

Northwest 231

Chapter 231

Having said that, Lil began to make her way out of the cell. The sailors, who filled the entrance to the narrow cell and even the hallway beyond, stared at her as though she were their saviour. And even though her vision was not only obscured by the darkness but also her hat, she still felt like she was similarly returning the gaze of every single one of them.

The fact that they easily put their faith in a suspicious and uninvited guest dressed as a prison guard, is actually twisting my stomach

Lil knew that among the men standing there, there were sailors who sympathised with Julio, but that apparently didnt seem to matter to her as she still felt a twinge in her heart. Relief permeated her, despite it being too early to completely let her guard down.

Lil moved quickly through the path cleared by her crew to keep herself from getting shaken.

Were going to go through an underground passage to reach the backyard. Once were out, everyone should get on the wagons waiting for us. For now, line up, hold on to the person in front of you, and follow.

Scouring through her memories, Lil headed to the next cell.

According to the records, this should be where Julio and his gang are imprisoned

She reeled and checked behind her every time she turned a corner. Even though she couldnt see the sailors at all, the action of confirming it put her mind at ease.

Alain, who was the one holding Lils shoulder, whispered to her in a shaky voice.

What did you go through? Your shoulder cant even fill my hand. Why are you so thin?

Alains remark caught Lil by surprise and she shrank her shoulders.

Of course, the Lil Schweiz that Alain knows and the person hes holding onto now have different physiques.

Lil responded calmly, albeit wary.

It was one hell of a struggle.

The old man sniffed audibly. It was an expression one couldnt see because of the dark, but Lil frowned.

Of all the concerns he could have, he worries about my fertility?

Its not a problem. Id be more worried about your own state, Grandpa.

Nonetheless, Lils heart felt a little lighter knowing that Alain tried. At this point, she didnt even know who should be worried about whom, thinking they mustve gone through a lot of hardships themselves, too.

Still, its concerning that Alain recognized my thin voice

Lil asked back, straining her neck a little harder this time.

Did Julio receive the cutlery too?

Well? I dont know.

What? So, theres a chance that the crew over there escaped like you did?

I guess so?

Shit.

Her head started to pound, but Lil shook it off. There was nothing else she could do here. But for some reason, her steps hesitated for a moment.

Whats wrong?

Nothing. Its fine.

She turned the last corner and checked the hallway. The hallway was quiet, with only the occasional sound of water dripping. Lil, who had been focusing all her attention on the sound of footsteps to hear if a guard was coming, became convinced that no one was there and immediately opened her mouth.

You see that door up ahead? Julio should be in that cell.

Damn that brat. I wish you could lose some of your determination for him.

No.

Tsk.

Remember this, theres no fighting allowed until you all escape. If you want to fight, do it on the Bell Rock after youve boarded.

A few men moved quickly and stuck to the opposite wall, covering Lils blind spot. There was a torch not far away, so she could see the outline of their nodding heads. As Lil went out into the hallway, the sailors tightened their grips on the utensils they were holding, wary of their surroundings. Lil then reached the prison cell with the keychain on her fingertip, aware of the presence of several sailors following behind her. Lil grabbed the lock on the iron door. Unlike before, this room was still locked. And since this cell wasnt a cell with bars, but a completely sealed room, there was no way for the inmates inside to open the lock that was located on the outside. In that case, even if each person had removed their chains, they wouldnt have been able to escape.

Lil picked the lock, removed the chains and opened the iron door by sliding it to the side. The room before her was also only illuminated by moonlight coming through a small window. It was quiet without a single sound, and Lil thought that was even weirder given how there must at least be a few dozen people in it. Instead of going in, Lil remained standing outside while looking for any signs of life inside. When she eventually threw the lock she was holding inside, a whisper-like cry came out as soon as the lock fell to the stone floor.

Attack!

Right in front of her, several people threw their entire body on top of the lock. Dumbfounded, Lil stared at the men who were overlapping themselves and blurted out a question.

What the hell are you doing?

The men piled on top of each other all turned to face her. Lil silently lifted her hand above her shoulder and signalled the crew behind, who went into the cell to help them up and sort out the situation.

It seems that all individual iron chains have been dismantled here as well, but they were unable to open the door from within the room and resorted to attacking any unlucky guard.

Lil moved without delay.

Dont leave anyone behind, take care of each other and follow. Ill explain the rest along the way.

She didnt have time to gather them again and explain the plan. Fortunately, the sailors seemed to have understood her words well. Low-pitched whispers steadily followed her while Lil walked into the darkness in front of her. She wishes she could use a torch, but then she wouldnt be able to hide her crew if they encountered a guard along the way.

Lil crossed the hallway and rounded the corner, praying with every step that her memory was flawless.

An empty plot suddenly appeared and the sound of birds chirping rang out in a space that had widened to the height of the floor. When they heard the birdsong, the sailors, thinking that the ceiling had opened, started to murmur frantically. Meanwhile, Lil was feeling around the wall looking for the door and spoke calmly.

Keep silent. Those are just bats. We still have a long way to go.

Scanning the ceiling as well, Marenzio stammered towards her.

Where where are we going?

I told you. An underground passage. One thats no longer in use now.

Who told you about that?

It doesnt matter. If I came to take you out without even knowing this route, wouldnt that be even weirder?

Lil found the door and inserted the key. By turning it, the door was technically unlocked, but since it was a passageway that had been closed for so long, it didnt open right away. The iron gate was also too heavy for her. So Lil pulled Marenzio, who was by her side, and instructed him to push the door. However, Marenzio alone wasnt enough, causing a few more people to join in. During the delay, there was a bit of a buzz starting in the rear end of the group.

Courant walked out amid the noise and stood in front of Lil. The latter looked at the boy and instantly sensed an ominous premonition.

I-Im not going.

Lil closed her eyes tightly.

Remember, I cannot allow them to split here. I have to take everyone with me.

Why?

I don't trust the Captain.

Why?

You, you sided with that guy! That's how we ended up here! This happened because the Navy was able to chase us! In the end, it was that guy who betrayed us!

His young voice echoed through the space. Because of this, it startled the flock of bats on the ceiling and they went on a rampage. The bats came down on their heads and flapped their wings as if to attack. Sharp things, unknown whether it was a beak or a claw, scratched the top of the crew's heads and snatched their hair. In the darkness, the panicked crew began to disperse.

They didn't immediately start shouting because they still have a bit of reason left, but they're probably on the verge of losing it

Lil quickly pressed Marenzio on the shoulder, urging him to make haste.

Marenzio! Come on!

Eventually, three or four more sailors joined forces. Lil occupied herself with trying to calm her crew down, even flailing her arms in order to shoo the bats away. The iron door squeaked and shrieked, and was finally beginning to open. The sailors, who heard this, began to rush towards the door. The pushing force of dozens of hands accelerated the process and as soon as the gap was behind a certain point, the whole door suddenly opened wide.

Thud!

A stream of cold air blew towards them. Sensing the strong smell of moss in a space that had been closed for a long time, her crew poured forward on their own even without the need of her giving orders.

Fortunately, the flock of bats didn't follow them into the unfamiliar environment, and Lil was able to force the unwilling Courant into the passage before closing the iron door.

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Previous

When the sound of bats screeching beyond the closed door died down, Lil sighed and leaned against the cold iron. She felt the presence of everyone gathered not far away.

Fortunately, from here on out, there will be no guards.

Realising this, it was only then that Lil fully extracted the balsam and allowed it to shine in front of her. The sailors watched her every move while breathing heavily.

Lil raised her finger and with a weak gesture pointed forward.

Go straight ahead

A familiar face suddenly squeezed out among the rising and falling bodies, catching their breath. The man's face was thinner than Lil remembered and he clearly hadn't had the opportunity to shave this past month, but she had no trouble recognizing him.

Lil Schweiz. We have no idea what you've been up to, and you only show up now, so how on earth can we trust you, the person most responsible for this situation? More importantly, why weren't you trapped here with the rest of us when you were still alive?

Lil muttered to herself, pressing her forehead.

No wonder it was so quiet

Julio.

The fact that we fell into the hands of the Navy is proof of your poor judgement. No, it may not have been mere judgement, perhaps it was all part of your plan

So, according to you, my plan includes putting you in here only to get you out again?

I don't know. I don't know what kind of dirty tricks you have left. How can we trust a pale guy?

Then don't believe me. Who told you to do so?

You're definitely screwing us over. This must've something to do with that bastard who was said to be a spy.

She couldn't deny what he just said. Lil herself was also frustrated as to how things had turned out this way.

It's understandable that Julio has a considerable amount of doubts, but that doesn't mean I have the luxury to explain the whole story here or give up on Julio and his group

What are you going to do if you stay here? Do you know the way, do you have the keys? Just take advantage of the chance I'm giving you now and stop naively spouting around that you don't trust me. In front of me, pretend to follow. And save all your venting of anger for behind my back. Don't be so honest in defying me and stop arguing about anything. I don't understand why you keep resorting to such predictable moves. Do you want me to read right through you and know all of your thoughts? Are you challenging me first because you think I have the ability to catch you off-guard and strike you at the back of your head? How great of a bastard do you think I am, that you foam at the mouth and fear me so much?

