

Northwest 241

Chapter 241

Is that all? Thats why you asked the Duke of Mireille to ask the Admiral? Just to bring me back?

An angry face burst into heat beyond the rain.

What?! Your fathers dying, but thats all you can say? You ungrateful bitch! You truly are the devils child!

With the devil, you refer to our father and mother, right?

I knew you would be like this, so I tried to bring you back by kidnapping you. You Youre worse than a beast! I at least know that much!

Ill think about going to see my father. However, even if I end up heading to the Obernyu estate, I refuse to be accompanied by you. I will take care of myself. Ill merely inform you if I come.

When the horses hooves stepped out of the corridor and onto the grass, heavy rain poured on Lil. Venua remained standing there with his shoulders shaking violently, but Lil simply corrected her posture that was initially turned towards him and slammed the reins down.

Raindrops pelted her face and entered her eyes. Wiping her eyes with her arm, she sped through the garden, where beyond the sound of iron hooves shaking the ground, the sound of grass crumbling beneath the beasts four legs, and the sound of pouring rain, Venuas cry could be heard as well.

Get that bitch!..

Following the distant shout, the front gates bell rang loudly.

Lil felt like someone was about to grab her head from behind. No, instead of someone, it was more like a formless demon she had forgotten for a while. Lil felt goosebumps running down the back of her neck and glanced behind her. She sensed Mortus voice, which she had thought had long since faded, mixed within the rain.

It seems like he can suddenly appear from somewhere and drag me back to his castle.

Despite her sinking heart, Lil hastily pulled out her gun. There was still a considerable distance to the front gate, but because of the darkness, Lil had not yet been spotted by anyone while running out in the rain. Soldiers guarding the tightly closed iron gate were busy going back and forth, wondering what they just heard.

Lil shot her saved bullet without hesitation.

Open the gate!

The soldiers, who eventually discovered Lil, gathered in front of the gate. One of the guards who was aiming a rifle suddenly took his eyes off the barrel of the gun, probably surprised that the figure he saw through the raindrops was that of a woman in a dress.

Its a woman! Who is it?..

Stop! Dont shoot! It might be the young lady!..

Then we shoot the horse instead

Thats crazy. She might get hurt!..

The soldiers probably expected her to rush straight to the gate, so the area in front of the gate thickened as a result of their efforts to form a human shield, leaving Lil with no room to break through the men who had poured in. However, Lil only pretended to steer the horse to the exact centre before abruptly changing direction. Due to the fact that all the soldiers gathered in front of the iron gate, the footpath next to it was now empty. It was still blocked by a gate of course, but Lils horse could easily leap that high.

Lil gripped the reins tightly and accelerated. Although some soldiers realised her true intentions and ran from the main gate, it was already too late.

Knotting the reins, Lil led her horse to instinctively jump over the obstacle without slowing down. As soon as the horses front hooves leapt, Lil stuck her torso close to the beast. Droplets of water splashed from its mane and hit her face while the horses huge body floated into the air and drew a flexible, parabolic line. Unfortunately, the hem of Lils skirt got tangled in the decorations that rose above the iron gate and as soon as the beasts hind legs crossed the highest point, her dress, heavy with rainwater, tore apart with a squishy sound.

Having landed on a well-paved road, the hooves of the horse were now light. The horse occasionally stepped in a puddle, causing water to splash in all directions and hit Lils bare calf from time to time.

The gate creaked open behind her back. Remembering the layout of the city of Roahn, Lil decided to run through the most complicated route she could come up with.

No matter how much the royal guards search Roahn in order to catch me, I have the advantage of having learned all the roads through the maps of the lord himself and so memorised even the routes of unmarked alleys.

After leaving the meticulously demarcated main street, she entered a narrow, tangled maze of alleys. When walking frantically between buildings, Lil suddenly came to her senses. It dawned on her that she couldnt see clearly in front of her because moonlight didnt make it into the narrow alleys. All she saw was rain. So, she directed her horse to stop as she finally felt secure enough to catch her breath.

It was also then that Lil noticed that the sound of the other hooves was no longer audible.

Its either due to the rain or because the guards have truly lost sight of me.

Remaining still for a while, her horse eventually lowered its head and bit the grass that had sprouted between the pavers on the ground. Lil brushed her hair away from her face and became aware of the cold. She was only hit by this much rain, but her limbs already began to tremble with the heaviness and weariness creeping into her body.

Come to think of it, the medicine I took at the inn before going to Gualtiero mustve long since lost its effectiveness

As soon as she realised that, the feeling of fatigue took over her entire body and she no longer had the energy to run.

It will be better to save up my stamina for now and speed up again when I sense someone catching up with me.

Lil turned her horses head and led it to walk. From where she was, it was only a short distance away from the port anyway

The moon, setting from the west, shone over the Devito Harbour.

Standing in the shade of the buildings, Lil looked at the quiet harbour.

There are no signs of a battle and more importantly, the Bell Rock is gone.

Lil stared at the dock where the ship had been anchored, but now there was nothing but waves continuously getting hit by the falling raindrops.

It mustve sailed safely then.

Feeling relieved, her body relaxed and sank further. Lil, who had held her horse close to the shadow of the building, stuck even closer to the wall and tilted her head up. The rain was getting stronger, pouring on her face, clothes, and down to her toes. Although she was exhausted and worn out, she had nowhere to go.

A place I can come back to Theres a place I once thoughtlessly said Id return to someday. Funny how Im suddenly reminded of how happy he was even though it was a slip of the tongue But was it truly a mere slip-up?

Lil raised her gaze at the cliff. Seeing the windows of the Retiro residence brightly lit, an illusory warmth seeped through the rain. While blankly staring at it, reminded Lil even of the smell; the harshness of the medicine she had to take from Levi all the time, the old papers in the library, things like that. And even the pleasant fragrance Ed used.

Its the scent he has been wearing since I first met him, but I still have no idea what it is A scent that was most present when he hugged me

Lil blinked her eyes slowly. Raindrops formed on her eyelids and fell. Perhaps because her mind was getting more and more clouded, her vision seemed to be blur as well.

Somehow I held on to this last bit of hope, but it turned out to be nothing but a useless dream. I knew I always knew it wouldnt work out in the first place. I knew it from the beginning, so now I have no reason to regret it or feel sad. Even after everything we went through these past months, Im not shameless enough to keep clinging to Ed Venua clearly warned me that he would kill Ed, so its obvious how my brother will act if I lay my trust in Ed

Lil closed her tired eyes. As she sighed, the lips that had long lost their senses trembled and a small stream of water continued to flow down her cheeks.

The darkness deepened.

At first, it was just hiding in the shade of the building, but now the shadows appeared to be condensing to reverberate a dark voice. The voice told her that she couldnt get away no matter how hard she tried. The pitch black mass on the floor eventually found shape and a hand appeared out of nowhere. The hand, formed from darkness, came up to the leg that had been exposed by the torn dress and gripped Lils ankle.

Lil offered Mortu her ankle without a fight and her foot popped out of the stirrup.

If both my feet fall off like this, then I wont be able to go anywhere

How strange. I originally intended to leave the League and resume my life with the Duke of Mireille, wanting to end my old, bad relationship with the Duke and start over as Liloa Obernyu again The only thing that I wanted was to just live my life without denying myself

But now I dont want to go anywhere. I barely escaped Venuas clutches by sheer force of will, but it feels like Id face the same problems no matter where I go Perhaps Mortu has already defeated me I dont seem to get away, no matter how hard I try Im trapped in a castle with no doors and Ive been completely unaware of it this entire time The whole world mustve already know of this and thats the reason why theyre constantly laughing, despising, and mocking me

Chapter 242

Volume 7

Ah, right

White fog, created by her warm breath colliding with the cold, broke into the air along with her mutterings.

If I were to wallow about this here, the royal guards would surely catch up to me. It will be just a matter of time

Lil let go of the reins.

Its almost ironic how I went through so much trouble getting away, fully knowing I wont be able to escape them anyway

In addition to her melancholic mood, the rain showed no signs of stopping either.

Even after some time passed, the royal guards still hadnt found her, so Lil kept entertaining her thoughts. In order to suppress the constant lurking urge to ride her horse up to the Retiro residence, she would repeatedly tell herself what Ed had done to her.

But the Ed I keep seeing in my memory is the one who insists that he has been treated unfairly, making all this increasingly difficult Theres no need for me to listen to his explanation though. What I really need is just one reason why I shouldnt go back I truly dont want to hear or read his explanation

Lils eyes widened.

Im sure I left Eds letter there on purpose

Shit

The compulsion to give up dominated Lil as soon as she mumbled the curse word.

Theres no need to open it anyway. Whether I read the letter or not, or whether I understand his situation or not, nothing will change

Lil decided to stop thinking about Ed altogether, whether with resentment or hatred. Although she felt so weak that she wished she could somehow simply pass out and disappear, Lil shook her head violently in an attempt to erase him

By the time Ed arrived, the Roahn guards stationed near Villa Somemei had already surrounded the mansions main gate.

