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Side story 3 Liloas Chapter 1: The Fruit

But after that, Liloa was unable to visit the boy for a while. Malus, an island full of resorts, became busier as the weather warmed up. The number of appearances that Liloa had to make increased as well. Ann and Charlotte had to accompany her on such chores the majority of the time, so meeting the boy while avoiding peoples gazes was difficult. While Liloa attended evening banquets throughout Malus, she craned her neck to look for the boy, wondering if he had come to the same banquet as her. But the boy was nowhere to be seen, nor a hint of his presence could be felt. In retrospect, it was absurd for a boy who had yet to make his social debut to attend a feast without the presence of an adult, such as a relative or a guardian. And, since there didnt appear to be any adults in the estate to accompany him, Liloa gave up on looking for him at those gatherings.

Moreover, as summer deepened, a letter arrived from Obernyu. When Henrietta suggested that Liloa should spend the summer in Obernyu until autumn, she was overjoyed and replied that she would. While Liloa found it exciting that Henrietta wanted to spend time with her, she soon remembered the boy and her shoulders slumped.

Even though I wont be able to see him for a few months, I want to convey my desire to visit him again at some point. Regardless if he still finds me annoying or not

Liloa, who had been agonizing for a few days, finally called for Louisa. She then briefly explained her story and in the end, decided to entrust her with the letter she wrote to him without anyone knowing. Of course, Liloa left out the part about him being a doctor as she was afraid her friend would be reluctant to visit him again. So, she only told Louisa that he helped her find her bag.

While leaving Malus, Liloa caught sight of the blue-grey villa that they were passing by from the carriages window. She then recalled the letter she wrote and sent to the boy.

Before I left, I really wanted to visit him and see how the medical herbs have grown It would also have been interesting to see how he made that disinfectant from the juices of the red fruit

Upon her return to Malus during autumn, Louisa, whom she met in the patronage of the lords house, unexpectedly said.

Liloa! Did you hear? The murderer is gone.

The news left Liloa heartbroken, but she tried her hardest to conceal it. She adjusted her parasol for no reason and was cautious enough to not break her gait while they walked.

Hes not a murderer. How many times do I have to tell you that he was just planting seeds? He helped me back then, so Im grateful to him.

Well, anyway. We havent seen him. Its been about maybe a month now? Maybe thats why Charles is now bragging that hes going to look for your hairpin there.

Louisa flipped open her parasol and exclaimed strongly.

What a cowardly coward!

Liloa nodded her head half-heartedly and looked in the direction of the boys villa.

But That doesnt have to stop me from seeing the herbs myself, right?

Her unknown impatience kept her on her toes. Liloa increased her pace without realizing it and ended her garden walk with Louisa. Liloa then gave Ann and Charlotte the excuse that she was going to the beach with Louisa and at the same time, told Louisa that she had some errands to run to escape from the latters arms.

As the villas were clustered together along the beach, it didnt take long for Liloa to reach the blue-grey mansion. Liloa slipped her body through the fence and easily passed through the main gate, just like before. She thought about going through the front door, but when she sensed some noise coming from the garden, she immediately turned around.

What, I thought she said he disappeared a month ago?

A feeling of optimism passed through her heart. Unfortunately, that feeling didnt last long, as there was no boy behind the main building. It was only an ordinary gardener, wearing a wide straw hat, standing at a distance and blankly looking at Liloa. Liloa changed the excited look on her face and approached the middle-aged gardener with a sun-burned face, who eventually opened his mouth when she came close enough.

Um, who are you

Im Philly. Im here to see the doctor.

If you say doctor, then are you looking for our master?

If your master is a boy about fourteen years old with brown hair and green eyes, then yes.

The young master has returned to his home

It was a fact she had intuited from the moment she saw the gardener instead of the boy, yet hearing it for herself made her feel a little sick. Liloa clenched her fists through the hem of her skirt in a way that it prevented the person right across her from seeing it.

So thats how it goes? He just leaves?

She hesitated to ask anything before she would take her leave, but when she remembered the letter she had left through Louisa, she asked the gardener.

Was there perhaps anything he had left for me?