If your problem with me is just a matter of pride, leave it aside. There isn't a more pathetic justification for this situation you're causing.

Pride? Do you think were that

Lets just all get out and argue later

There was more than one person who saw you get injured. And the Bell Rock was seized. So how did you survive with a body like that while avoiding the eyes of the Navy?

I understand that there are still a lot of questions that remain unanswered. But I didn't come here to tell you about my survival story. For now, we both, no we all have to live and see. There's no way that I've locked you up here for as long as I did, and then suddenly decided to go through all this trouble just to take you outside and kill you.

Lil walked past the sailors gathered behind Julio. Half of the men naturally followed her, while the rest only did so after a moment of hesitation. A loud argument erupted shortly after, but Lil left them alone.

Its fine. We managed to enter the underground passage, so I dont see any more problems coming our way. After all, this is a passage that was only used in the past, and currently, theres no one using it Nonetheless, I will be grateful when we reach the stable in the backyard and get on the wagons, maybe that will finally relieve some of this anxiety.

As Lil started to increase her pace, the sound of the footsteps following also garnered momentum and the damp space was instantly filled with the sound of dozens of peoples footsteps.

Progressing up the slanted passage, Lil began to feel the wind and spot the opening in the distance. As the passage hadnt been used as an official entry point for years, the entrance had narrowed a lot. Thankfully, the gap remained large enough for people to enter and exit while lying down and the strong wind she felt blew from there.

Lil, who was sitting in the drivers seat of the wagon, lowered her hat and greeted the guard.

Good evening.

Alain, wearing a garrison guards jacket turned inside out*, made an awkward expression. The fact that the clothes were too small and short on him, doubled his feeling of awkwardness. Lil faced the guard while covering Alain with her whole body so that Alains face was as obscured as possible.

Whats this?

Its from the grocery shop on 23rd Street.

The guard approaching the carriage then frowned and held his nose.

But whats this smell?

Smell? What smell?

But unlike the puzzled Lil, Alain, who was sitting next to her, raised his arm and pressed his nose against his armpit. Only then did Lil realise that her wagon was crammed with people who hadnt washed in months.

Lil tried to come up with something suitable to say.

Were on our way back, the eggs in the wagon have rotten, so were unable to deliver them.

Eggs? Didnt you say you were from a grocery shop?

W-we also run a poultry farm.

Really?

After she had already said it, Lil belatedly realised her mistake.

Eggs are expensive Its no wonder that the guard looks at the carriage with interest.

Lil stretched out her upper body from the coachmans seat and anxiously looked at the guard heading toward the luggage compartment.

Have you ever touched rotten eggs? Normally, if you crack one open, its all chewy, but if its rotten, it glides around like scum. It stinks like the ooze of a month-old gunshot wound. Do you recall that

yellow and green ooze? And its odour is so strong that if you handle it wrong, it sticks to you and the smell wont go away no matter how much you wash

Despite Lils efforts, the guard continued to reach for the luggage compartment while covering his nose with a handkerchief.

Lil reflexively screamed.

Uh! Be careful!

What? What?!

The guard jerked up and looked at Lil in a fit of surprise.

I was just concerned about what would happen if you handled the crate wrong and they burst. The banquet will soon be over, and the dignitaries will come out, so if by chance the contents spill

Oh, today is the day of the banquet. Thats right.

Yes. I wasnt particularly in a hurry, but I just received orders to take care of this before the ladies and gentlemen come out. The manager was adamant that we shouldnt run into them just in case

The guard, who was about to remove the tent covering the luggage compartment, twitched and withdrew his hand as if he had touched something dirty. Perhaps it was due to the strong stench coming out of the tent. Shortly after, he turned to the guards post and looked as though he had lost interest.

Yeah. Get out of here.

Yes.

As the guard waved his hand, two soldiers ran and opened the side gate of Gualtiero. Lil pulled the reins and moved the wagon, pretending to be calm. When in reality her hands shook so much that she intentionally tightened the grip on the reins. At the same time, Alain, still next to her, shrank his body as much as possible. All the attention of the surrounding guards was directed toward their carriage as both the guards on the ground and those in the watchtowers kept an eye on them. Of course, it mightve been a superficial observation, but it felt like a persistent gaze from the perspective of the person being targeted.

The wagon slowly passed through the side gate. As soon as she confirmed that the second wagon behind them, driven by Marenzio, had also escaped completely, Lil drove her horse vigorously. She felt as if Gualtieros torch could light up at any moment and a call to chase them would be heard

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The wagons ran down the dark green hill. The hill where Gualtiero was located was actually nothing more than a low peak, but even though the road down it wasnt very long, it felt like an endless eternity pulling on Lil.

In time, they left the hill and entered the paved city streets. The sound of the horses hooves altered and rang on the stones. Meanwhile, Alain grabbed his chest and waved his hand in the air, making strange sounds.

Hiya! Ho!

Shut up.

Lil warned, but the men inside the luggage compartment were also becoming noisy. Finally, Alain lifted the screen behind the coach seat and shouted to the sailors in the cargo hold.

Were out! We escaped that damned vineyard!

Chants that were as strange as Alains came out sporadically. Although Lil scolded them several times in order to keep them quiet, she herself eventually burst out laughing. However, when the excited sailors began pounding in the hold, causing the horses to cry out in distress, Lil slapped Alains back as he was putting his upper body further into the compartment.

Calm down now! Calm down, all of you!

Captain!.. Captain!..

As Alain crawled back onto the coachmans seat, the shouts of Marenzio, who was driving the second wagon, spread everywhere. His voice echoed into every corner of the alley and reverberated, giving Lil no choice but to jump up from her seat and shout towards the back.

Cant you shut up?

But just as she was about to sit down again, Marenzio shouted again. Unfortunately, his message wasnt a pleasant one.

Something is catching up behind us!

What?!

Holding the reins in one hand, Lil twisted her torso and looked behind her. Four figures were approaching fiercely from the end of the street. Lil drew her eyebrows together, thereby squinting her eyes. Because the figures were backlit, the seal of those horse riders couldnt be seen properly. The only thing she was certain of was that there were no badges on the horses saddle nor markings on their cloaks.

Lil muttered as she turned the wagon to the right, following their designated path.

Its not the uniform of the guards

Still sitting next to her, Alain looked at her in shock. Similarly, Lil also faced Alain.

Both of them shouted simultaneously.

Then who?..

Then who are they?..

How should I know? I just got out of jail!

Shit!

After handing the reins to Alain, Lil pushed herself off her seat and landed flat on the roof of the wagon. Instead of falling onto the middle of the roof, as she was going for, she fell more to the side. But luckily for Lil, the rear was visible from this position too.

Four armed men on horseback

An obvious fact came to mind.

In the first place, theres no way the guards are wearing masks Are they spies from the Duke of Mireille? No Im not sure

Lil took her gun out of her pocket and placed the barrel on the frame of the luggage compartment as support. However, she quickly became conflicted due to the possibility that they could be the prisons guards.

What if this only brings us more trouble? Moreover, if I use my gun now, the gunshot will ring aloud, and if someone hears it

While she was caught up in deep thought, Alain hit Lils leg which was hanging above the coach seat.

Where?! Where to next?!

What?!

Which direction should I go?!

Left! Left after to the white five-storey building!

Damn it! Its a bit too late for that now! Hold on!

Because the carriage turned belatedly and was violently swept to the right, the two horses neighed noisily due to the sudden pressure. Several empty wooden boxes fell from the luggage compartment, and the cries of the sailors were heard through the tent. Lil frantically grabbed the tent of the roof but found it nearly impossible to grasp the taut fabric. Struggling to get a hold, Lil lost her grip on her gun.

The gun slipped over the roof of the carriage and fell down.

No!

Lil, hanging on for dear life, screamed helplessly while seeing the hooves of the horses pulling Marenzios wagon hit the gun that had landed on the road. In the end, she had no chance to retrieve it or could afford to turn back.

Chewing her lip, Lil retracted her outstretched hand.

When their wagon was finally back on a steady course, Alain shouted again.

Were good!

As soon as the tilting motion disappeared, Lil went back to the coach seat and pulled the screen behind the backrest. Her crew, crammed in like chickens in their coop, looked up at her, their faces covered in sweat.

What happened?..

Who are those guys?..

The Navy?..

Their frightened eyes twinkled in the light, but Lil only brought her finger to her lips and cooed in a whisper.

No, so be quiet!

..!

Sword, does anyone have a sword?

Something like this?

Lil accepted the bent kitchen knife one of the sailors held out. Unfortunately, throwing bent knives wasnt a skill that Lil had mastered yet.

Dont you have something that I can throw like a dagger? A straight knife will do. Something straight!

Half of the men shook their heads immediately, while the other half attempted to rummage around. However, there was no more time to waste. The distance between them and the horsemen was closing rapidly. After all, their wagons two horses were pulling the weight of multiple men, whereas their opponents horses were carrying the men individually. Their opponents speed was impossible to compare, to begin with.

With her gaze fixed on them, Lil pondered.