Who are you? What are you doing here?..

One of Eds guards managed to catch up with them and immediately yelled at the man behind the gate.

How rude! This person!

The guard suddenly stared at Ed with a look of dismay. Among the citizens of Rohan, there was no one who didnt know what kind of mansion Villa Somemei was. If there was a conflict between the lord of the land and the person staying there, it automatically made it a conflict between the most powerful families. Realising this, the guard on the other side of the gate abruptly changed his attitude. What also hadnt helped his situation was that due to the rain, he didnt get to check the uniforms of the men behind Ed, but after taking a closer look he recognized them instantly.

The guard quickly came out of the gate and bowed his head properly. He squinted his eyes in the rain to further examine Ed, however, Ed simply announced himself, making the guards scrutiny pointless.

Edgar Retiro. Go and tell the lessee.

What do you mean lessee? The person staying here

Then who is the lessee?

..!

When Ed tried to enter the opened gate, another guard blocked his path and the guards waiting behind the gate simultaneously positioned their hands on the hilts of their swords.

Ed pulled the reins to restrain his horse and asked again.

Who is it?

That

How high is his status?

Well, one of the highest in the Empire

So youre telling me that one of the most powerful people on the continent has come into my territory with a private army in tow? And without informing the territorys lord of his identity no less? Even His Majesty the Emperor cannot commit such insolence. Are there any nobles who dont know about Roahns right of denying entry?

?

No, thats not it

Then whats the problem?

The guard confusedly blinked at the series of inquiries, and thereby belatedly asked the only right question.

W-why are you trying to get in?

Instead of answering, Ed checked his pocket watch.

Its already past one oclock. Im too late

Even though Ed had no idea what Venua would do to Lil, it worried him nonetheless. He became even more anxious because he was unfamiliar with being afraid of something so uncertain.

With his mind currently elsewhere, Eds subordinate spoke up next to him.

There was a report of a kidnapping. It was said to have been quite the ruckus.

What do you mean by a kidnapping report?

A witness confirmed the sight of six people on horseback knocking out one person and wrapping his head in a sack.

We dont know anything about that

I will make sure to record these words of yours. You just denied the charges during an initial interrogation, if what you said turned out to be false, know that the punishment for your crime will be heavier.

Huh? What charges

Ed, who had been squeezing out the last bit of patience he had, which hadnt been much to begin with, cut off the guard.

I witnessed dozens of armed men riding horses into the alleys on the way here. What do you think the charges would be for unidentified soldiers that roam my territory and may have been involved in a kidnapping?

As Ed drove the horse again, the soldier backed away but blocked the gate. However, Ed didnt stop and if he continued much further, the guards would definitely be trampled by his horses front hooves.

Then, wait a moment

As the lord and magistrate of Roahn, Im afraid I must go in now.

The reason why Ed had to state this so formally, despite being a person who usually didnt care about formality or status, was simple.

Venua is a difficult individual to deal with. Personally, Im not familiar with his character, but Im aware he was able to press the Duke of Mireille, who is a close associate of the Emperor and wields great power, to this extent to force him to move. I also cant ignore the fact that hes a man of high status, so this may result in a major controversy over Liloa

In fact, there would be no legal issues if Venua were to take Liloa. No one in Sesbron would consider this as a case of kidnapping. Venua isnt only a blood relative to Liloa, but her brother, so he has the right to claim ownership over her Legally. Even if theres a lawsuit or court intervention, the Emperor will support Venua. Besides, if the Emperor finds out that I returned without even touching the South, hell be looking for every opportunity to screw me over. In addition to this all, it looks like Liloa has no intention of wearing the necklace again, so she mustve decided to live as her original self. The problem is, she never told me anything about that, so I dont know where or what I can start. Unless I want to risk getting in the way and cause trouble during her return process, I

have to follow these tedious procedures And the only thing I can use against Venua in this situation is an armed conflict within the territory.

The villas guards opened the gate with a disgruntled gesture. Accompanied by two of his own guards, Ed sped up, clearly not caring that he had already reached the garden.

Dismounting and entering the ground hall, Ed took off his hat.

Rainwater accumulated in the brim poured down and caused the servants in the villa to clean after him. Because Ed didnt wait for the tenants instructions and kept moving, the door attendant hurried in front of him.

Sir. You have a visitor.

From behind the door, a dull sound of something or someone rolling on the floor could be heard before it eventually calmed down again.

Nervous thoughts crossed Eds mind.

Liloa might be the one getting beat up Although in the eyes of the general public its considered absurd to hit a woman, its not an unfounded worry at all, because in reality, violence against the opposite sex is still frequent. From Venuas perspective, Liloa is someone who he deserves to beat, he probably did so when they were growing up. Of course, under normal circumstances, Liloa wouldve been able to withstand a few strikes, but her physical state has been terrible lately. Moreover, she likely lost a lot of stamina when she fought against Venuas royal guards, and given how long its been since she last took her medicine, her body will start to struggle

Ed rushed into the inner room even before the door was opened for him. He looked around, but there was no sign of Lils presence. There was only Venua and other two guards.

Judging from the messed up face of this one guard, I guess hes the one who had been beaten up just now.

Venua, who was showing his back, turned to Ed after lighting a cigarette.

So whos this uninvited guest?

A long stream of smoke flowed through his lips.

Aside from the black hair and blue eyes that are the same as Liloas, their eye sockets and facial profile are horrifyingly similar as well.

The moment they faced each other, Ed was convinced that they were indeed family. The man in front of him was no other than Venua Obernyu. The regent of the principality of Obernyu.

Edgar Retiro.

Chapter 243

Volume 7

Oh, I see.

Venua, sitting down with his legs crossed, offered Ed a seat as well.

Marquess, what brings you here?

I came here due to a kidnapping case.

Kidnapping? Thats indeed a big deal.

Thats why were searching the mansion. And you, arent you going to introduce yourself?

Ed initially didnt intend to talk about the kidnapping incident with Venua or the fact that there was a witness, but this pretext was necessary for him to access the estate. At the same time, he used this conversation to distract Venua while figuring out what was going on.

Liloe, who I expected to see, isnt here. Instead a soldier from the Royal guards, who followed Venua to this faraway land, is the one being beaten up. Why? Moreover, even though my guards are searching his place, he seems quite relaxed on the outside.

I wonder what kind of important person got kidnapped for the lord to come out and do the inspection himself

Who are you to bring your private army into my territory?

Well

Venua also seems to be fully aware that this situation could turn unfavourable for him too. His plan mustve been to kidnap Liloe and escape, and then claim that he never stayed in Roahn in the first place.

We both know without you asking. So let us not tire ourselves by doing so, okay?

My soldiers will arrest any private soldier they encounter

How cocky.

And you will be detained here until your identity is revealed

Venua set down his glass with a clang. As the alcoholic content poured onto his hand, the guard with the best complexion immediately wiped the back of his masters hand.

Nothing good will come from making me upset, Marquess. And right now, you already annoy me enough without even trying.

I dont know why I shouldnt bother with you.

Venua let out a short laugh into the air.

Haha! People say that your ego is sky-high. I can see how thats true.

All this time, Ed hadnt sat down yet. After all, it was better to stand so that he could look around the room.

Venua was clearly angry about something and took it out on his guard What on earth happened here?

Ed kept turning his head to scan the room with a sneer until a strange object caught his attention. Something was stuck into the side of the sofa. It was thin and long and compelled Ed to get closer and see exactly what it was. Ed walked to the seat that Venua had recommended earlier. The object occasionally shone. However, it depended on the angle of the light that changed every time he took a step.

The moment he passed the sofa, he noticed that it was a womans headpin and the corners of his tightly closed mouth lifted up.

Its obvious who pierced the sofa like this.

Venua, on the other hand, interpreted Eds action of obediently sitting down and snorted in a better mood.

Seeing as youre doing this, I guess you like her a lot. Actually, idiots like you, who fell in love with her pretty face, used to come visit me one after another in the past

Ed lowered his head to suppress his laughter.

Now I see why Venua became enraged and beat his own guard, or why theres still no word from my soldiers investigating the inside of the mansion that theyve found Liloa.

Venua, who again misunderstood Ed bowing his head, continued to speak in a soothing tone.

From what I heard, Marquess, youre so rich that even His Majesty envies you. But, as you know, you cant buy blood with money

The question now is where did she go after leaving the mansion?

Ed suddenly felt a sense of loss. It was as though his blood was being drained. He had been worrying that Lil would leave after todays mission, but now it felt like she had one more reason to really leave Roahn and go somewhere unknown to him.