The gardener tilted his head and answered.

I dont think so? I didnt see anything like that.

Liloa bowed her head in such indescribable disappointment that it was hard to hide. She was on the verge of tears, wondering about the difference between her and him and why the boy had left nothing behind. Based on her reaction, the gardener got a rough idea of what had happened between his young master and the girl, and tried to comfort her.

Oh my, Miss Philly, I know, our master isnt a very thoughtful person Im really sorry about this.

Why are you apologizing?

Gazing at the gardener, Liloas eyes were a bit distorted as she tried to fight back her tears.

From what Ive heard, hes going on a big adventure this time. Thats why he was probably too preoccupied and distracted. He even entrusted me with taking care of the garden. Knowing hes the type of person who normally handles everything on his own

Where is he going?

I cant tell you that

Youre not going to tell me his name either, are you?

I cant. Im sorry. If the master finds out that I told you things behind his back, hell be furious at me. Hes someone who absolutely hates troublesome things

Does that mean Im annoying your young master?

What? Oh! No! Thats not what I

Its fine!

Liloa, who shouted bitterly, turned around and quickly left the garden. As if running away, she ran around the main houses facade and towards the main gate. She was so angry that her face flushed, but the wind that beat her run made zero contribution in cooling her.

Then suddenly, Liloa stopped in shock. She realized that her anger was directed at a boy who made no promises nor gave any hints. Rather, he kept telling her that she was annoying and even told her not to come back. Inhaling her breath, Liloa raised her hand and covered her mouth. She felt so stupid that she couldnt stand it. Ashamed that she had given meaning to something on her own and then, filled with unfounded expectations, waited for the day when they would meet again

From the other side of the villa, the gardener, Igor, gloomily looked at the hem of the childs skirt as it quickly disappeared. There was a rumour going around among the servants. Their master, who was known to be cold and indifferent to others, was claimed to have exhibited compassion and kindness to a girl on an incredibly rare occasion. Long-serving family servants suspected it was because he had lost his sibling when he was young.

However, Igor pondered whether that generous act was genuine.

It did seem like he became nice to the girl named Philly, but then he left without saying a word.

Igor, pitting the childs expression that had been unable to conceal her disappointment, clicked his tongue.

Even though hes the master I serve, he truly has a very nasty temper.

Igor gathered all the tools he used to maintain the garden and put them in a large basket. After walking around the mansion, he put the basket down on the front steps with the intention of tidying up the lawn in front of the main building, when suddenly he thought he saw the front door shaking in the wind. The rest of the servants didnt normally enter or leave through the front door, so they didnt pay much attention to it.

Hmm? Why is the front door open?

Climbing the stairs in front of the main houses entrance, Igor gently pushed the door open and found a glass bottle on the floor right in front of the door. It was a glass bottle as small as the palm

of his hand, containing a red liquid. A small piece of paper was tied to the bottle with twine. Igor went outside with the glass bottle and looked at the piece of paper under the sunlight.

[Philly.]

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Huh?

Didnt that young girl say her name was Philly?

Igor absentmindedly opened the paper that was folded in half.

[This is the disinfectant I made from the fruit you picked. Its effective, so try it when you need it.]

Oh my

Immediately realising his mistake, Igor belatedly ran out the front door towards the streets, but the child was no longer in sight. Instead of chasing the child himself, he tried to think of a more effective way.

I should give the glass bottle to a servant who has been working around here for a long time. Malus is a small territory, so as long as I ask someone who has a wide foot, they should be able to deliver this vial to Miss Philly and resolve any misunderstandings.*

Liloas autumn was boring. Her body felt strangely lethargic and nothing she did gave her joy. After she returned from Obernyu, her daily life remained flatly the same as before she left. Lord Malus still watched her as if wanting to check if she was doing anything naughty, but Autriche had made it a habit to emphasise to her the importance of being a cultured lady. Sure, Autriche still gave her the warm hugs she craved, but at the same time, Liloa was getting sick of Autriches parrot-like demeanour in her teachings.

Even though her daily routine didnt change, it was now harder to endure than before summer.