No guns, no daggers. It means that I cannot fight them over long distances. Even if were lucky and they wont close in on us, I cant afford to let them tail us all the way to the port. In this case, the only option is to engage them in close range.

Lil lowered the screen again and sat down in the coachmans seat. She rummaged through her arms, took out an envelope, and stuffed it into Alains pants.

Give this to Anunchio.

No way. Why are you giving me this?

Listen carefully. Keep going straight and when you see the port, turn right. If you follow the dock, you will eventually see a sign for Old Port Dock no. 2. The fourteenth ship from there is the Bell Rock. It has been changed a bit because of the repairs, so you need to be alert and carefully identify it, alright? Ed is with the rest of the crew, so join them.

Ed? You mean the doctor?

Yes. Theres no time to explain.

What about you, Captain?

Lil didnt respond and tried to jump off the wagon. But the moment she tried to leap to her feet, Alain grabbed her by the collar.

Answer me, Captain!

Lils upper body swayed violently and she was dragged back into the coachs seat. As she was caught midair, her neck almost broke from the force.

Lil yelled loudly.

You crazy old man!

What about the Captain?!

Lil managed to regain her balance by grabbing Alains shoulder.

Come to your senses! Think about what you were imprisoned for. If even one person is caught here, the whole of the South will be executed!

What do you mean

Lil shouted while pounding the back of the coach seat with her fist.

Damn it, think!

Alains face, which had been blank for a moment, soon became coloured with realisation. Lil asked him to confirm it.

You know what I mean, right?

I understand I understand now.

With Alain frantically nodding his head, Lil pulled her upper body out of the coach seat, looked behind her and shouted.

Marenzio! Move aside!

Marenzio, driving the second wagon closely behind them, opened some space to the right. Lil was about to jump out of the wagon but remembered something important. Turning to face Alain again, her heart sank as she wondered how she had forgotten such a crucial point.

One more thing. Ed must watch the course of the Bell Rock until it sets sail and completely leaves Mondovi. We can never know what might happen. You understand that, right? The waters around here are all full of warships, so he must remain in the port until the end

Are you saying I shouldnt tell him about those guys?

Alain pointed with his chin at the men pursuing them. He looked at her uneasily, as if he had sensed her intention. But Lil lied to him to receive his cooperation.

Theres no need to tell him anything. Ive bribed the nearby guards, so theyll come to help me as soon as I give the signal. Until then, all I must do is buy you time.

Guards? How?

Shut up and say you understand! Theres no time to explain!

Okay, I understand!

Remember, once you manage to get out of here, everything will be resolved. And dont worry about what might happen after you escape.

The last thing she saw before turning away from Alain was his mouth opening to say something. But simultaneously, one of the horsemen already caught up to them and had stuck himself right next to her. A spur-of-the-moment reflex made Lil unsheathe and swing her sword fiercely.

Crazy!

Agh!

The arm that was reaching towards Lil backed off. It was an accidental wound, but it appeared to have been more fatal than she thought, seeing how the guy struggled to continue. He eventually fell

from the horse despite his efforts to hold on. However, his horse paid no heed to the ordeal and kept running alongside the carriage.

With no time to argue any further, Lil jumped towards the empty saddle

Shit!

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Because of the height difference of the wagons coach seat and the horses back, the cushioning effect of the saddle became insufficient and Lil, as well as the horse, were surprised by the hard impact. The shock was so great it even sent the beast into a rampage in an attempt to get rid of her.

Lil was unable to put her feet into the stirrups as the constant jumping of the horse caused her whole body to bounce up and down. It became so bad that it even felt like it wouldnt be long before her back would break into pieces. She almost fell from the beast several times but desperately held onto its neck while kicking her feet in all directions. The stirrups clanked and passed over the edges of her feet more than once. Nonetheless, Lil was determined to swing her feet until at one point, she skilfully managed to insert her shoe into the metal ring. After tugging on the reins out of instinct, the horse, who was restrained from running wild, neighed loudly and pulled itself up, standing on his two behind legs. His angry hooves waved in the air.

Feeling her body being tucked downward, Lil grabbed the reins for dear life.

Whoa, whoa! Damn it!

Lil squeezed her legs together with everything shes got till they went numb.

If I fall down now, I will either die by hitting my head or being trampled by the horses hooves.

Despite the palms of her hands heating up due to the scuffing of the reins, and her shoulders feeling like falling off because of her effort of maintaining the angle of those reins, Lil suppressed her groans.

Captain! Behind you!..

A shout erupted from the wagon.

Some of the sailors seemed to have forgotten that they had to hide themselves and foolishly removed one of the wooden boxes that concealed them to hold out their hands to Lil.

Lil was barely in time to turn her head back.

Before she knew it, one of the men chasing her was just a stones throw away, his sword already pulled out. Lil knew it was useless, but she had no other option but to keep herself as close to the horses mane as possible. The horse finally began to calm down from his initial aggression, but it was already too late, for Lils hands were tied

A sharp object grazed her ear covered in cold sweat.

A knife? A sharp and straight knife.

It flew through the air with precision and stuck the neck of the horse coming for Lil. An animalistic cry was heard before the beasts body collapsed in an instant. The rider, unable to handle the inertia, fell forward and rolled on the ground.

When Lil looked back at the wagon, her horse finally put its front hooves on the ground. And as if it never had gone mad in the first place a sudden snort was heard from it. Lil stood silently and watched the wagon moving away. To be precise, she watched Julio moving away while hanging outside the wagon. Just the fact that the attention of the sailors squatting in the luggage compartment was focused on Julio, she could tell who it was who had thrown the knife.

Lil felt like her eyes were locked with Julios. It apparently wasnt an illusion, for Julio indeed continued to look at her.

I dont know why, but it seems like he has always been doing that.

Lil tightened her grip on the reins and turned her horses head.

Now there are two more left.

Their silhouettes against the moon grew menacingly closer by the second.

I need to deal with one of them first while preventing the other from running off. This job turned out to be more difficult than I expected, but I have to buy time until the Bell Rock leaves the port.

Above the two rapidly nearing horses, two blades flashed in the moonlight.

As Lil also waited with her sword out, a piece of memory flashed through her mind.

Thats right. There was a bag on the saddle.

Lil hastily groped behind her and opened the small bag. The cold barrel of a gun touched her fumbling fingertips. Relieved, Lil pulled the gun out and aimed at one of the horsemen.

So, they have guns as well. But it appears that they arent keen on prematurely using such weapons. Its clear that they, like me, dont want to cause a scene.

The men eventually stopped at a reasonable distance. Pointing her gun at the man who seemed to be in charge of the others, Lil asked a futile question.

Who are you?

As expected, they gave no answer. Still, she felt reassured after becoming certain of one thing.

You already lost two of your men, yet you still have no plans of revealing your identities. It seems to me that you arent honourable people.

Knowing that they werent soldiers of the empire or private soldiers of the territory, Lil had no choice but to consider other options.

Could it be that I am their real target? If so, I can relax. As long as I stay here, I can be confident that they arent after my crew.

Why are you holding a gun that you cant even shoot?

I wondered why the security forces had completely withdrawn, seeing they had been stalking those alleys like lice. Was it for this?

His voice is familiar. Its definitely a voice Ive heard a lot in the past

This time, Lil asked with a different kind of suspicion than before.

Who are you?

Well anyway, thanks to you, it became much easier for us to move around. I dont know whats going on, but should I say thank you?

Tell me or Ill shoot.

Residents in this area will most likely hear the gunshots. Dont say anything that you dont mean and just put that down.

That wagon. Doesnt it have a destination? Youve been busy inspecting the port for nearly a week and refilling supplies to a ship that has no crew nor is set for departure Its obvious. Those wagons are heading to the port.

A cold chill went down Lils spine.

This man has been tracking my movements

Lil couldnt even withdraw her gun.

What are you? And who do you work for?

Port security had been very tight. And if that wasnt annoying enough, you even moved around with several escorts, making it very difficult to meet you.

The man slowly removed his mask while keeping the muzzle of his gun fixed on Lil. When the black cloth, which had been covering his whole face except for his eyes, disappeared, Lil recognized him. She couldnt understand why he was here, but her lips moved reflexively.

Maxwell?

Maxwells thick eyebrows twitched, however, the movement was so small that Lil didnt notice. After all, her thoughts had been flooded with why Maxwell went after her.

Maxwell is a knight of the Obernyus Royal Guards. Or was at least I cant even remember how many years it has been since I last saw him, so Im not quite certain that he still belongs to that group No, no fool would leave the Royal Guards on their own unless they were forcibly stripped of their rank.

I told you to put the gun down.

He may not have come to kill me, but I have no idea how I should deal with someone like him. What will happen if I disarm and become defenceless like that?

The answer to her question came up so easily that it seemed like a waste of time to even ask. In an instant, a mans face came to mind. A face she could never forget.

Is the Prince Regent here too?

I am waiting.

Her index finger resting on the trigger trembled slightly.

What should I do? What can I do?

Dont be so pretentious. Have you ever spared those you deem below you?