Obernnyu is a monarchy with as much history and legacy as the imperial family. Her father is Archduke Joseph I, and her mother is the sister of the current Emperor. If that child gives birth to a son, that son will have the right to succeed to the throne. She is impeccably noble. My blood and that childs blood are flawless. No matter how much she goes out and devalues herself, her bloodline isnt the kind that should be associated with a simple marquess from the empires periphery

With a look of dismay, Ed raised his head toward the window. Meanwhile, Venua assumed Ed had been discouraged and smiled with delight that he had been infatuated with his own legitimacy.

It was even too much for the Duke of Mireille

Of course, simply looking out the window wont mean that I can see Liloa outside I need to take action it isnt helping that the rain hasnt subsided yet.

It made him sick to his stomach to think about losing Lil without a word. Although he had already imagined the situation in which Lil abandoned him hundreds of times, with his mind in complete disarray now, he felt even more helpless and tormented.

Damn that Rene Mireille. Look how he caused things to reach this point. I knew it. After all, if you want to do this right, you cant trust or entrust your business to others

The longer I keep sitting here like this, the sooner Ill lose my sanity

Out of nowhere, Ed jumped from his seat and made his way to the door.

But if youre willing to make up for the scandal, I might change my impression of you Marquess?

Venua called from behind, but there was no answer as Ed already convinced himself that he had to go find her.

She doesnt have anything, so how can she survive in this rain? No proper weapon, or medicine
Marquess!

The guards waiting at the door hesitated at Venuas rebuke, but Ed opened the door himself and went out into the hall.

Clash!

The sound of glass breaking was followed by Venuas scream in a bloodshot voice.

I cant believe this! You think you can just ignore me like this and get away with it?!

Venuas curses and swears persisted even after Ed was out of sight. The prince regents voice resounded through the open door, but Ed paid no attention to it and ran down the hallway and down the stairs.

Detain the lessee and arrest all other soldiers. You can stop searching the mansion.

Yes.

As the two Roahn soldiers, who directly received the order, began mobilizing the rest, Ed got on the horse he had left on the porch and rode off into the pouring rain.

Liloea mustve escaped. And given that other suspicious-looking guards were patrolling outside the mansion, she mustve been so desperate that she rode out even at the risk of being discovered by them. So, where did she go? Shes probably hiding somewhere deserted. Theres also a chance she may have escaped Roahn, but outside the city are fewer buildings, meaning shell be easily exposed. More importantly, Liloas familiarity with the roads is limited to the city. And because she has become familiar with the citys geography, she mustve decided to stay in the city she knows well.

Liloea!

No matter how loud I yell, she may not come out, but this is the only way to make myself present.

Ed wandered around the complicated streets for a while. Because of the darkness, even his most intelligent courser kept making mistakes. In addition to the pouring rain, there was no light in the alleys, so it seemed impossible for Ed to find Lil, who was determined to hide her presence.

Liloea!

I dont know what will happen if I dont find her today. Once the sun comes up, Im sure shell be riding out of the territory. Then, will she disappear forever?

In the first place, Ed hadnt heard anything about Lils future moves, so he had mentally prepared himself. However, now that hes reached this point, all the mental and emotional preparation he did seemed futile.

What should I do?

Ed couldnt remember how long he had been in this agony.

He eventually got off the horse, grabbed the reins, and walked aimlessly, while his beast followed him with a groaning sound, as if the animal had been hit and swept all over the narrow road. Eds entire body was chilled by the cold rain, but his insides were not. The fire fueled by regret, self-reproach, and despair seemed to even melt his internal organs.

Checking for the moon, Ed raised his head.

Its been several hours already.

The moon was setting and soon the sun would be rising. Ed, who had been staring blankly up at the sky, suddenly turned his gaze to the hill. His house was on the highest point in the city, so it could be seen from almost anywhere in Roahn.

In him suddenly burned a futile hope.

No way.

Chapter 244

Despite believing it was impossible, Ed got back on his horse. The animal, having had enough rest while they were walking, climbed the hill with renewed vigor. In the meantime, the rain, although lighter, continued as if it was never going to stop.

As soon as Ed entered the front door, servants who were waiting with towels followed him one after another. Ed outpaced them all and ran up the stairs. Of course, he couldve inquired with any of the servants, but he preferred to see for himself.

He made his way through the mansion all the while repeating words that should bring him back to reality, but they had little to no effect.

Theres no way Theres absolutely no way

Eds body, heated by tension, trembled slightly with every step he took. Walking down the short hallway, his mouth went dry several times. His nerves, which had already withered from his feeling of abandonment and frustration, were mended and made his heart beat again.

Ed flung open the door to the bedroom Lil had been staying.

Illuminated by a single candle on the desk near the window, he saw a womans face. The small, yellow light shone on her forehead and the bridge of her nose.

Liloa.

Lil returned his gaze with a startled look.

Seeing the quill in her hand, she appears to have been writing something. And based on her initial reaction, she had no idea someone would arrive at any time. She didnt even turn on the lights probably because she sneaked her way in No, none of this matters!

Without being able to breathe, Ed just blinked his eyes and thought he was seeing something in vain.

Lil on the other hand, put her quill down, stood up, and walked towards the center of the room. Ed, for a moment anticipating that she would flee again, took a quick step forward, causing Lil to stop moving. Her face, now out of the range of the candlelight, was no longer as clear as it had been. Even though she didnt explicitly invite him in, Ed entered the room nonetheless and the interior quickly darkened when the door closed behind them. With the fireplace off and the curtains closed the only source of light was the candlestick that Lil had moved away from.

The closer Ed got, the more he realised why Lil had hidden herself in the dark. As his gaze caressed her cheek, Lil started to stutter excuses even if he hadnt said anything yet.

I let myself get hit on purpose. I knew that if I got hit, they would let their guard down, so I just had to endure it once. It's no big deal. Anyway, that's how it ended up like this.

Ed placed his hand on her hard, swollen cheek. Although Lil's body trembled, she didn't avoid him or shake off his hand.

I'm sorry. I didn't want to come here, but I thought I would die if I walked around like this. I didn't have a single weapon and had to change my clothes. I should've brought them with me in advance. That way I wouldn't have to come back here and this wouldn't have happened.

Lil immediately kept her mouth shut upon thinking that her words only sounded like meaningless excuses.

However, none of that mattered. To Ed, just having her here meant a lot.

Her breathing, her words, and even her smallest movements moved him. And Lil remained in front of him no matter how many times he blinked. Wet and cold from the rain, avoiding his gaze, and unable to finish her sentences. Still, none of it mattered and Ed simply muttered that he was relieved to have finally found the person he had been searching for.

Liloa.

Lil, who, till now, had been looking away nervously, finally faced Ed. He called her so sweetly that it made it difficult for her to look away. And as she had been pushing herself mentally and physically, even the smallest kindness from Ed's voice felt so incredibly sweet now. But regardless of being drawn to his sweetness, Lil knew it was dangerous. And so, when the desire to collapse into Ed's arms and in his embrace grew, she brainwashed herself numerous times to say no. However, the truth was that she wanted to lean on him.

Answer me.

Huh? Uh Uhm, yes?

..?

Ed didn't respond, even though Lil gave him the answer he desired. So far, all he did was stare at the face he thought he'd never see again. With his hand still on her cheek, he gazed at her brows, eyes, and cheeks, not fully believing that she was right in front of him. Lil, on the other hand, felt that the only proper thing to do was to take Ed's hand away from her, so she gently rested her hand on the back of his. Through their contact, Lil realized how Ed's hand was much colder than hers, probably because he had been outside for a long time and got caught in the rain. Despite that, Lil believed that it was pointless for Ed to keep looking at her like this. So she tried to pull out his hand. But when Ed pointed toward the desk, Lil suddenly understood his true intention.

Lil followed Ed's lead and sat down on the chair. Although she was clearly hit by someone, Ed didn't initiate the question of where else she was hurt, nor did he bring up the usual nags of a doctor. Lil quickly drank the three bottles of potion Ed brought from across the desk, one after another. In fact, as soon as she arrived here, she tried to find her medicine, but not knowing which exact bottles to take, she endured the pain that stung her body.

I searched for you almost everywhere. I never thought I'd find you here.

Ed took a chair and sat in front of the drooping Lil, who experienced all of Eds emotions at once. The happiness, optimism, and hope implied in that one sentence. Everything. Lil felt the emotions in Eds voice the same way people can distinguish the emotions of a person close to them by simply listening to the tone of their voices.

Realising that, Lil straightened her back and chastised herself for sitting too comfortably.

Ive thought about it a lot, but I dont think its a good idea for me to stay here. Im already regretting it. I actually planned to leave before you came back, but

The Bell Rocks crew left safely.

Lil had confirmed that herself earlier. Eds words were intended to assure her that the sailors left safely and that they now should talk about what they had been putting off, but Lil had no desire to do so anymore.

Sorry.

Im so sorry, you must be thinking about why I came here without any shame, but my purpose was purely

Is it because of the Prince Regent?

