? No, this can't be.*

Lil shook her head vigorously and tried to change her distressing thoughts.

*I've seen Alain earlier. Before his wrists were cuffed, it seemed like he was an attendee of the banquet due to Avars invitation. Meaning, its been less than an hour since these crazies escaped on their own*

Lil's thoughts were abruptly cut short by a cold piece of metal that touched the back of her head

Put your hands up.

*It feels like the muzzle of a gun*

Lil slowly raised her hands.

*Is it a guard? Was there another guard on patrol besides the one at the entrance?*

During that brief moment, her mind was flooded with arrogance.

*Even if I can easily subdue the guard here, that doesnt change the fact that I dont know where the crew is. And in addition to not being able to successfully rescue my crew, those same sailors are about to turn Gualtiero upside down on their own*

All kinds of terrible imaginations converged without even a hint of a breakthrough, but Lil managed to calmly console herself. Since she was wearing the guard uniform, she decided to try her hand.

You might be unaware, but

Courant. Get me those keys.

Yes, Alain.

What?

As Lil inadvertently asked back, the muzzle of the gun was menacingly pushed to the back of her head.

Shut up.

Meanwhile, Courants light-coloured hair popped into Lils periphery. Although her vision was dark and the boy looked like a mess, Lil was sure that the hair belonged to Courant. As Courant took her key ring from her pocket, Lil stared at Courants head. Nevertheless, Courant just looked up at Lil with eyes full of hostility.

Murmurs erupted from behind her.

What should we do now?..

Where are the rest of us trapped?..

Is that a problem now? We dont even know where we are! Damn it, weve been circling here for ages!..

It didnt take long for Lil to grasp what was going on and inwardly snorted out her laughter.

*These crazy guys broke out of their cells in order to run away, so what are they still doing here? They shouldnt have done this without a plan unless they decided to die together of course*

Uh Ehem! Everyone be quiet.

..!

Alain solemnly quieted the crew. With this, it became clear that the crew recognized his role as captain.



You idiots, are you seriously whining about not being able to find your way out despite a guard standing in front of you? You idiots are like no other in the world, tsk tsk. We should be thinking about how to use this guy.

Lil, who has suddenly become a guard who must be used, was unable to hide the sound of her wheezing. A sudden relief washed over her, and she burst into laughter.

Pffft. Hahaha!

Whats wrong with this guy? Is he crazy?

Hahaha.

He might be up to something, seize him.

Ugh! What?!

A chain wrapped around Lils neck and someone strong lifted her from behind. Lil struggled in the air as her fingers eagerly tried to secure some room to breathe, but it was difficult to squeeze through the already tightened chain.

While twisting her body as much as she could, her hat fell off. Soon after, Alain threateningly strode forward.

The way out

Where is it?!

These black hair you crazy

If you dont take the lead, well kill you here.

Recognize your captain look at me

Fine, then die here.

It became more and more difficult to hold on.

*Ill have them take this chain off before I can swear and get angry.*

Ah all right

*Clang*

The chain disappeared as soon as Lil accepted Alains proposal, and she instantly dropped to the floor. Lil gasped a few more times, trying to catch her breath.

*The man who strangled me from behind must be Marenzio.*

Lil picked herself up and faced Alain. She was tempted to prick his eyes that looked down on her sternly. Initially, she thought to explain things rationally, but her lips twitched on their own.

Strangle me one more time and see for yourself where youll end up.

Hah, havent you come to your senses yet?

Have you gotten senile because of your age, Grandpa? I just saw you spit out your juice earlier.

Alain, who was about to give orders to Marenzio again, asked back with an extremely confused face.

What?

Wasnt it because you recognized me? Or were you thinking about something else?

What are you talking about? That was definitely a woman.

I guess you crazy bastards didnt recognize your captain simply because he put on some makeup. You mustve been locked up for far too long without being able to see the sunlight, so your eyes have rotted away. Ill have to beat you all up one by one and hang you up to dry.

The mumblings around quickly subsided. Meanwhile, Lil coughed several more times. Her throats condition hadnt yet completely improved, so her voice still sounded raspy from the strangulation. Of course, she actually considered that beneficial for her case.

Alain closely examined Lils face while she was in a kneeling position. Looking at Alain observing her like that with such curiosity, reminded her of the way he tilted his head and looked at her before she took off her veil earlier. It was like she experienced some kind of dj vu from her memories of when she dressed up as a woman.

Grandpa, theres a red wart on your left buttock. With two white hairs stuck in it. Unfortunately for me, reciting it like this brings me right back to the day I had the pleasure to admire it.

*Its a good thing there arent any torches around here. They wont be able to grasp my full appearance if they can only rely on moonlight. All that needs to happen is for them to recognize the resemblances between me and their Captain. More than that wont be possible anyway, seeing how Im also covered in soot. Also, I wasnt planning on proving my identity with just appearance alone.*

Well, the black whale is merciful, so Ill give you guys another chance.

Lil now sat back on her butt and admired Alains dazed face. Some of the sailors behind her grabbed her hair and looked at it in the faint moonlight.

Its black hair. Very pitch-black hair

You idiot. Who knows if it would look that way in the dark?..

Isnt the Black Whale dead?..

Didnt someone say he saw him die?..

Uhh then is this a ghost?..

Upon asking if she was a ghost, Lil felt some pokes on her shoulder. Noticing how the atmosphere slowly turned in her favour, she flicked away the fingers on her back and thought of dealing the final blow.

Marenzio.

Yes, Captain. No, uhh, no Yes?

Hearing that he answered right behind her, she became sure that the guy who had strangled her was indeed Marenzio. Lil spoke, gritting her teeth in disdain.

Last June, you couldnt muster the courage to confess to Panichis sweet Rosaline, so you just chased her around the whole time. I once saw you hide behind a tree and spy on her in a dirty and disgusting way.

As if it wasn't a secret that only she knew, a few people could be heard giggling behind her. Lil stood up from her seat and snatched the keychain from Courant's hand.

I'm getting tired. And we don't have time. Let's just finish this and go.