In addition, her questions kept arising. Liloa simply couldnt understand why people would criticise her whenever she tried to act outside of what she was told to do, even if she clearly knew how to do much more than only being a cultured lady. She noticed that she would be deemed greedy when she stepped outside the boundaries they set for her and dared to do anything not considered within the acceptable behaviours of a lady. And whenever Liloa expressed her frustrations, she would be treated like a difficult child.

The only person who intently listened to Liloas words was the boy she met briefly in early summer. Having experienced the joy of possibility, Liloa could never go back to her old days. However, she gradually lost motivation, and as her vitality drained from her body, people began praising her for becoming more and more like a true lady.

But, as expected, Liloa was not at all pleased by such praise. To make matters even worse, word was sent from Obernyu at the height of her distress.

It contained an obituary about Henriettas sudden death.

Liloa could only cry like a baby who didnt know what to say, for no words could accurately describe her feelings. The same was true for Autriche, who could only shed tears and wrap Liloa in a tight embrace. But before her sorrow could even subside, she had to leave Malus.

The cold winter air filled her throat.

When Liloa recalled her mother during her summer vacation in Obernyu, Henrietta seemed already weak and depressed. On Liloas last day there, she clung to the hem of her mothers skirt to express her sadness to part, but at that time, Henrietta said.

{ Youre throwing a tantrum again. See, youre still so young, you need more education. }

Henrietta appeared annoyed by Liloa as she bit down on a long, thin cigarette. Slowly, her face started disappearing into the smoke she had puffed out and became fainter and whiter

The winter sun was dazzling. Liloa stared at the bright sunlight shining against the window of her rattling carriage. The carriage passed by tall trees that occasionally block out the sparse sunlight.

Miss, cheer up.

When her only response was a faint whimper, Liloa was gently patted on her shoulders, but her eyes remained looking out of the window without answering.

The further she got from Malus, the colder the air and the more bitter the wind became. At some point, Liloa fell asleep and upon opening her eyes, a pure white snowy landscape greeted her. With the carriage pulling down a snowy road, her body naturally trembled from the cold emanating from the frozen ground

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Lil, who was leaning against a wooden pole, opened her eyes. The sea breeze blew on the hill in front of the Retiro mansion, making the spot where she was standing the perfect spot to cool off after training.

Lil rotated her stiff right arm.

I cant believe this is the shape Im in after just firing a few shots

Ed and Levi had praised her for her amazing resilience, but Lil was nothing but impatient.

If Im like this, it has no use asking for a real sword yet

She first had to withstand the recoil of her gun without difficulty, but that was already a challenge for her.

Lil sighed.

When she lifted her head, the maids, who were stealing glances at her, immediately lowered their eyes. Lil couldnt help but mind them because their presence was so obvious. At Levis orders, three or four people followed her around at all times, carrying baskets filled with food and medicine bottles. In addition, instead of blending naturally into the background, they didnt forget to blatantly observe her every move. At first, they saw Lil as a mistress, so they constantly flattered her looks and figure. This soon converted into silence when they became unhappy to serve a woman without

a clear status or name. And now, more recently, their eyes had turned strange since Lil started to run around the backyard of the mansion, shooting a gun and sparring with Ed in light clothing.

They were clearly at a point where they couldn't guess her identity anymore.

Seeing how curious the servants are, I'm starting to feel concerned about the possible loose lips of the vassals and officials who come and go. Ed is obviously too busy caring for me and the recovery of my stomach to pay close attention to it, and because medical equipment can be needed at any given time, we have no choice but to stay in his mansion. Then, maybe, rumours that not only Ed, but also an unidentified woman, are staying in Roahn are already making their way to Sesbron. What certainly isn't helping is that the Duke of Mireilles' Garni business has branches throughout the Empire. Their communication network is well organised, so information is exchanged quickly within the top ranks. And even though Venua is still imprisoned in the villa, it will only be a matter of time until he escapes from his confinement with the help of a nobleman who will guarantee his identity. I can't even guess how the Emperor will react to my sudden reappearance. Not to forget Ed's lack of success in the South to top it all off, meaning that even the Admiral won't leave a favoured impression on His Majesty. In that case, we have even less time.