As Lil raised her eyes in surprise, her gaze fell on Eds wet and glistening face shown in the candlelight. It was then that she recalled Ed having just arrived at his mansion.

According to the view I can see outside the window, its already dawn What did he do for so long outside? He probably forced Alain to confess If so, he was told about the attack and immediately identified the suspect In other words, theres no denying it

How did you know?

I didnt know you underestimated me that much.

No matter how genuine she meant it, hearing Eds response full of sarcasm and self-talking, it was clear that he wasnt affected by her words.

I was going to come and leave quietly because I expected this. But in the end, Im here, sitting face-to-face with him My plan definitely went awry and it starts to become even more complicated

Did you meet him?

Eds silence heightened Lils anxiety. His obstinate expression suggested to her that he was suppressing his rage and wouldnt respond no matter how long she waited. Lil also interpreted his silence as him feeling betrayed and angry at her for trying to slip past him yet again. Despite knowing this, she still urged him, because she needed to know if he had met Venua.

Admiral?

Edgar.

I thought youd freely call me that by now.

I dont want to call you that anymore.

Why?

Because I dont want to get any closer.

Why?

If he searched for me even after meeting Venua, then Eds feelings for me are clear. Im grateful for that, but I dont want to accept it. If Venua has a purpose, he wont mind going through fire or water. If he were a sword, hed tear his opponent apart and kill him no matter how badly he got himself injured in the process. For him, it would be satisfying to tear them to death. Thats how he compensates for his natural sense of inferiority. This personality, combined with his high status, will have disastrous consequences. Even if his boast of killing Ed wont succeed the first time, he will obviously deal a fatal blow somehow in one way or another At this point, the only right thing to do is just to give up*

Chapter 245

I didnt know that Venua was involved in this And I didnt expect to meet him this soon I just Ive been so complacent. At the back of my mind, I figured we would bump into each other at some point, but his sense of existence just slipped, perhaps because its been a long time since we last saw each other, or because my memory of him is faint Yet, now that Ive seen him again, Im reminded of the plan I made. At first, yes, I planned to go back to Mireille and rewind the knot I had left twisted Getting my life back thats where I wanted to start. I believed that if I addressed my problems one by one, things would get better for me somehow. Even if there were variables

Lil cut herself off and hit her forehead.

Theres no need for such a tedious explanation The only reason why I keep rambling on is because it gives me an excuse to stay I wish I could slap myself on the cheeks right now I almost fainted in the rain on the street. If it happens again, I dont think I can overcome it It will be over if I go out there and collapse for real this time

But Venua is different from the Duke of Mireille. The Archduke, my father, is in critical condition, so Venua will soon succeed him and become the new Archduke Come to think of it, its ridiculous for Venua to come all the way here in person just to look for me, even if it was requested by our father. Venua must have some other ulterior motive then. In such a case, theres no way hed let me go. Even if I try to remain optimistic, I know that this time, it will be different

Liloa.

I might be done for

As I told you from the beginning. It doesnt matter.

I said it doesnt matter who you are.

Thats

And you were delighted, remember?*

That would mean that you look at me the same way even though Im not wearing the necklace. You understand that right?

One way or another, my answer remains the same.

What?

I said it doesnt matter. What makes you think Ill change my mind?

Because of Eds persistent response, Lil was reminded of the time she shared with him in the music room. When she barged through the door while Ed was playing the cembalo.

After our fight and reconciliation, I asked him if he knew who I truly was. He said it didnt matter I didnt know this was what he truly meant

Recalling what happened, Lil felt embarrassed.

Those were words said by someone who already knew everything about me.

Not being able to sit still anymore, Lil rose from her seat and paced around it.

The more I ponder it, the hazier my mind becomes. I thought I understood Ed through our numerous conversations, but apparently, the depth of his mind is evidently deeper

Because of this, Lil felt as if the ground beneath her was crumbling and her feet didnt touch the floor anymore. She turned her head towards him. Eds serious demeanor was so unwavering that Lil felt the pressure rise to her throat.

I dont understand. Why are you so

Lils speech became slurred when Ed suddenly jumped up. His eyes, illuminated by candlelight, moved uneasily, constantly returning to her right side. Lil followed his gaze to a window with curtains drawn. Apparently, Ed couldnt keep still with the foreshadowing that Lil could be planning to run and jump out the window at any moment. He even tensely clenched and unclenched his fists, grabbed his clothes, and swept down his face impatiently.

I know what I did to you. I let you down. I tried to coax you into thinking I was different from the other men. My actions since Amiaeng only disillusioned you and made you unable to trust me again. I know that. Im still the same bastard who hasnt gotten rid of the arrogance and the feeling of inferiority I had 10 years ago. I deserve to feel terrible for acting like that. But But I just cant let you go.

Why?

I wont beg you for forgiveness. I wont even ask you to look at me.

Why are you doing this for me?

Just dont go.

Youre so strange. When have I ever spoken nicely to you or treated you kindly? Ive never given you anything. You took a bullet for me, told me the things I wanted to hear the most in my life, and brought me back from the dead. I, on the other hand, have done nothing to repay any of that.

Thats not true. Ive known you for much longer than you know

I know. I read the letter.

Ed, who was momentarily taken aback, lowered his eyes to the desk. Next to the candlestick was the reply Lil had been writing and a quill that was dripping ink.

Lil quickly snatched her stationery before Eds hand could reach it.

Half of the paper, which had been densely populated with Lils writing, crumpled in her hands.

I messed up I said I had come to get some weapons and clothes, but the truth is that I havent even changed my clothes yet

She was still wearing the dress that got ripped when she escaped the mansion. From the very beginning, Lil had known that all the words she had blurted out to Ed were excuses that didnt make any sense. But she had no choice but to do so. As soon as she entered the boudoir, she was determined to find the letter, and after reading it, she couldnt help but write a reply.

The version of her in Eds letter was so unfamiliar to her that Lil held onto the letter for a long time. At first, she felt strange and awkward to discover how Ed saw her, but that feeling quickly changed into something wonderful and it sparkled throughout all his various sentences.

It felt weird to me that I mightve looked like that to someone, so I couldnt bring myself to get out of that feeling because it was so fascinating to me. It made me rethink the days I lived. I always thought my past was just full of envy Filled with ridicule, criticism, and disillusionment

Lil tried to fool Ed into believing she was okay, but it wasnt easy as a hot sensation rushed up and swept around her eyes. She pretended to fumble and touch her face, thinking she could use her faces wetness from the rain as a cover.

I know you dont want to go, so do whatever you want instead. You already escaped from him to do that, and you said no one could force you, so why are you still being influenced by the Prince Regent?

Because despite being in Roahn, Venuas status didnt change. Hes still Obernyus Prince Regent. I, on the other hand, became a nobody when I left the villa. Can someone like Ed even understand the sense of helplessness and self-degradation of being someone of no value? I want to ignore Venua just as Ed is doing, but I dont have that kind of power I never want the man in front of me to be hurt or fall sick in any way, but that doesnt mean I can protect him or prevent it. Reality is that miserable. No matter how much Ed praises me, he can only do so through letters or reminiscences as the real-life me is extremely unsightly. Rather than shining, Im immersed in darkness. No one would even know if I disappeared Maybe the world is hoping that Ill just go away

In the middle of her depressing thoughts, the medicine had started working and Lil suddenly felt it was much easier to stand, so she turned around to find her bag.

I enjoyed reading your letter, thank you for thinking so highly of me.

Is that all?

I wont misunderstand you anymore

Are you doing this because you hate me?

Lil slammed the sheathed knife she had been packing down on the desk. Ed had been following her since she began moving, so even if she looked back just a little, she could see him. Lil raised her voice because she was beginning to get frustrated that he kept pleading even though there was nothing she did or could do for him.

Im not that great of a person! I dont know why you think of me that way, but I cant stand myself because Im so pathetic. None of your flowery words makes any sense to me!

No, you

At one point, I, too, thought I might be special. But ever since, I've been struggling to prove it, and till now, I still am. I know it. I'm nothing. I'm on the run, so I don't belong to anyone or anywhere and that's why I have no place to return to. I'm a lost object. Where am I supposed to go? I'm sick of myself because I could've died if I hadn't come here. Do you get it? I'll die if you don't help me. I'm useless on my own. The world knows it. And yet I can't admit it to myself. I feel like the crazy one for being unable to accept it.

No one can achieve everything alone.

Is there anyone who doesn't know that? But whenever I ask someone for help, I hear that I'm asking for help because I'm weak and lacking. If I can't do everything on my own, no one will believe in me. What you say applies only to people. And women are not people, they are women.

Lil was well aware of this, but she still tried and eventually failed, which was why she was standing here.

The more Lil spoke, the more difficult it was for her to bear herself becoming so shabby. The Liloa that Ed remembered was so wonderful that now, she was embarrassed to be standing in front of him in such a state of disintegration.