You know me well. Then you also know that I will find that wagon and kill every one of them. So, think things through before doing anything foolish. Youre not the only one who has taken advantage

of the lack of guards. I have some men stationed at the port as well. It wont take long to send a signal.

Lil didnt believe a word he said. But she couldnt just ignore them because of her doubts.

If the sailors are harmed because of my doubts, then there is absolutely no turning back. However, even if I surrender now and get captured, theres no guarantee that he will leave the crew alone.

Maxwell snorted as if he had seen through Lils thoughts.

Elite troops like us only carry out the orders of the Prince Regent. We wont waste resources on something that doesnt fit our purpose. So I ask you again, put down your gun and get off your horse.

Four reinforcements were already approaching behind Maxwell.

There are now six of them, blocking my path If I want to run away, I have no choice but to follow this road down, which will automatically make me lead them straight to the port Whatever happens, I cant leave this spot.

While she was weighing her options, the men began surrounding her. The sound of horse hooves coming from all directions grew closer, like a siege. When Lil eventually put her gun down on the saddle and stepped down, several people dismounted themselves along with her. Maxwell came to her front and looked down on her. Meanwhile, Lil never lowered her head. With Maxwells nod, someone kicked Lils leg from behind, causing her to collapse helplessly and she fell to her knees.

What on earth are you up to..!

From both sides, soldiers pressed down on her shoulders and Lil, who had tried to stand up, collapsed once again.

Maxwell!

I apologise. However, the Prince Regent said I could skip courtesy in case of a capture.

The gigantic Maxwell leisurely approached her. He then lowered his body to match Lils eye level and lifted her chin. Lil immediately twisted her face to shake his hand away. So this time, his hand wrapped around Lils neck, making her look straight at him.

You havent changed one bit.

Chapter 235

Are you crazy?

Why has it been so difficult to find you?

Get your hand off me!

Im just trying to take a proper look at your face. To see if youre really the Liloa I remember.

I told you to get your hand off me.

Do you know how long we had to chase after you like a bunch of dogs?

How filthy. If you felt like a dog, then does that mean the Regent put a leash around your neck after ordering you on your knees

Maxwells grip suddenly got stronger, so Lil could no longer continue her sentence and had to keep her mouth shut. The mans flushed face then came in front of her nose.

What do you know? You were born a daughter of a great nobleman and have lived your life in luxury. So, what do you know, when you didnt even realise your own good fortune and chose to kick yourself out to run around as you please!

..!

As Lil was slowly being strangled, her throat felt like it was about to burn. Her vision became increasingly blurry as well. She tried to fight it by blinking, but even her mind began drifting off and became hazy. At one point, all she knew was that Maxwell had released her throat forcefully.

Seize her.

The other men grabbed Lils wrists and used a rope to tie her hands behind her back. In her faint state of mind, Lil tried to resist, but it wasnt easy due to the two people clinging to her. Even though her efforts seemed futile, she raised her head in an attempt to stand. At the same time, a black sack was placed over her head, immediately containing Lil in darkness

The Devito Harbour was quite busy. The men of several merchant ships couldnt rest even after midnight. Workers came and went, constantly carrying wooden cargo. Ed got off the coachmans seat and pulled down the tent of the luggage compartment. Jericho, who was crouching between the wooden boxes, glanced up at him and they eventually made eye contact.

Ed then pointed to the dock with his chin.

Take the box and walk across the plank to board the Bell Rock.

W-what? The Bell Rock?

There is no time. You can hear the details from your Captain.

Jericho put the box away and faced Ed.

The Captain?

Ed, who was now looking around, answered without turning back to Jericho.

Lil Schweiz. Your Captain.

Is he still alive?

Yes.

How is that even possible? He clearly had his stomach pierced Was it you? Did you save his life? Because youre a doctor? Is that what happened?!

Fully emerging from the luggage compartment, Jericho grabbed Ed to nag him for an answer. Ed, however, simply removed Jerichos hand and turned his back.

As I said, hear it from your Captain when he arrives. Its a pity that a skirmish ensued, but I wont hold it against you.

Joe came up next to Jericho and whispered something to him. Jericho then froze upon remembering how Ed had been removed from the Bell Rock. Ed, on the other hand, was surprised by the sudden anger that started to invade his reason, for he thought he had buried it long ago.

Jericho, Alain and Courant havent yet served the punishment that will always be insufficient even if they paid it with their lives After all, I was never a generous person. But

As Ed slowly stroked his face, his fingertips smoothed out the scar on his forehead that started just above his brow. He pressed down his eyes and shook his head, making Jericho stammer.

Im sorry Im sorry, doctor. We

To avoid suspicion, you must board pretending to move boxes. I would appreciate it if we could end this conversation now.

Thankfully, Jericho stopped talking to him after that. Ed briefly considered if he was being petty and that he should at least greet them properly, but then decided to be open about his feelings. These unfamiliar concerns were ultimately caused by his awareness of Lil, but she never asked him to be courteous or generous.

After all, these men probably didnt throw me into the sea with the intention of meeting me again and finding proper closure either

When Lils wagons arrived, Eds party had all boarded and were ready to set sail. Although the appearance of the ship had changed slightly, the Bell Rocks structure remained unchanged, so Ed didnt need to board and command it. In addition, the sailors were the ones who were the most familiar with this ship anyway.

Leaning against a stake, Ed watched as Alain got off the wagon. The way Alain jumped from the coachmans seat and led the crew still in the cargo hold to disguise themselves as labourers carrying boxes was very natural. Moreover, since there were already a lot of people around the Bell Rock, it seemed like Alain had no trouble finding it.

However, no matter how long Ed waited, Lil was nowhere to be seen. Since she wasnt in the coachmans seat, he thought she must be in the hold. But still, she didnt show up even after all the boxes and crew had been removed from the hold.

Ed agonised for a moment. While hesitating, the Bell Rocks square sail came flapping down and the sound of sailors winding the mast rope could be heard overhead.

Ed approached Alain, who was guiding the sailors to the ship. When the latter saw Ed, his gaze wandered, unable to find an appropriate place to rest his eyes. Ed guessed that Alain was embarrassed for a similar reason as Jericho.

After all, who wouldnt be embarrassed when the person he killed with his own hands appears before him again?

What about the Captain?

D-doctor

Alain looked like he was about to apologise, but Ed shook his head after a bit of silence.

Although I was innocent at the time, I never actually was a navy deserter and eventually appeared in front of the Bell Rock with my fleet. It brought about a different ending than I intended, and

although Im correcting the faults from my end now, I have no intention of explaining all that to Alain. Theres no time to individually examine the entanglements of how things had been or decide between whats right and whats wrong. Moreover, and more crucially, Im not a compassionate enough person to be able to have a friendly conversation with the person who threw me into the sea to die. Benevolence is a word that only fits Liloa. In that regard, I still cant believe how she forgave Sagastar like that. Her generosity is so vast that its impossible to understand

It became terribly clear to Ed that he was too petty to ever catch up with her.

We did a terrible thing to you. I dont know how you survived, but Im so glad you did. And youre even helping us this much

What about the Captain?

Alain glanced at the alley they had exited from.

He stayed behind. He said he needed to check if something had caught up.

Is he suspecting the prison guards?

No, that wasnt it. But he just wanted to make sure.

This wasnt part of the plan.

What can I say, that guy is so meticulous

Alain hesitatingly tried to pass by Ed. But Ed found the whole situation rather strange and grabbed Alains shoulder. Feeling that Alain kept avoiding his gaze, Ed gripped the old mans shoulder more forcefully.

Thats not what the Captain told me he would do, so what do you mean when you said he stayed behind to check?

Liloa wouldnt tolerate even the smallest flaw in her plans. Not just today, but in all of her missions. As a result, even for this one, we planned not only for possible changes in our execution but also for what to do if our plan fails. However, there was never an option for her to vanish without leaving a signal.

Im sure about that! Thats what he told me. He was going to check the perimeter. So, he got off the wagon to do that. He can be here any minute from now.

But did he leave a message for me?

He told me that you should watch the port until the end. Until the Bell Rock safely leaves the coastal waters.

After Alain twisted his shoulder and slipped out of Eds hand, Ed went to the side of the wagons and lingered.

All luggage compartments are empty There are no suspicious marks on it. No bullet holes or knife sheaths One thing Liloa could definitely have said is for me to watch the Bell Rock until it disappears over the horizon Yes, because that was actually part of the final stage of our plan. But I cant help but feel anxious

Ed kept looking back and forth between the dock where the Bell Rock was anchored and the alley where Lil was expected to appear

The Bell Rock raised its anchor. The dull sound of heavy chains being wound up echoed through the port. Still, there was no sign of Lil showing up. There wasnt even the sound of horse hooves getting closer. Ed was concentrating all his attention on her possible presence in the alley, but when he felt a hand tapping his shoulder, he turned around in surprise

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Chapter 236

Are

..?!

But it wasnt Lil

Are you leaving tonight? If you have the documents, please give them to me, Sir.

Instead, it was the port manager, holding out his hand to Ed. As Ed looked around, he realised that he had already walked quite a long way from the dock. The sailors gathered on and around the Bell Rock were still busy with their work. Ed stood with his back to the ship, pretending to hand over the documents while whispering to the manager.