Lil stood up, clutching the barrel of her gun. Just as she was about to start again, Ed waved his arm from afar. She seemed to already hear him ask why she was holding her gun before her break was even over and sure enough

I came just in time for your break, so why are you about to start practising again?

Ed took the gun away.

I'm in a hurry.

There's no need.

Yes, there is.

Lil turned her head curtly for no reason. Ed then took a basket from one of the maids and looked inside. Seeing the untouched fruits, he grabbed an apple and pushed it into Lil's mouth. Lil, now familiar with the feeling of being taken care of, obediently took a bite of the apple.

I was thinking about going out tonight.

Why?

It's the eve of the harvest festival.

Lil recalled what Levi told her earlier. Roahn was a seaside city that celebrated events since ancient times. The ancient locals used to pray and express their gratitude for a safe journey and a good catch. Now that it has become a trading city, such customs have been borrowed yet altered to pray for the city's commercial revival.

What are we going to do there?

We need to gauge the current public sentiment.

Cut the crap.

and this method is the most fun.

Who has

Ed didnt even have to hear the rest of her answer. Lil was about to say that she didnt have the time to play around, but she shut her mouth, for Eds next words showed that he already knew what she was thinking.

Just this once.

As Ed pleaded with his index finger raised, his narrow-eyed smile was clearly a skilful act trying to charm her. Lil looked back on her dull love life inside the mansion and thought about Eds days of dealing with her as if she were a full-fledged sack of wheat, only concentrating on her rehabilitation. But when following her around, Lil often heard him whine

{ Are you sure you really love me? }

and asked her to confess again

Lil lowered the hand mirror after seeing her face decorated with colourful wing patterns in all kinds of paint.

So, why does your festival require your face to be painted like this?

Its tradition.

What kind of tradition?

More than a hundred years ago, Roahn was still a humble fishing village. What do you think was the biggest fear of a fisherman hoping for a good catch?

Storm.

Right, so because the fishermen were most afraid of storms, they painted their faces like this. They thought that if they had scary faces when lightning struck the sea at night, it would scare the sky and it would take away the lightning or something.

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So, do people paint their faces throughout the whole festival?

No, only on the festivals eve. According to the superstition, painting ones face on the eve of the festival warns the storm to not approach during the rest of the festival.

Interesting superstition. As expected, everywhere you go, sailors have thin ears*.

The South also has many superstitions related to the sea and sailing. I, too, entrusted my life to Mother Ocean again and again. My ears were normally thick when I was on land but naturally became thinner whenever I got on a ship

Lost in thoughts, Lils hand was gently nudged by Eds, which had grabbed hold of hers.

Why? Dont you like it? Its nice that you dont have to worry about covering your face, dont you think?

Is this why you were quite confident in asking me to go out?

Ed laughed without answering, causing the red wings on his face to move along with his squinting eyes. Meanwhile, Lil looked over her shoulder. The rest of the festival-goers, standing in queues to receive their snacks from the street vendors, similarly had their faces painted with various colours and patterns, ranging from a few crude straight lines to pictures as colourful and detailed as Lils.

Sir? You ordered two, right?

The owner of the stall gave Ed two pan bagnats*. Lil just learned that this was a more modern meal, with fish and vegetables sandwiched between two slices of bread.

Apparently, its currently a trend in Roahn to eat light meals as everyone is living such a busy life.

Ed looked disapprovingly at Lil who took a big bite of the bread.

Are you sure thats all you want? Its not nutritious enough.

Theres fish stuffed in the bread.

So?

If it had been plain ham or vegetables, I wouldve passed over it even if it was my first time seeing it, but this is grilled fish. Cant I be curious about what it tastes like?

Only then did Ed raise his eyebrows and take a bite of his own.

So, you were curious about this.

It may not seem like it, but I like to eat and Im curious by nature. Of course, till now I didnt exactly live a life where I could leisurely explore such things, so I cant even remember when or what I was last curious about. But since youre setting the table for me like this, I now can think about it again. Didnt you bring me here to simply look around and talk about trivial matters?

Exactly.