Chapter 246

It was comfortable when I was wearing the necklace, because I didn't have to prove anything. No one would ask me to prove myself. Still, I always wanted to go back to living as me. I couldn't bear to forget or abandon myself. I just wanted to live the way I was born. I thought I should give it another chance because it became painful for me to keep denying myself. That's why I'm now trying to get my name back, but that alone is already too hard. I realise once again that I'm only just a beggar. So, if you want to make me more miserable, go on, keep saying nice things like that!

The reckless outpour of words was new to Lil.

I have never said this to anyone.

Lil always boasted that she couldn't be wrong and that she would never be shaken by any humiliation. She couldn't show any flaws, not even to herself. All because a little slack or a little mistake would already be deemed unforgivable. Although someone in the future was bound to find the vague path that Lil initiated, she believed that in order to contribute even a little to that future, she had to be blameless herself.

But now, she felt weaker than she had ever experienced. Rather than a tiny gap, it was as if a large hole had opened somewhere in her body and all the emotions she had concealed throughout her life began pouring out.

But why am I taking it out on Ed when I'm the one who's both a disappointing and disgusting person?

I'm sorry.

I didn't mean to. I don't know why I'm spewing these hateful words at you. It's so

The Ruwa tribe On the Western Continent lived people belonging to the Ruwa tribe. They were exterminated not long after they were brought to the Central Continent. Do you know why?

...!

He talked about them in his letter The unexpected story has both been a humiliating and depressing memory for Ed

Lil stiffened, unable to get a word out. Meanwhile, Ed, who came closer, held Lils finger.

I did something terrible, but I had no idea that what I did was wrong. I thought I could simply fix it and they could live here well. I decided to let them live in the place where I was born, so I tried to change them to fit the atmosphere of this place. It was too late when I realised my mistake. It took so, so long. Why didnt I realise the truth sooner? That they were most perfect where they were born in their most natural state. Why did I try to change them to suit my way? It may seem obvious to you, but it was extremely difficult for me. Because that was how I was taught to think. And as I was formed in that manner, it was unclear how much of it was the result of pure thinking and how much was acquired as one grew up.

Eds fingertips interlocked with hers.

You praised my library. You said you were jealous, that you envied me for being able to read whatever I wanted. But you dont have to envy me

To be honest, its not that I envy his library, I hate it. Among the countless books, the books I actually read in my life can be counted on ten fingers And theres no way theres a Guide to Good Embroidery there. I became sick of feeling infinitely small among the books that fill the librarys huge space. The gap between Ed and myself, which I can feel all the way into my bones, is terrible

Thinking so, Lil couldnt understand anything that Ed was saying at all.

You already know everything.

What?

The reason I was able to come this far is probably because of that library. Even so, its still difficult and daunting. I dont even know where Im heading towards. But you already knew since you were fifteen No, Im sure it was even before that.

..?

Still confused, Lil flinched and leaned back, but Ed tightened his grip on her as if he wouldnt let her go.

The truth I want to grasp. The world I want to affirm.

What

That world already exists within you, a world that I can only picture in my vague imagination.

I dont understand

I didnt know what kind of ideal I was chasing or what words I could use to describe it. But then, I saw you in Panichi. At that time When I looked at you, it was like the sun was rising*

No, stop it

It was so red. The very world I was looking for just emerged before my eyes. When you told me that story, I was also convinced that I was the first to hear it as it was clear by the clumsy way you spoke. But, it was unbelievably beautiful. You probably have no clue about the joy I felt that day. It was an ecstasy that cannot be described. Every single day, Im in awe due to the fact that Im born in

the same era as you and that I have the chance of facing you so closely. Do you think I will allow myself to miss this miracle? I cant. And definitely for a reason as trivial as the Prince Regent

The more Eds sentences continued, the lower Lil bowed her head. Tears slowly dropped to the floor as she was looking down. At some point, Lil could no longer put up with them. And even though she tried to suppress her sobs, she eventually started to cry.

Ed is too persistent He was and still is And he persistently says only one thing. That Im right. He just kept saying the same thing over and over again, without getting tired of it And as for me, I want to hear it again, and again, and again, for the rest of my life I always thought that when I met someone who affirmed my life at least once in my life, I would be content to simply pass him by. Even if only for a brief moment, I thought it would be enough to keep me immensely satisfied for a long time. But it seems like I cant let him pass by like this I feel like I cant leave I want to be happy like this And if I dont get away from him now, it can definitely happen Right?

A strong conviction that she had never felt before pierced her heart like a dagger.

Lil was surprised at herself, now that she paid more attention to her emotions. While her desire fluttered like waves, her heart, like a boat, soared through the fierce waters and capsized first before rising mighty above them.

How funny. I cant believe that I suddenly want to live like an ordinary human being. Or maybe it isnt that strange, part of me always thought that if I were a person who didnt deserve happiness, I wouldnt have been allowed to even wish for happiness. So, I always had the feeling that the reason I could dream of happiness was because I, too, had a piece of happiness waiting for me. However, I thought I would get too greedy if I dreamed too much of it, so I daydreamed just a little, that way I could keep it at a manageable size I never expected that it would be so full and overflowing, and topple my inhibitions.

You can love anyone. It can be easier, it can also be harder. But Ill remain the same.

As Lil wouldnt raise her head, Ed lowered himself to one knee so Lil could see his face in front of her blurry eyes. Ed then guided her hand to his cheek and pressed the back of her hand.

Remember where you said you would return to and who youre standing in front of now.

Neither of them knew when it started, but Eds voice was trembling too. Ed kept pressing Lils palm to his cheek, as though he wanted to be touched.

Like when I caressed his brow in the music room before, I still remember how much I felt sorry for him at that time

Dont go. I want to be by your side.

Its the same for me too.

With her answer staying on the tip of Lils tongue, Eds trembling voice continued to mumble into Lils palm.

I want to because I love you. I dont know what else to feel but love. I dont even know how to explain this. So, please just understand

Lil wiped her eyes with her free hand. No matter what she did, her tears wouldnt stop so she lifted her head and stared at the ceiling.

I

A muffled voice clogged her throat. Lil, who sniffled loudly, let out words that she could hardly continue.

I am a human I want to become a human

It was so hard for her to say those words, that her whole body seemed to be shaking. Lil gritted her teeth while still staring somewhere blankly.

No matter how many times Eds hand wiped her cheek, her sadness didnt stop.

Where do I start?

Ill be there.

As Lil lowered her head to face Ed, a stream of water crawled over her tilted nose, gathered at the tip, and dripped down. While Lil was looking at his face, Ed lifted his kneeling body. Her gaze followed him upwards.

And while the candle casted a shadow on Ed, Ed casted a shadow on Lil

Chapter 247

Theres no need for proof. Even if no one wants to admit it, even if they say crazy things in order for you to prove yourself, dont listen to them. Its all useless bullshit. You were already born a human. Dont you ever deny that first.

Lil laughed while crying.

Her face, painted with both joy and sorrow, looked up to see Ed right there in front of her. She was looking at the face of a man who had become familiar to her, but his looming presence was even greater now.

Whenever she saw Ed, her heart fluttered strangely and it uplifted her mood.

He always made me feel the vivid wind. Even now, I feel like Im brought somewhere distant due to the cool flow caressing me. Eds the kind of wind that knows my direction, even if I dont, and blows me there easily. His clumsiness and roughness confuse me at times, but through him, I was never off course

Edgar.

Ed, who continued to smooth the back of her hand using his, raised his head in a flash. Lil muttered as she looked at the back of his hand wrapping hers.

Perhaps I do want to be happy

Its funny now that I admit it. The word happy is concise and easy to pronounce, but still, Im not used to expressing any greed or acknowledging my emotions I had only been ashamed of them

Lils lips trembled because of her small laughter, but she managed to suppress her equally trembling throat and confessed unwaveringly.

Like you said, Im a human. And because of that, I guess I want to love like a human.

It was a confession that no one expected and no one intervened in, but it lingered in their ears like an auditory hallucination. It was clearly her own voice, but it sounded strangely sweet.

Ed stood blankly, either due to confusion or shock. That was why Lil hesitantly approached him. In the short distance between them, her movements were gradual. She slowly put one foot in front of the other and walked forward and another step forward

I want to love you.

A face wearing an awkward expression came closer to her nose.

Lil laughed bashfully.

Having no experience in confessing love or knowing whether this was even the right moment to do it, her expression was not much different from Eds, but that didnt matter.

Lil pressed her hands against his shoulders and closed her eyes. As her vision was cut off, her other senses awakened and focused solely on Ed. Lil parted her lips and searched for his. When she lifted her heels into the air, their height became somewhat similar.