Go to the mansion at once and inform Sir Lindhardt. Tell him to reassign the guards from Gualtiero to the port, and then instruct him to also come over here

Pardon? Residence? Whose residence are you talking about?

Ed reached into his shirt and took out the signet ring that was around his neck. The managers face, which had been brightly smiling because he thought he was getting a bribe, soon turned pale. At first, he couldnt take his gaze away from the ring but looked up at Ed when he suddenly realised something. He then stammered, fumbling with his fingers.

Ad Admiral Retiro

Here, take it and go. Right now.

Yes Yes!

After the manager mounted a horse that had been tied up in front of the management office and disappeared into the distance, Eds mind ran through all the possible reasons for what mightve happened.

There mustve been another factor that prompted Liloa to order Alain to remain silent. Liloa wanted me to stay here until the end to keep an eye on the port thats a plausible possibility Otherwise, if nothing had happened she wouldve arrived by now

Time passed

Now enough time had passed to make the trip to and from Gualtiero two or three more times, making it already past midnight.

Was she chased by the guards? No. A gunshot wouldve been heard or a bullet wouldve struck the wagon in such a case. Besides, normal guards have no reason to move quietly, whereas her

*opponent clearly did The Duke of Mireille? But his villa and company are under strict surveillance.
How on earth*

Doctor

How did they escape our surveillance?

Doctor!

..!

Alain, who had been calling Ed from behind, came around and stood in front of him.

Were ready to set sail. Now all we have to do is untie the rope from the dock.

Then go on, set sail.

But, Im worried because

While dragging his words, Alain looked in the same direction as Ed. Not even a single rat was seen in the alley. Ed, who endured his irritation, took a half-hearted guess at the cause of Alains concerns.

You dont have to worry that I wont be watching until the Bell Rock is completely out of the coastal waters.

No, thats not it

..?

Ed finally faced Alain, whose anxious eyes were blinking rapidly and whose hands and feet couldnt stay still. His speculation slowly turned into conviction. Fortunately for Ed, Alain appeared to be willing to tell him something, so he waited for Alains next words with bated breath.

Now that I think about it, isnt it strange that he was worried about me telling you that he bribed some nearby guards?

Guards? What are you

No, if you knew that the Captain was able to call on the guards he had bribed in advance, why did he think you would leave the port? Dont you also find it suspicious? Why did he bother to ask me not to tell you? Now that I think about it, the fact that he bought off some guards could be a lie altogether

Dont tell me what?

After Alain remained silent, Ed violently shook the shoulder he had unconsciously grabbed.

Alain!

Four men on horseback followed us. We managed to take down two of them, but the remaining two continued to chase us, so the Captain stayed back.

Why are you only telling me this now?!

Ed, who was about to push Alain for an answer, soon shut his mouth.

Seeing his stiff face, its clear to me that he faithfully believed Liloas lie. Its of no use getting angry at Alain this way.

What did they look like?

Masks Yes, they were wearing masks. The Captain said there were no insignia or markings, and that their identities were unknown.

Set sail.

What?

Hurry!

Ed turned Alain around and pushed his back. Alain, however, kept looking back at Ed while resisting stubbornly.

But what about the Captain? We need to check on the Captain first

Ill take care of that. If you all dont set sail right now, youll be stranded here too.

Despite Eds warning, the old man shook off both of Eds hands and turned towards him.

So, youre telling us to just go? Is that what youre saying? Are you sure about that, Doctor?

Didnt the Captain leave you with that very message?

But

Alains shoulders sank as Ed gestured to the railing behind Alain. He hadnt realised it till now, but all the other sailors were standing near the railing and staring down at them. Ed never noticed them before, because he was preoccupied with his debate with Alain about whether they should wait any longer.

The Captain had been in a coma for over a month. And the only thing he thought about since the moment he woke up, were you guys. He planned and executed all of this with a body that before long couldnt even walk So, the sooner you get on board and sail away, the sooner we can declare his mission a success. Can you even afford to waste his efforts?

Julio came down the crossing and grabbed Alains arm.

Come to think of it, Julio, whos supposed to be making the most noise of all at this point, has been unusually quiet

Even though he realised this now, Ed didnt have the time to worry about his unusual behaviour. With Jericho following suit and wrapping his arms around Alains shoulders, Alain, who appeared to be frozen in place, finally stepped onto the crossing. As he climbed toward the Bell Rock, the sailors that had clung to the railing began to return to their positions one by one. The crossing was removed once Alain was fully aboard the Bell Rock, and the ship, which started to set sail, cruised forward the moment the last rope was released.

Ed turned around and hastened his steps. Still, he didnt forget to turn his head occasionally to check on the Bell Rock.

As long as I can see the Bell Rocks movements with the naked eye, Im heeding Liloas wishes. But if Linhardt doesnt arrive in time, I cant be confident about further staying to watch over the ship

Although he knew what Lil wanted most, thinking that she might be gone for good intensified his internal conflict. But just when Ed began to run along the harbour at full speed, the sound of horses hooves could be heard not far away.

Ed hastily turned his head.

Please please

The leading man was followed by several guards. Identifying the mans face, Eds conflict was resolved instantly.

Linhardt!

Linhardt got off the horse and scolded Ed as soon as he saw the latter.

You crazy bastard, did you really just give some random guy your seal?! And why are your clothes like that

Ed didnt bother slowing down and simply snatched his signet ring from Linhardt. Thinking that Linhardt wouldnt say anything else worth listening to, Ed had already mounted his cousins horse and taken the reins before Linhardt even realised what was going on.

Please watch over that ship and make sure it sets out safely.

What?

Instead of answering, Ed kicked the stirrup. Linhardts beloved courser cleverly turned and galloped through the harbour as Linhardts shout quickly grew distant.

Edgar! What on earth are you doing? You damn bastard!

As soon as Ed got on the horse, the alley he had been looking at so anxiously disappeared in an instant. He quickly entered the road, retracing Lils exact path. After midnight, the road was vacant without even the noise of any drunkards. They deliberately chose a quiet residential area for fear of attracting attention.

Liloa!..

Ed shouted her name left and right, but there was no answer. Only his voice calling for Lil rang out on the dreary road.

After wandering around fruitlessly, Ed returned to the main road. A little further ahead, he came across a fallen horse. He dismounted his own and examined the animals carcass but found nothing unusual.

As Alain said, the masked men wore no signs that identified themselves.

In the end, Ed felt that he was left without any clues and decided to knock on the door of the nearest building. Because of his persistent banging noise, someone from the building eventually opened his window and cursed out loud. Then another man from the building next door came out and attempted to swing his fist towards Ed. Quickly blocking the mans incoming fist with one hand, Ed held up his seal with the other

Chapter 237

Seeing your reaction, I get the feeling that you're a light sleeper, did you witness anything adverse happening here tonight?

What? What kind of crazy situation is this?!

Sir Edgar!

Guards approached from a distance, probably sent by Linhardt. It was only when the man saw the men in uniform that he bowed down.

Y-yeah, something happened. It looked like an incident ending in a kidnapping

The man hesitated and looked at Ed.

I don't plan on blaming you for not reporting it, so tell me the whole story.

Well, the sounds of wagons and people shouting were so loud that I looked outside. But when I did, the two wagons had already disappeared toward the port. It seemed that only one person stayed behind to confront the other two. Then four more came and surrounded the one who stayed. In the end he had to kneel down. It was as if he surrendered. They spoke for a while before they tied his hands, put a sack on his head, and took him away.

The feelings Ed had when it was still part of his imagination and the feelings he had now when he realised it had become reality were drastically different. Ed tried to calm his stumbling body, which appeared to be falling somewhere. With him losing his balance, his horse neighed lightly, causing Ed to come to his senses and pick up the reins.

We closely monitored all possible movements of the Duke. And as Roahn is my territory, I know that he has no way to go through undetected. Does this mean that the Duke really wasn't the kidnapper? If not, who else would want to take Liloa

At that moment, a memory passed through his mind in a flash.

An unidentified person has leased Villa Somemei long-term. When the royal family or any other family of the highest ranks visits Roahn, they mostly stay in that villa. And he could do it. He also has a clear reason to seek out Liloa.

The Prince Regent of Obernyu Venua Obernyu

It's amazing how I never considered Venua at all. How come he never occurred to me? Perhaps Venua's pressure was the reason the Duke endured so much humiliation and asked someone like me to find Liloa. Funny enough, no matter how much I tried to forget the day the Duke requested me, I can still clearly remember his overly patient face. Now that I think about it, I should've suspected how he managed to appear so excessively patient.

Were heading to Villa Somemei. Contact the nearby guards and surround the villa without the residents noticing. And tell the platoon guards in Cluet

But he's alive, right? That person

Ed, who was getting on his horse while giving out orders, looked down at the man. Because the man's gaze wasn't directed towards Ed but somewhere else, it took Ed a moment to understand what the man was saying.

Why are you asking me such a thing?

Because of Eds question, the man shivered.