Seeing Ed smiling happily, left Lil a little regretful.

If I had known he would like it this much, I wouldve agreed for us to wander around sooner.

Lil finally understood that when someone adores someone, they would want to share even the most insignificant elements of their daily lives with them. And as if to prove it, on their way to the dock, Ed and Lil kept themselves busy by eating coloured sugar skewers that turned their tongues blue, popping the bubbles floating above their heads periodically, and picking five random numbers in the lottery. As well as other insignificant things, such as hitting a target with a hammer.

Meanwhile, it became harder and harder for Ed to disguise his joy due to the overall vibrant mood and he eventually even joined a group to dance and laughed until the last song played. Ed wasnt the only one who was ecstatic. Lil was on the other side, fluttering her arms

Lets eat here!

Okay.

The docks were filled with stalls of food and small tables lined up between the stakes. Because the crowd was packed, it became a real task to find a seat. After Lil and Ed bought two small bottles of

wine, they managed to sit down at one of the vacant tables. However, the place was so dense that two men squeezed themselves in and took the seats next to them.

Ed paid them no mind and poured wine into Lils glass first. Lils eyes widened and asked if he was serious about giving her a drink, but Ed didnt seem to hear her because of the loud conversation next to them. The men were lamenting about their situation but suddenly changed their subject and neither Ed nor Lil could ask them to be quiet.

Where the hell did our Admiral go?

Ed lowered the brim of his hat for no reason, while Lil looked around the table in surprise.

Where is he, huh? Its been a while since the fleet returned, but we havent seen any traces of him

How could I know? Only the high-ranking officials are aware of the situation

The non-commissioned officers who said they were going to make a fortune in the South also came back disappointed. How many months did they spend there? Huh? But the only thing that they received was their salary

Its also a shame that no merchant ships followed. At the beginning, it looked like this expedition was set up to clear the trade routes, so a lot of merchants invested. But now that its obvious that the docks remain empty, I wont be surprised if those misinformed investors go bankrupt one after another

Thats right! But do you know what everyone keeps talking about? They say that the Admiral didnt fail the southern expedition, as he, in fact, had no intention of subjugating there in the first place. That could be it, huh? Rumour has it that before setting sail for the South, the Merchants Guild over there on Goeden Street grabbed the hem of the Admirals trousers and begged him to let them trail behind the fleet, but he firmly refused

No way, then why did he lead the fleet all the way to the South?

Well, what do people like us know about his intentions? Nonetheless, even if there are harsh words about him being the Bastard of the Peninsula and things like that, hell never do anything that will cause harm to Roahn

Come on, man. How can you say that so confidently after seeing what Sesbron has been doing to Roahn for the past half year? Not only have the taxes gone up, but according to the guy working at the government office, Sesbron is even trying to have Roahn pay a toll for using the Saint-Vive Canal which leads to the capital But if the Admiral stays away like this, who will take care of all that?

His Majesty is the richest person on the continent, but he still seems not satisfied. Hes sitting in his palace in Sesbron, where gold coins and treasures are being piled up like mountains, yet he covets the pennies of a distant western canal?

Lil intently listened to the conversation without realising it. It was mainly about the interests of Sesbron and Roahn, but it was all new information that even Ed had not told her yet.

Why is Philip II showing interest in the West?

Are you not planning on managing your territory any time soon?

Lil whispered as she took a sip of her wine. No, after tasting it, she realised it wasnt wine. It was just grape juice.

Well then. I guess Ed is indeed not the kind of person who will easily give me a drink.

Linhardt is in charge of administration. Hes the governor of Roahn. My situation is no different from any other lord. Only the privileges remain, the actual authority has been transferred to the governor.

Lil laughed at Eds honest assessment of his own situation.

Ive never heard before that a relative of a lord is serving as the governor of their territory. Isnt a governor appointed by His Majestys edict? Because a governor is an official of the capital.

Ed shrugged his shoulders and took a sip of his wine.

The governor is supposed to be His Majestys appointee, but Linhardt doesnt seem to have any attachment to the Empire, let alone to His Majesty. Just by looking at this, anyone can tell that Roahn is a land run by Eichendorff.