Eds breath seeped through his lips quivering gap and allowed Lil to take it in. She felt the hot air on the tip of her tongue quickly followed by the warmth of his lips. Before their barely touching lips could separate, Eds arms hurriedly stretched out and wrapped themselves around Lils waist. He pulled her high enough to lift her, and with Lil now in a slightly higher position, she naturally put her arms around his neck while biting his lower lip.

With their lips pressed against one another, their tongues intertwined, sucking each other in.

Lils torn lip supposedly stung, but it was eventually numbed by her excitement. She reached out from the nape of Eds neck and tore through his hair as their tight hug wasnt nearly enough. Her body, wet from the rain, lacked warmth, so Lil pushed herself against Ed even more. At some point, she wasnt sure anymore if she wanted to keep him warm or if she wanted to be given warmth, but because Ed didnt back down, Lil fell deeper and deeper into him.

Their exchange of heavy breathing came and went, but it was still not enough. Lil wanted to feel more alive, feel his body heat against hers and confirm that they were truly together. So, she slipped her hands through Eds jacket and found the buttons of his waistcoat. With his collar being pushed over his shoulder, Ed quickly took off his rain-soaked jacket and dropped it on the floor with a thud.

Before the jacket even reached the ground, his hands were already holding Lil again and he pulled the sleeve from her shoulders. Eds lips, which had been biting Lils earlobe, slid down her neck and licked her now exposed shoulder, causing Lil to tilt her head back and let out a gasp. Ed then peeled off the remainder of his waistcoat and lifted Lil into his arms. Lil, who was now much higher than him, lowered her head and kissed him again, while Ed undid the knot at the front of her dress making it flow down her upper body.

At the same time, they fell onto the bed.

Because Ed didnt want to fall on top of her, there was a little space between them for the first time, but such space quickly became filled with heavy breaths that came and went. Ed, who was facing Lil in the dark, seemed to wear an expression she had never seen before. Lil reached out her hand to the silhouette that was looking down at her and traced the vague curves of his face with her finger, noticing that the skin she touched felt hot and when she touched his earlobe, it was similarly hot.

Lil whispered, imagining Ed with his whole face red.

Why cant I give you up?

What? Me?

Ed took Lils still-wandering hand and brought it to his mouth. Lil mumbled while she traced his lips.

Why did I make this ridiculous decision?

Do you regret it already?

No. But its even weirder that I dont feel a hint of regret.

You said it yourself. You cant give up on me.

Thats what Im saying. Its so sudden and youre still so annoying. Why on earth?

Lil pinched Eds upper and lower lips together and suddenly kissed his pinched lips, but this time, the sloppy kiss was not pleasant at all. Lil laughed heartily because she found it cute that Ed tried to move his lips as though he was asking to be released. Lil laughter made Ed laugh along with her, but because he laughed with his lips still held, he sounded more like he was losing air. In retaliation, he eventually started to attack Lil with small kisses all over her face and after he moved to give her a soft kiss on the cheek and the corner of her eye, she finally let him go.

Turning serious again, Ed pursed his lips while pulling down Lils dress like a man whose patience was running out. Simultaneously, Lil reached her hands in the air, undid Eds cravat and unbuttoned his shirt. Their hands, picking at each others clothes, were as excited as their breathing and soon their removed shirt and dress fell off the bed.

Lil placed her palms on Eds moist torso and raised her fingertips against him to savour his exquisitely toned muscles. As she ran her hands around his thick rib cage and to his back, his well-defined curves wriggled to embrace her. Feeling Eds blunt bulk was satisfying.

Due to the rain even Lils innermost clothes were damp and clung coldly to her skin. So Ed nibbled on the tip of her breast which was now visible through her thin chemise.

Lil looked down and saw wet brown hair trailing down over her chemise but soon became distracted by the sensation of Eds hot breath spreading across her breasts and down to her abdomen. Lils body flinched due to her heightened sensitivity. With the hem of her skirt being rolled up her legs as his hands caressed her thigh, and with his lips still hovering over her lower abdomen, a small feeling of pleasure rushed into her stomach. Lil let out a drowsy breath and jerked her knees up.

When Ed lets out something similar to a sigh, Lil senses the heat.

Wait.

It seemed like he was muttering something, so Lil asked back reflexively.

Hmm?

No, wait.

Lil opened her languid eyes. After focusing them for a moment, she asked again to confirm if she had heard it right.

What?

We cant do this.

Lil, who pushed Eds shoulder and rolled him over, ended up on top, allowing her to look down at him. Seeing his embarrassed face puzzled Lil even more. She tried to guess the reason behind Eds sudden hesitation, but as she couldnt think of one, she blurted out whatever crossed her mind first.

Do you need to mentally prepare or something like that?

No.

Ed clutched his forehead as if he had heard something terrible.

Chapter 248

What on earth do you think of me?

Or do you have some other kind of problem?

..?

Lil carefully placed her palm under Eds half-undone belt. Ed suppressed a groan and squeezed his eyes shut, but Lil didnt remove her hand.

I dont think you have a problem I dont think theres much to worry about at all

No, thats not it. Im worried about your injury! Your injury! What makes you even say that, what kind of guy do you think I am?

..!

Ed muttered a few more words out of perplexity while Lil looked down at her stomach. She didnt even have to take her clothes off as it was clearly visible through her chemise.

Now that I think about it, it was crushed by Venua just a few hours ago.

When Lils stomach throbbed upon realisation, Ed continued his explanation while lightly holding her waist.

Not only was your stomach torn, but your insides were damaged as well. Ive never read an opinion about how long it would take someone with injuries the size of yours to be able to enjoy intimacy again Ive been searching through my memories, but I cant find anything.

Lil frowned.

She didnt understand much of what he was talking about, but Ed looked very serious. It made her recall a concern she had missed even though it was a question that almost every ordinary person wouldve wondered about.

Im not sure if I ever want to bear children, but I at least would like to know if the organs I have to do so function or not

By any chance, is my

No, your womb wasnt hurt.

Ed answered so resolutely that her momentary doubts disappeared without a trace. Now, there was only one question remaining, Lil looked at him inquiringly.

..?

You have to live a long and healthy life.

So, you cant take risks with your body.

Ed nodded like someone who had already made up his mind. For that reason, Lil became caught up in an indescribable mood, not knowing whether it was one of regret or bewilderment. She felt so embarrassed that she didnt know how to deal with their situation right now, whether she should simply accept his hesitation or be angry with herself for initiating something like this in the first place.

The short while when we were obsessed with sensuality and indulging in each other feels like a lie now

Seeing Lils expression, Ed smiled slyly and raised his upper body.

But Liloa.

Hm?

Why do you look so disappointed?

With Lil sitting on his legs, they were facing each other at eye level.

Ed stroked the inside of her thighs. Her body, whose excitement had not subsided yet, was still sensitive and easily responded to the caressing fingertips that teased her. A tingling sensation lingered along the skin he traced.

Lil replied while struggling to keep her trembling voice in check.

No Im not

I just meant we cant do it the way we intended it to do. But I didnt say Id give up for today altogether.

..!

Eds hands rose to further push up the hem of Lils chemise until they once again landed on her waist. Lil stared at her completely bare lower abdomen and saw the water droplets that flowed down her stomach drip down onto his. Ed was clearly in no hurry as his hands gradually moved further up her belly. Inch by inch, tickling her intentionally. When the hem of her dress was pulled up to her collarbone, half of her breasts were exposed.

Ed whispered as he licked the reddish bump.

Theres no law against not going through the royal road*

As soon as Lil slipped her chemise over her head, Ed pushed her over and landed on top of her body. With both their bodies drenched from the rain, their connected points were slippery.

Now, lying on her back, Lil licked her lips in anticipation.

Then?

Then

..?

Ed brushed her lips in response. Their kiss continued for a long time before he gave a more concrete answer. His hand, which had been caressing her breast, went further down and his voice that flowed from between her lips lingered in her mouth.

We should find another way, right?

Eds fingers dug between Lils legs.

The fatigue that had clung to her body melted away along with her hazy consciousness. First it were her clothes, soaked in rainwater, that had been weighing her body down, so now it was her drenched body turn to sink into the bed. It sank like a drop of water pressed into the abyss.

Far down and deep

Weird Somehow, it feels like someone is lifting my eyelids

Lil tried to ignore it and calmly closed her eyes again every time it happened. So, whenever her eyelids were popped open, she would perceive dull light and when the touch disappeared, it would be complete darkness again. Ed repeatedly pulled Lils eyelids up and released them, like he was playing with a toy.

Lil eventually swirled her arms in front of her face and murmured.

..Stop

However, Eds voice still hovered close to her face.

How long are you going to sleep? Its way past noon and the sun is about to set soon.

This time, Ed pressed his lips to her cheek. This also wasnt a one-time thing. He moved around and kissed both her cheeks continuously until Lil turned her head away and lay down with her back to him.