They strangled him before putting the bag over his head So, to cover someones head like that
Sir Edgar!

It wasnt until a few seconds after a horse ran down the road that the guards noticed what was going on. Meanwhile, Ed had already disappeared into the alley. His men were too stunned to realise it at first but soon began to hastily follow their leader

Lil slowly came to her senses. She felt faint and had trouble piecing her mind together.

The sound of water could be heard from somewhere. With a splash, warm water poured over her shoulders, followed by the sensation of someone touching her body

Startled by this sudden realisation, Lils consciousness came back at once and she reflexively looked down at her body before grabbing the hand that was indeed touching her.

Kyaaa!

The woman screamed. The shriek made Lils head pound and she had to cover her ears.

What am I doing in water without a single piece of clothing on?

Lil looked around frantically. The other surprised women, whose sleeves were all rolled up, began screaming as well till the oldest of them tried to calm them down.

Keep quiet, everyone. Youll only scare her more.

The commotion died down immediately. Lil, still clutching her head, looked to her side as she caught her breath. The sound of someone opening the door was heard and Maxwells voice came from far beyond the partition.

If you want me to intrude, go on, keep causing trouble.

..!

Lil warily looked at the maids gathered around her bathtub. Soon after, a middle-aged woman placed her hand on the back of Lils hand, which was holding onto the bathtub.

What happened to you, my lady? You have a lot of small wounds on your body and your clothes were very dirty, so we had to wash you.

Lil took her hand from the womans grasp and wrapped it around her body.

Why?

This is what the Master ordered us to do.

Master? Who are you talking about?

Unfortunately, I cant answer that question.

However, Lil already knew who it was even if she didnt ask. Her eyes wandered up at the dazzling chandelier in the bathroom, then moved to the walls and furniture. Still, she couldnt find what she was looking for.

What time is it?

I cant answer that question.

Then just tell me how much time has passed.

I apologise my lady, but I cant answer that either. Please, just let us do what we were ordered to do.

Since I dont know the time, Im left with no other choice. I have to stall for time as much as possible and get past midnight. Ed and I agreed that the job would be completed by midnight, no matter the circumstances.

In the end, Lil nodded her head and the maids started working again. Lil even offered her arm to the maid who held out her hand. At the same time, she scanned the headdresses lined up, to see if the pins belonging to them were sharp enough.

One, two. I can take at least two.

After the bath, Lil was put in a dress that didnt fit her well. It also wasnt the kind of womens clothing one could see outside nowadays, but the quality was nonetheless excellent.

Perhaps this is a rental mansion, and these clothes were left behind by someone who stayed here before. Who wouldve thought he would go to the trouble of renting a place with the sole purpose of observing my movements? I was expecting the Duke to show up in Roahn, but instead, its actually Venua who appeared

Lil tried to understand Venuas motives somehow.

For what purpose is Venua involved, or rather, could he be the reason why the Duke looked for me in the first place?

Lil had to leave the bathroom with the assistance of the maids. She had snatched a few headpins while the maids were busy decorating her hair, but she was anxious about whether these would be enough. Meanwhile, the Royal Guards, including Maxwell, were waiting for her outside. As Lil walked down the hallway under their strict surveillance, she tried to look outside. But unfortunately for Lil, the windows she passed were on the moonless side.

Maxwell noticed Lils attempts to look out the window and walked next to her.

Just look ahead.

Maxwell tugged Lils arm and dragged her while she deliberately acted weak. With each step she took, water dripped from her hair. Thanks to that, it allowed her to pretend to shiver from the cold. Lil couldnt afford to simply keep her gaze fixed forward and looked at the security situation. Every time they passed through the halls wide open doors, there were always at least two soldiers standing on either side.

The Royal Guards are seasoned soldiers. Their skills are beyond doubt.

Lils whole body ached from tension.

Will I even be able to escape at this rate? Im getting sceptical

The two guards waiting in front of the inner room at the end of the hallway opened the door.

Sir Venua. Liloa has arrived.

After Maxwell brought Lil inside and closed the door behind her, the latter stood quietly in the doorway and looked around the interior. Various escape plans ran through Lils mind, including whether or not she could make use of the decorative sword that was stuck to the wall or if she could jump from the third floor.

If I dont think otherwise or distract myself, this body of mine, that had been dragged here, will surely bury itself in the past again.

Lil struggled to remember her current self now that she was standing in front of Venua.

Venua, who had been drinking on the sofa, put down his empty glass. He filled his glass again and tapped his cigarette. His face, suffering from a long-standing illness, looked even paler under the bright chandelier. Only then did Lil recall that his health hadnt been good. To make matters worse, his alcohol consumption was damaging his body even further, but Venua never left his glass empty for even a moment.

His cigarette pointed at her like a finger.

You were so dirty that I couldnt bear to look at you without you being washed first.

His fingertips trembled and ash from the end of his cigarette fell to the ground.

Even a drowned rat looked better than you.

Glaring at Lil disapprovingly, Venua clicked his tongue and rose from his seat. He then stepped forward and circled her as though he were judging.

Lil similarly looked up at Venua.

Weird, Venua always appeared much taller in my childhood memories, but now he seems much shorter than he was back then. Why? Is it perhaps due to his emaciated appearance?

Sweat-soaked hair stuck to his pale face and there were dark circles under his eyes. His illness was evident.

Chapter 238

Did you hire Mireille?

Is that what the Marquess told you? It seems like that damned bastard has been trusted too much. Even though I warned the Duke that that freak wasnt trustworthy, Ren Mireille stubbornly insisted until the end

Why are you looking for me now?

Standing in front of Lil, Venuas blue-green eyes shone dully.

Such familiar eyes.

In the past, whenever those cold eyes looked at her, her whole body used to tighten. She was merely facing him, but it felt like Lil was already being pushed back into that box. A box meant for forgetting who she was.

While being tied up in her memories, Lil began to hallucinate the screams she used to scream as a child.

Pulling herself together, Lil calmly addressed her relative she met again after many years.

Brother.

Venua glared at Lil, but Lil only raised her head even more when confronted with the clear contempt in his eyes.

Are you twenty-four or five now? I cant believe it. Who on earth will accept you now? The dowry will be needlessly high Damn it, I shouldve found you sooner

Your face used to be worth looking at, but now its clearly over 20 years old. And with your body growing older, I wonder if youll even be able to bear children properly

Lil finally heard why Venua had come to search for her. It was so obvious that she could barely contain herself from laughing.

Ha Its almost embarrassing that I had been this clueless.

Was it my marriage that caused this mess after all? I didnt know my brother was this worried about my life.

Dont call me that. Every time I hear you call me my brother, Im starting to wish more and more that we could bring back the tradition our family honoured 200 years ago.

Because back then, we could still publicly execute the filthy bitches in our family with our own hands.

Venua took a drag on his cigarette. With a sigh, the smoke from the cigarette spread across Lils face. Her vision became blurry in an instant and it even forced her to turn her head. After coughing a few times, she opened her eyes again and noticed the clock on the fireplace. It was pointing at midnight.

I expected it, but still, its extremely disappointing. Im actually the foolish one for thinking you committed suicide. For a moment I had forgotten that you were an animal without any shame. You let yourself be wheedled by that Marquess and rolled bodies with him, didnt you? No need for you to lie to me, I know all about it. Its a miracle that you havent given birth to an illegitimate child yet

Lils pulse, which had been calm even after meeting her own blood for the first time in many years, suddenly started racing. She could pass off the verbal abuse directed at her, but she really didnt like to hear Ed getting dragged into this mess as well.

Eventually, Lil couldnt stand it anymore and reacted sarcastically.

I, too, can see how the Prince Regent mustve lived.

The truth is that Venua can still lawfully publicly execute me. It might be frowned upon, but no one would blame him. However, theres a reason why I was brought here unharmed. Venua needs me and he needs me alive

Still a Prince Regent despite being an all-grown-up firstborn son. My poor father, even though hes old and sick, I guess he felt uneasy about completely entrusting the principality to my brother. I heard that you yourself have been fighting an illness for several years? Shouldnt you at least go

south for recuperation? And yet, even though its precarious, you are holding on to the throne. I fully understand how trustworthy my brother is to father

Venua immediately lost his temper and threw the glass he was holding against the wall while shouting.

You crazy bitch!

The shattered glass spilt the alcohol in it.

Not knowing how to cope with his anger, Venuas body shook uncontrollably. As he got closer, his bloodshot eyes glared at Lil as if to devour her.

Who gave you permission to use your tongue like that?

At that same time, Venua raised his right hand high, his blazing eyes looking like he intended to kill her.

Lil clenched her jaw.

It would be beneficial to get hit.

As soon as she braced herself, Lils cheek flared up. Despite being able to withstand the weight-loaded blow, Lil fell sideways, pretending she couldnt overcome his strength.

Fuck!

Venua was about to kick Lil as well, but swerved at the last second and kicked the chair instead, causing the seats leg and armrest to shatter and collapse.

Blinking slowly, Lil came to her senses. She then raised her body and spit out blood. No matter how much she expected it, the impact of Venuas slap was still a lot for her weakened state to handle.

Whats going on?