Just yesterday, I was dragged to the villa by Venuas men and overexerted myself. Then a couple of hours after that, I was served by Ed for a long time. So today, I dont even want to lift a finger thinking about fingers Ed truly looked like a man of genuine inquiry and commitment Seeing how he was so preoccupied with trying to carve his way into me Of course, I was equally engrossed in the mysteries of the human body, but my limbs eventually became exhausted because of the series of peaks I experienced

Lil couldnt even bring herself to move her sprawled arm over the blanket.

Ill just keep on sleeping like this

As she was no longer bothered, Lil let out a sigh of contentment and was about to go to sleep again

[Edgar. I dont know what to say first]

..?!

After hearing those familiar words, Lil immediately flung her eyes open. Looking behind her, she saw her unfinished letter in Eds hand. The crumpled, sparsely wet paper was definitely the letter she had thrown away somewhere yesterday. When Lils eyes met Eds, who was glancing down at her due to sitting with his back against the headboard, he merely smiled and cheekily raised his eyebrows before continuing reading.

[Everything in my head is a mess right now. Since when]

Give me that!

Whimpering, Lil stretched out her hand and thereby her upper body, but Ed simply lifted his arm further into the air. Lil, not fully awake, flopped helplessly and fell into the bed. Ed continued the letter, stroking the back of Lils head that was tucked in the blanket.

[Since when did you know me? Since LeBrun?]

Stop it!

After a quickly failed attempt to retrieve it again, Lil threw down her hand and lifted her gaping face. When she glared at him with disgust, Ed shrugged his shoulders and spoke.

This is only the second letter you have ever written to me. How can I just throw it away? Of course, I have to keep it.

Lil, who was now completely free from the blanket, snatched a pillow and threw it at him.

Ack!

In the midst of screaming at him, Lil struggled to move her tired body to approach Ed, who was trying to escape her attack, and instead clung to him.

[How could you know me? Ive never seen you, no, thats not whats important]

Eds body, now carrying the weight of Lil on his shoulder, fell backwards. At this point, Lil tried to retrieve the letter by stretching out her hand again, but it wasnt enough to reach the tip of Eds long arms that stretched all the way out of the bed.

Hey Hey!

Lil then tried stretching her fingers while crawling upwards, but it was futile. Ed, on the other hand, just laid his head to rest on top of Lil and continued to read her letter. In the end, Lil decided to attack Ed instead of focusing on the letter she couldnt reach for the life of her, so she poked his eyes with her index and middle finger.

[Im glad someone thought of me that way!]

Ed quickly closed his eyes. Of course, as it was only his eyes that were attacked, his mouth could still be seen smiling.

Incredible. He has the guts to not even bother hiding his twitching mouth!

Lil had no choice but to grit her teeth because Ed seemed to be planning to annoy her until the very end. In a last resort Lil switched tactics again and tried the mental approach.

You said you loved me, and you said you meant it!

..!

Lil pulled a pillow and hit Ed with it as she climbed on top of him.

Well, all good for you! But for me! I couldn't even sleep properly!

Even though Ed was being repeatedly hit by a pillow, he made excuses with that same smile on his face.

Because you wouldn't wake up

So you did this instead?! Is this what you call love? Huh? Is that what it is to you?

Chapter 249

Volume 7

I was wrong! I was in the wrong! I only teased you like that because I missed you already!

Only then did Lil stop slamming the pillow.

Casting it aside, she found a sprawling Ed with his head drooped on the bed. His mouth was smiling softly and pretended to beg for mercy, but unfortunately for him, that kind of acting didn't work on her anymore.

Lil eventually widened her squinted eyes and held out her palm to his face, which was looking up at her.

Oh yeah? Then give me the letter

..!

Puck.

Lil fell to the side after being hit by a pillow on her shoulder. Ed had sneakily grabbed the pillow when she was distracted and caught her off guard.

Wow. I didn't even see that coming. I guess I truly am still half-asleep.

Lil, now lying down on the bed, looked at the ceiling and muttered.

How mean

Ed slowly crawled on top of Lil, whereas the latter merely rolled her eyes and looked away from him.

That's just the kind of guy I am.

Ed stopped at Lil's thighs and gently lifted the hem of the gown that covered her legs.

And I'm not ashamed of my methods.

What are you trying to do?

Doing whatever I feel like doing?

Die.

I'm kidding.

Still, Lil glared at Ed disapprovingly. To prove that he meant it, Ed lightly kissed her thigh, pulled away, and laid calmly down next to her.

Were you really just kidding?

When Lil still didnt relax her expression, Ed pushed the corner of her mouth up with his finger. But as expected, upon removing his finger, her sullen face greeted him again. So, Ed raised the corners of his own mouth and muttered pitifully.

Thats right

But it seems to me that your words and your body hold different opinions from each other.

While Lil pointed down, Eds gaze followed with a sad face, but then shook his head solemnly.

You dont have to worry about him.

What?

But of course, please pay more attention to him later when youre healthy. Hes a friend who needs some attention now and then, plus I think he likes you.

Lil was taken by surprise by the strange manner of speaking in which Ed separated himself from his body part.

Not only his speech but also the content took a strange turn

Can you stand it until then?

Of course. And since you still feel pressed and irritated somewhere in your stomach, your blood vessels need more time to heal. Its best not to take any risks until youre fully recovered.

Are you sure it will be that bad? Will that friend of yours really have that big of an impact?

Cant you tell by seeing him?

..!

Ed triumphantly opened his gown, showing off his friend who greeted Lil in all its glory. Lil pulled her eyebrows together and smiled a forced smile.

Well Hes not completely wrong but unfortunately for Ed, he has a knack for making people reluctant to admit that hes right. In that same sense, he also seems to enjoy seeing his opponent make such a sour expression. All in all, hes this really odd side to his personality

Even if you and my friend cant meet yet, we still can have some fun right? So, for the time being, its okay to be sad while you wait with longing for the day you two will be united.

Hm okay, yes. Well, what else can I do? I have to listen to whatever the doctor says.

Im sure you dont plan on delaying your recovery just because I say this, right? The sooner you get well enough, the better it is for both you and me.

Why for you again? Whats in it for you?

Lil asked playfully, but Ed changed the topic.

Speaking of recovery, I need to give you some food. You need to get healthy quickly.

Standing up valiantly, Ed pulled the tassel next to the bed.

He looks cute with that hair of his, it looks like he has a fluttering birds nest on his head

Lil couldn't figure out how this grown man with a body void of anything particularly endearing or gentle, could look like that. Lil smiled softly. The nest in question was in an extremely dishevelled state, probably because, since last night, Ed had been rolling around in bed with his hair still wet from the rain.

When Ed returned to her arms, Lil scattered the nest with her fingers to her heart's content.

You should eat the meat you like. Its beef.

I actually don't particularly like meat I was just obsessed with it for the sake of my recovery.

Then what do you want? Ill tell Levi to add it to your diet.

Lil blinked for a moment.

Hes asking me what my favourite food is? Hmm, well In the South, I enjoyed eating dried Erimyan or birch sugar, but its too much to say that can be served as a mouth-watering meal*

Lil searched through her memory.

When I was on the battlefield or the Bell Rock I was never in a position to choose my food, and for the rest of the days, I wasn't allowed to eat my favourite food

Lils recollection needed to go even further back into the past.

I remember that I liked grilled fish when I was young. However, its a luxury thats hard to get inland, and I think its a species thats not common in the seas around the Empire.

It was for that reason that Lil didn't want to say it at first, but because of Eds natural persistence, she knew that if she answered with some random food, she would have to deal with his constant suspicions in finding out what she truly liked. So, Lil decided to answer honestly.

I remember liking salmon when I was a kid.

Oh, I used to eat salmon every day in my hometown.

Really?

Yeah, and I think Linhardt has it in his upper storage room right now.

After thinking about it for a while, Lil guessed it was actually a fairly common fish for him.

Realising it belatedly, she remembered that salmon were actually caught in the northern Monferrand Strait.

Ed added excitedly.

Ill steal it for you.

If he asks, they would just give it to him, right? So why would he bother stealing it?

Nonetheless, Lil asked him not to steal them all, but to only bring three or four of them. Ed kept nodding his head while muttering something about salmon, wondering what was so good about it.

Lil, who was watching him intently, laid back next to him and asked.

What about you?

Hmm?

What do you like?

Ed pursed his lips and twitched his cheek as if he couldn't hold something back.

I can't believe the day came when I received this kind of attention from you.

..!

And when that something reached the point where he could no longer bear it, Ed embraced Lil and nuzzled his head into her arms.

I like you best, Liloa!

I meant to eat.

Ah.

Lil frowned to stop herself from laughing too.

Oh my god I never knew that this man, who is in love with me, could be so clumsy, air-headed and cute. Its as if he has a screw missing somewhere

Eating, if you meant something I consume water?

..?

Wherever I go, water is the most important thing. I need it for my survival, my daily life, medicine I need it for everything. Water is the food that deserves my favour and respect.

Hearing his reasoning behind it, it seems like its the right thing to say.

Lil nodded her head in response to his reasonable answer.

I want him to keep talking, but he isn't saying anything else I want to know more, but he only gives straightforward answers to my questions about himself.

After placing her hand under her head as she lay on her side, Lil asked.

And?

What?

Is there anything else? I heard from Levi that you're thirty years old. However, apart from that, I don't know anything else about you. You always only listen to what I say.

Hm, let's see. Well, I was born on the Northern Continent.

You were?

This time, it was Ed who just blinked. He always thought she already knew his birthplace, but seeing how she looked really confused, she truly had no clue.

Lil stared at him as if telling him to continue this momentum.

But he looks tongue-tied. I guess he isn't used to talking about himself. In fact, Levi, who grew up with him since childhood, told me that he rarely talks to her about things other than medicine. And after becoming an adult, he also had less and less interactions with his cousin, Linhardt.

My parents they were normal I guess. My mother was always kind, whereas my father was strict but caring. I was treasured because I was a child who came late into their lives. My family and I lived

together in our castle, along with our other relatives. Our whole family was like that. My father was the eldest son, and I am the eldest son as well, so I never questioned the way I was treated. I guess I don't have to tell you how I was raised.

Lil burst out laughing upon listening to Ed's story.

For some reason, I always sensed that he had strong narcissistic and arrogant tendencies ever since he was young. I can imagine a kid with that kind of personality running around the lord's castle.

Then, when I was six, I got a younger brother.

..?

Lil remembered Ed saying that he was an only child.

It was during breakfast in that inn we stayed in on Panichi, I'm certain he said so?

Noticing Lils puzzlement, Ed added.

It was a stillborn

Chapter 250

Volume 7

The smile on Lils lips faded.

Visha. That was his given nickname. My father said that even after the child was born, he would still be called Visha until he was an adult, just like how I had been called Knox from the moment I was inside my mother's womb.

Before he knew it, Ed was lying down, looking at the ceiling. Lil felt responsible and guilty for urging him to keep talking for no reason, because now that he had done so, she felt like she wasn't in the position to offer something like a half-baked consolation. So instead, Lil moved closer to him and whispered that he didn't need to continue any further.

However, Ed lightly shook his head.

Anyway, due to that, my mother lost a lot of blood and had childbed fever*. She passed away not long after. Of course, I was very sad, but the people around me kept saying that childbed fever was very common. I couldn't understand why they were comforting me with such words. If it was a common disease, did that make it any easier? Was it then just natural to die?

When the hand that was stroking Ed's hair suddenly stopped, Ed held Lils fingers and fiddled with them.

Of course, I was too young at the time to truly understand any of it and only had such thoughts. But three years later, my father also passed away. He joined a small battle and came back with an injured leg. I could do nothing but watch how his leg rotted away. Within a month, it had to be amputated. But the amputated part became infected again and it spread throughout his body. I didn't even know it was an infection at the time. I just grew up smelling the scent of rotting flesh, the smell of my father slowly dying for half a year. People said to me that even with his leg cut off, he had to be lucky to survive, and that if he was unlucky, he would obviously die. Adding that in fact, there were more cases where luck ran out. They comforted me with such words again.

Lil, who thought she would simply listen to some of his preferences, likes, and dislikes at best, was taken aback upon hearing the series of tragedies in Eds life.

Even in the letter I read yesterday, there was another death that wasnt light. I cant even imagine experiencing such sorrow from such a young age. I baselessly assumed that he constantly received love when he was growing up, seeing how hes always so positive and active

When he heard that his son was in critical condition, my grandfather, who was staying in the Empire at that time, came to my hometown, but my father had already passed away by then. My grandfather even brought a doctor from the Imperial Clairaut with him. After my fathers passing I stayed away from them and didnt speak, so that doctor thought there was a problem with me and he examined me instead. The doctor at that time had unfamiliar iron tools and a book that was difficult to read

After that, Lil understood it even without Ed having to continue.

Ed sighed softly. Still holding her fingers, he slowly turned his body to face her.

I wanted to live. I was scared and hated that people could die so easily, so I decided to study medicine. Thinking that I could die easily, too. That I, too, could die a common or unlucky death. I didnt know any better then, but thinking about it more carefully now, I truly think people really do

Lil lifted her body and moved closer to Ed. As she looked down at him, she felt a knot in her stomach. The sadness that could be heard in his voice, became even more vivid when she saw it in his face.

Come on, dont look at me like that. My grandfather was a pretty funny guy, so I quickly regained my spirits.

Still, her heart ached as if she was actually the one who experienced it. She didnt know that Ed would share something like that so willingly. And given how dark his story was, she could only apologise to him with tears in her eyes.

Im sorry. Ive been misunderstanding you.

Instead of responding, Ed reached out his hand and tucked Lils hair behind her ear. Because she had been looking down at him, a lot of her strands flowed down her face and Ed carefully swept them all away.

Liloa.

Hmm?

After tidying up the hair on both sides, Lils full, slightly reddened, face was revealed. Ed spoke as he caressed her cheek.

You should stay healthy for a long, long time.

One doesnt need to have great intuition to fully understand those words. Ed didnt say that as a doctor. He lost his younger brother, his mother, his father, his first love, and his grandfather who raised him like his own child And perhaps the next thing that came to his mind was me

Lil answered while staring at the man who was constantly abandoned.

I will.

Thank you for saving my life. Have I ever expressed that properly? Thank you for allowing me to live. I really wanted to tell you this.

Im the one who should be thankful.

..?

Ed spoke with a sigh.

You dont know how thankful I was that you were so strong stronger than anyone else. I was so afraid. The coma you were in continued for such a long and hopeless period. During which I constantly asked myself how many people could actually survive that period or even wake up?

Lil held Eds hand that lingered near her ear.

The tragedy of losing a family member is common regardless of country. Although the circumstances of the Empire are different, southerners are separated from their families in an even more tragic way. This is nothing special to me. Ive been accustomed to tragedy Still, I cant deny that I feel deeply sorry for Ed

And from here on, Lil knew.

I want to spend a lot of time loving him.

Recognizing she was becoming more generous than ever before, Lil recalled something Cesar had previously told her. She finally understood it.

{ It seems as if this one single mistake of mine has let you define my whole being, but how many times have his faults been forgiven?* }

Drops of realisation dripped through the cracks of her blissful feeling. Her gaze shifted between the wrinkles in the blanket to Eds neck and shoulder.

I didnt notice before But even when I was furious, I couldnt yell at him to get out of my sight forever. And I, myself, couldnt stay away In fact, I didnt want to leave

Lil felt this strange pull from Ed.

Its so odd. Even though my family may continue to haunt me, I want to stay here even if it means fighting my anxiety every day. But will I be able to trust whatever Ed tells me from now on? Wont I reflexively doubt it? Wont he try to deceive me again by doing whats most convenient for him? People dont change easily, and I can confidently say that I know that constancy better than anyone else

Lil was taught to forgive a man before he apologised for a third time. She was told that if she didnt let go of her anger after hearing more than three sentences filled with a mans apology, she lacked virtue and was a spoiled woman. She gave up all hope the moment she couldnt even remember expressing her feelings of anger or resentment. And holding it in had been exhausting. Despite their empty apologies, she pretended to agree in order to survive, to breathe a little until she became lethargic.

So now, she was unsure whether she was stuck in this bed because of her teachings or because she felt differently about Ed.

Liloa.

The gaze that had been meaninglessly wandering around the hem of the blanket shifted back to Ed. Unbeknownst to her, Ed had begun raising his upper body, and unexpectedly, Lil had to look up at him.

What?

I'll never do that again.

What do you mean?

I will never deceive you again.

Lil was at a loss for words for a moment, then decided to be honest about her thoughts.

Did you just read my mind?

It was due to your stiff expression. It made me wonder why you looked like that.

Still, you couldn't have been that accurate.

His eyebrows twitched. Lil climbed onto Ed's lap despite his hesitations and swept his serious face with both hands. Ed's eyebrows and eyes went up due to the motion, causing Lil to be the only one who could freely smile.

This is my first time seeing this kind of expression on your face.

It's the face of someone who is carefully agonising. I hope you like it.

I like it. It's handsome.

I'm glad that my good looks contribute to easing your anger.

Even though he joked, Ed didn't laugh, so Lil waited for him in silence. Instead of continuing, his fingers came up and caressed her cheek.

Your cheek is swollen.

Lil immediately took his hand, lowered it and avoided his eyes.

It's fine. Don't worry.

No, it's not.

I was arrogant. I dismissed what you went through in your childhood as nothing special. That's why I was so envious of you and couldn't acknowledge you. I laughed at those who were afraid of you, but at the same time, I couldn't admit to myself that I was one of them.