Maxwell burst through the door and came inside.

Get out! How dare you come in here without my permission!

Venua, looking around with red eyes, strode towards the table. He then grabbed the bottle standing on it and threw it towards the door. Avoiding getting hit, Maxwell quickly left the inner room and shut the door. After the bottle made impact with the closed door and glass pieces shattered in all directions, the strong scent of distilled liquor filled the room.

This is also in my favour, Im sure that no matter what fuss Venua makes from now on, Maxwell wont come back.

Venua, who had been fuming for a while, even had to place his hand on the table in order to support himself. In between his pauses to catch his breath, the finger from his other hand pointed at Lil.

You probably thought it would be easy to get away with it, right? Yeah, a bitch like you would definitely have thought so.

I guess I need to educate you again. It becomes clear to me that I was much too lenient in the past.

..?

Lil raised her hand and wiped the side of her mouth.

It feels sore perhaps he actually managed to tore my lip.

Meanwhile, Venuas expression, as he looked down at the squirming Lil, suddenly overlapped with the face of the Gualtiero guard who wanted to take a look at the rotten eggs.

How dare you look straight at me with your filthy eyes?

Why am I filthy?

You were rumoured to be the Marquess mistress.

Ah.

Do you think I will simply leave the Marquess alone? His Majesty might not want to give him up, but theres always a way for me to avoid the eyes of even the imperial family. Sooner or later, I will cut off his head and shut him up for good.

This is exactly what Ive been worried about. It has always been evident to me that my brother was going to do something about Ed if word got out Fearing this would happen, I couldnt bring myself to hastily show my feelings for him or approach him without hesitation But apparently, during my stay in Roahn, rumours spread that I was his mistress nonetheless. Its obvious how much Venua wants to deal with Ed now

Regardless of the feasibility of Venuas method, anxiety rushed forward and indiscriminately encroached on Lil. Still, she managed to open her mouth with a sneer.

Do you know how many men I have had attached to my stomach? Does this mean you are going to find and kill all of them?

What?!

Venua walked towards Lil.

What did you say?

How many years have passed between me leaving Sesbron and you finding me hanging out with the Marquess? As my brother said many times before, I lived my life bouncing around from one man to another. I thought you would have guessed it all by now as my dear brother was always so sharp-eyed

You crazy bitch! What kind of nonsense are you spouting?!

...!

Venua reached for Lils hair and shook it, causing her neck to bend violently in all directions.

So have you given birth to a child? Huh? Do you have an illegitimate child?!

Venuas other hand pressed roughly against various parts of Lils abdomen, as though he was able to tell how many times Lil had been involved with men or given birth that way. Lil gritted her teeth against the pain of her injured area being crushed and held out her hands under the pretence of begging Venua to stop. Her vision became blurry again, so she had to rely only on the touch of her fingertips. Then, out of nowhere and without letting her hair go, her body was violently pushed by Venua and hit the sofa. Lil didnt even have the time to feel the sudden pain in her back as it felt like not only her scalp but also the skin of her face would be torn off due to his tight graps.

Lil, now reaching behind her to find her balance, coincidentally felt something in the waistcoat lying on the sofa.

A little closer, come on a little closer

While blindly struggling with her hands, Lil reached closer until the cold metal behind her waist brushed against her palm. Lil then immediately pulled it out and shoved it under Venuas chin.

Upon feeling a foreign object being pushed against his skin, Venua froze.

Those old habits of yours have been proven quite dangerous.

Lil slapped away the hand that was pulling her hair before placing her thumb on the ball. At the sound of the pestle going down, Venuas eyes widened and rolled down. Lil put more force on the barrel of the gun and pressed it further into his chin.

Soon, the hands that fell from Lil rose hesitantly into the air

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Wha what are you doing?

My brother still has the habit of grabbing people by the hair and keeping a gun on his waist.

What is this? Huh? What the hell are you thinking

Im pointing a gun at my brother while contemplating if I should kill him right here and now.

Lil gradually rose as Venua sank. She led him to his position by nudging the gun side to side while keeping it pointed under his chin. When Venua ended up kneeling on the floor, Lil took a step back to create some distance.

Who told you to do this? Did the Marquess instigate this?

Listen carefully, brother

Have you been brainwashed? Did he order you to kill me?

I know how to think for myself. Even if I kill my own brother, it will entirely be of my own accord. You may find it hard to believe, but just to let you know, this head of mine can think of such incredible things.

You cant do this. How can you point a gun at me?

The reason why we find ourselves in this situation, with this gun between us, is because you angered me. And without this piece of metal, you wouldnt listen to me. Do you get it now?

You misunderstood me. I was just correcting you. If you finally learn how to think properly in the future, Im sure you will be grateful to me. So, how can you

Keep your hands up.

..!

The arms that gradually lowered quickly rose again.

It was strange for Lil to see Venuas pale face turn blue while trying not to lose its cool. But it was even stranger to see him exhibit such patience, even if he was in the presence of a gun. In spite of everything, patience was Lils sole possession. It wasnt in Venuas nature to tolerate anything in front of her.

Lil went on as she ran her hand through her messy hair.

Youve probably forgotten that Im a skilled markswoman. Remember Pontenbach? That insane seven-year war was brought to an end by my bullet. Im especially confident over long distances, and seeing how Ive never put down the gun even though Im out of the military, everything I say isnt without foundation. Can you imagine it now? My guns muzzle is aimed at my own brothers forehead from only one step away

You really are doing this Are you threatening me? Its terrible to see how much youve lived like a scumbag and clearly lack manners and civility

Whoever it is, if you try to lay a finger on anyone who is associated with me, you will need to face me.

Ha! You probably mean the Marquess you

Lowering her body, Lil pressed the barrel of her gun into Venuas knee. Venua, who had temporarily forgotten about his situation and raised his voice, gradually quieted down with her sudden action.

rolled bodies with

From now on, anytime, anywhere, a gun will be pointed at you from just a few meters away. Then one day, I will shoot the pottery next to you just to watch you lose your mind. And if I get bored some other time, I will blow off the leg of the chair youre sitting on. Then if you ever forget about my existence and think about living comfortably, Ill shoot you in the knee. That way, youll never forget that the muzzle of this gun is always pointed at you.

..!

Whereas Venuas body trembled as he couldnt vent his rage, Lil merely stared down into his red-hot eyes and continued sharply.

Ill count down the days till your death and treat you as such until you wither away. Wasnt it my brother who always told me this? That Im a filthy bitch with nothing more than a body. Im sure you never even considered that you should be wary of bitches like me. I dont have an honour to lose because I have no status anyway.

Your delusions are becoming too much. I will throw that body of yours in a corner as soon as possible and keep you from ever getting out of the house.

How are you going to imprison me? This body will walk out of here soon.

How can you

Its simple. My dear brother will order Maxwell to clear the hallway.

Venua, who was looking up at her, burst into laughter. Lil, on the other hand, quietly listened to his laughter though, as if she knew it wouldnt last long.

Stupid bitch. Why should I listen to you? Once the royal guards subdue you again, this play will all be over.

Are you sure about that? Hmm, to tell the truth, I actually don't know what crazy things I would do if they burst in through the door. But for example, I can always pull the trigger right now.

Can you, now?

Knowing that she had only 1 bullet, Lil took out a hairpin that had been tucked into the sleeve of her dress instead.

I don't know what makes you think I can't and won't do it. The moment my brother disappears, I will become the successor to Obernyu. Although I yearn for freedom, I have wanted to enjoy that glory ever since I was young. So, there's no reason to refuse when my turn comes. There truly is none.

Lil pointed the sharp ornament at Venua's left nape. More specifically, she aimed its tip just right below his ear. Her arms were shaking, probably from the beating she endured before, but she was dominated by the dangerous thought that it wouldn't matter if she missed or not.

If I really miss, it might as well end up in Venua's neck.

The tension in the other person's body was evident. However, seeing Venua's neck and shoulders twitching and stiffening reminded Lil of her younger self. Oddly, the feeling of standing in front of him like this wasn't something she enjoyed.

Didn't you scorn me as a child because you feared the likes of me?

Out of nowhere, the ornament shot past Venua's ear and pierced the sofa, triggering the man to scream and close his eyes from shock.

Taking a moment to pull himself together, Venua slowly rolled his eyes and found the pin stuck next to the nape of his neck. He pressed his lips. Although he felt humiliated due to the sound he made, it was nothing but momentary fury and embarrassment to him.

After all, Lil knew better than anyone that despite this being something he wasn't used to, he probably wouldn't experience it ever again.

Rather, I'm the one experiencing my past pain through him. Venua's power is that he's completely unaware of this connection. Venua would never understand the gravity of my past, nor would he ever regret it even if I use violence to repay the violence I've suffered myself.

Lil was despondent by this helpless fact.

What do you think brother? After the royal guards run here because of the gunshot, will they serve a dead body or will they kneel before me?

Unless the world has gone crazy, who would dare to name a woman as their heir?

Didn't we have a precedent named Madam Pondue?

You bitch

Brother, there's something I've been wondering about. What on earth makes you so confident?

..?

Lil was suddenly reminded of something she had heard through passing rumours.

It may not be true, but I have nothing to lose.

Especially, when I heard you haven't produced a son yet.

Those words seemed to have touched something fatal. However, it only lasted a moment, and the look of embarrassment on his face quickly disappeared.

Successions, descendants and abdications. Everything related to being the heir is Venua's reason for living. He hasn't changed a bit since we were young.

Lil was even proud of herself for remembering it, albeit belatedly.

His pale, stiff lips loosened.

Max well.

So, will you listen to my orders?

Maxwell!

Half an hour had passed since midnight, so it was time for the royal guards to return to their quarters. After confirming that her surroundings were sufficiently vacant, Lil gestured with the gun she aimed at Venua.

Take the lead.

Do you think you'll get away with this?

Why, are you saying it will be safer if I stay here?

Lil let out a laugh like a cough.

Me? Here?

Although her stomach still hurt from the scuffle a little while ago, Lil laughed even harder as her opponent's face contorted in contempt.

I wonder if there will ever be a day when you will understand this joke.

What's with this frivolity? Is this also something you've learned from your time outside?

Lil, who had erased her smile in an instant, flicked the barrel of her gun again.

Take the lead.

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Venua got up from the floor and headed toward the door. Despite having his hands tied in front of him, he didn't, for even a moment, hide his displeasure. Nonetheless, Lil followed behind him while aiming the gun at her brother.

When Venua kicked the door open, he raised a question.

Where are you trying to escape to?

Is that something I need to tell you?

If youre planning to return to the Retiro residence, just forget it. You dont expect the Marquess to continue protecting you, do you? He probably only knew about Ren Mireilles involvement, so do you think he would keep holding on to the hem of your shirt if he knows hes actually facing me?

Dont talk about him so carelessly.

Who? Are you talking about the Marquess? Liloa, hes a mixed-blood with no roots in this Empire

Lil suddenly shoved Venuas back with the muzzle of her gun, causing her opponents body to tense and stiffen.

I told you to stop talking about him in that way. Dont expect me to have the same level of patience as in the past, especially now that I have experienced everything that Id been longing for in the outside world. I have no reason to put up with you anymore. And considering how my arms are still shaking from being beaten for the first time in a long while, I could actually miss my aim. Of course, Id like to avoid your vital points, but Im not sure I can in this state

Venua glanced back, twisting his mouth.

Youve become quite good at threatening people. I see youve gotten more cunning since you grew older. Your temper has also worsened. Parents often say that their daughters become more cunning and temperamental with age. I can see now how that isnt an exaggeration at all.

Funny, I dont remember throwing bottles and breaking chairs like my brother just did, so why do you say its me who has the temper?

Stop talking back to me. Its frustrating enough to see that all the culture and etiquette Ive taught you have been wasted away

Thankfully, my brother is cultured. Hes so well educated that he knew he had to beat his own sibling since they were young.

Beat you? If anyone hears this, theyll think I really hit you Ah yes, you mustve been tarnishing my reputation by going around saying stuff like that to disparage the fact that I disciplined my sister in the hopes that she would grow up properly. Dont forget you became the way you are now because you received my discipline. People wouldnt even bother opening their eyes to look at you if it werent for it.

Our conversation continues in circles In fact, this isnt an unfamiliar situation at all as Venua always insisted that he has no recollection of what he had done to me. And if I ever tried bringing it up like now, he would just tell me to ignore it as those days had long passed

Remembering the old days, Lil chose to hit back with a remark Venua often threatened her with.

Dont make me gag you.

In the past, Venua actually gagged Lil. Freedom of speech was the first of many freedoms that Lil had been deprived of.

But Venua will refuse to remember this as well.

The ears visible from behind turned red.

Well, speaking of gags, Venua is probably experiencing this level of humiliation and shame for the first time in his life. Whats more, the threats are uttered by none other than myself, his little sister. I can only imagine how humiliating he must be feeling.

Lil followed Venua down the stairs of the mansion.

When I was younger, I fantasised about exacting my revenge on Venua and revelling in the joy. But now that the reality of pointing a gun at him hits me, Im left unimpressed. And I dont think it will make me feel any better even if I tell him everything he told me back then. Venuas humiliation stems from the fact that hes embarrassed by me, not because he has to suffer the real pain and hatred he would feel if he was prevented from speaking by someone else. I know this better than anyone else Maybe that explains the dull despair Im feeling

The familiar feeling of disappointment rose up to the tip of Lils throat but quickly subsided. It went as fast as it came, just as she had been used to it.

Lil crossed the halls on the ground floor and eventually asked her brother a question to evoke herself.

Why did you insinuate the Duke of Mireille to bring me to you?

Look at you, you really are doing all sorts of things. Now, youre even interrogating me

I understand the general story about how you put pressure on the Duke and the Duke made a request to the Admiral. But what I really want to know is what made my brother move. What made you come all the way to Roahn? Were you so concerned about the possibility that I mightve had an illegitimate child? Was it due to fear that your lineage would be leaked, or that I would give birth to a son before you? Whatever it was, I guess you couldnt get past your worries and in the end decided it would be better to put me somewhere where you could keep an eye on me

If you gave birth to an illegitimate child, whether its a son or a daughter, I will definitely find them

But its strange that it took you so many years to realise that. It wouldve been easier to start searching for me as soon as I disappeared, so I dont understand why you suddenly became so desperate now. Is something going on in the principality?

Theres nothing for you to know. Even if there is, what makes you so curious about it? Without pretence

Because its about me, my body, and my child.

Venua didnt seem to hear Lils response as he was preoccupied with grabbing the door handle and violently shaking it to open the mansions entrance. But seeing him simply pulling and pushing it repeatedly, one would think he had never opened a door himself before in his life. Lil extended her hand and unlocked the lock beneath the handle. When Venua eventually pulled the door open, the sound of rain hit Lils ears.

Its raining heavily.

Lil looked around while Venua hesitated.

Going out of the front door and down the stairs on the right, they reached a corridor leading to the left and right side. Fortunately for Lil, several horses were temporarily tied up in the corridor. Lil

pressed down on Venuas back while looking down at one horses mane with its head stuck in the hay feeder.

To the right.

Venua was forced to turn to the right before stopping again, perhaps having figured out what she was planning. Lil put pressure on the gun held against his back. Even as he had no choice but to walk, Venua kept trying to look back at Lil.

I dont know why youre doing this. Where are you going and for what? What do you want out there?

What kinds of interesting things are out there that you keep trying to get away? Huh? Do you really enjoy being trampled under a bunch of men with no roots?

You truly think that the only thing I know how to do is spread my legs, thats why youre making such poor guesses. I advise you to think more diversely if you want to track my route later.

Think more diversely? How can you cause such a huge fuss just because you sneaked out and read a few books when you were young? Even so, it was all useless. Even if you can read and understand text, youre nothing but a low-level intellect. No matter how much you try to think, at the end of the day, youre just a bitch. And even if you could read, whats the point? How are you ever going to use it? After all, if you dont spread your legs, your existence is basically worthless.

With a glare, Lil thrust her gun into Venuas face.

The corridor.

The cold muzzle that suddenly touched his cheek startled Venua, and it urged him to walk. Still, he added more words while looking ahead.

Okay, Ill tell you what. Thinking about the affection Ive developed for you so far, Ill let you read a few more books Strangely enough, youve loved books ever since you were little But theres one thing you should know. All that has happened to you up till now is the result of daring to read with your limited brain. Misusing knowledge is a speciality of women after all. And it frustrates me even more because youre so unaware that even your arrogant attitude now is evidence of my failure to raise you.

What a disgusting appeasement. The fact that he thinks appeasement can be established through just that is utterly disgusting.

Keep in mind that your greatest value lies in satisfying a man and giving birth to his children. After all those years, how can you still not know your brothers heart, which is just concerned about your future?

Keeping her distance from Venua by stretching out her arm, Lil stroked the horses mane with her other hand. The beast lifted its head from digging into the hay feeder. Lil then stared at Venua while fiddling with the reins.

Even now, he seems to be contemplating whether or not to scream loudly or how he can subdue me.

If thats truly your concern, I think you can stop now.

I cant believe thats all you can say

My legs are made for walking and running

Lil climbed into the saddle and took the reins.

they exist so I can stand on my own.

Rainwater fell from the corridors awning and hit the floor. In the midst of the heavy rain, Lil kicked the stirrup and her horse started walking.

Beneath her muzzle, Venuas lowered figure looked dwarfed, however he suddenly raised his head as if he had made up his mind.

The Archduke is in critical condition.

The voice sounded like it came through gnashing teeth.

I know that my father, the Archduke, is ill, but has his illness progressed to the point where hes now in critical condition?

Still, Lil decided that it would be best for her not to get shaken by his words. She paused for a moment before answering as calmly as possible.

This isnt the first time he has been in critical condition for a day or two

Dr. Limue said its really dangerous this time. Father said he wants to see your face once before he passes. Even if you were already presumed dead, he was stubborn. He assured me that you were definitely alive. Thats why I had no choice but to make him a promise You I will bring you, Liloa