Ive never been interested in running it. Its the same with being an admiral. My only interest was finding relics, but now that Ive collected all the clues scattered across the seas, its time to turn my attention inland. Its difficult to do that as an admiral.

His Majesty would issue an edict before that happens, right?

I signed a deal which makes it able to retire soon.

And His Majesty agreed to such a contract?

To be honest, he doesnt like me very much. Hes probably hoping to kick me out of Sesbron as soon as possible.

That couldnt be the only thing, you mustve offered him something in return.

I told him I would return the fleets strength to what it was before the conquest of the Monferrand Strait. You remember that one, right? The 3rd Prince led the expedition as the Captain and the fleet was almost completely destroyed.

Lil nodded her head.

The Monferrand Strait only opens to Admiral Retiro.

Although it was a tragedy that occurred only a few years ago, that phrase spread like a legend. When Lil first heard it, she thought it was a ridiculous exaggeration, but now, the legend himself was filling her glass with juice right under her nose.

Lil changed her opinion.

Eds a very capable navigator and captain, knowing that, it doesnt sound like an entirely absurd story that the safe passage to the Monferrand Strait is secretly passed down from generation to generation.

By the way, why are you fighting His Majesty?

Ive never done that.

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Never done that? The rumours of him causing trouble in Sesbron spread over the sea all the way to the South, its ridiculous for Ed to innocently roll his eyes as if he was wronged. Has he really no idea that he has the personality to annoy even those who are minding their own business, or is he just pretending not to know? Of course, from the other partys perspective, theyre unlucky either way.

Are you truly unaware that youre the type to make enemies easily?

No way?

Really? One can tell just by observing your behaviour.

Me?!

Well, I hated you from the beginning too

Ed obviously pretended not to hear Lils muttering and put something in her hand instead. This time, it was a skewer with a fruit she had never seen before, covered in yellow powder and stuck in a row. As Lil chewed its sickeningly sweet flesh she was convinced her mouth was melting from the sweetness added by the honey powder. Lil, who barely managed to swallow it, quickly handed the skewer back to Ed, who casually ate the remaining pieces of fruit.

Dont go too far with His Majesty. It will be troublesome if you die.

Are you worried about me?

Let me rephrase that, dont forget our lifetime contract.

No matter how much Lil looked at him, Ed, who placed his palm on his heart to show her how moved he was, looked extremely composed.

Does he truly not see the danger in any of those problems? Even though were walking side by side now, at times I still dont know whats going on in his head and its still awkward to ask about the details of the territory because its such a personal matter.

Liloa, Im touched.

What do you mean touched?

Eds face fell right in front of her nose and his fingers lifted the brim of her hat. Lil glared at him as he was looking at her.

Because youre worried that I might die.

That kind of worry can also be expressed to a random passerby on the street.

Lil slapped his hand that was gently stroking her cheek away.

The look she gave him, warned him to forget whatever he may be planning on a busy street when it was still bright outside, but Ed, who had already come under the brim of her hat, lightly kissed her lips. The taste of the honey-covered fruit entered her mouth again, making Lil shiver in horror.

Hey!

Ed, who had been pushed away by Lil, laughed heartily at her reaction. Lil reflexively swung her arms, but if easily dodging her attacks wasnt enough, Ed lightly caught her fist mid-air and pressed his lips against the back of her hand.

Lil glared at him even more as she cried out.

Do you want to die!

Ack!

Come back here!

Lil ran along the harbour to chase Ed, who began to sprint away from her. It immediately occurred to her that this was exactly what he wanted, but she was so annoyed that she couldnt brush it off.

The sight of a man being chased by a woman wasnt very common, so naturally people looked their way. Fortunately, because it was the eve of a major festival, there was so much to see on the streets besides them; a talking parrot, monkeys performing acrobatic tricks, a minstrel singing poetry, and a band playing exotic music that drew cheers from the crowd. So, it wasnt long before no one showed interest in them anymore.

Ed made his way to an area where there were fewer people and soon enough, he had left the dock and boarded a sailboat. He stepped on the short crossing and disappeared beyond its small hull. Lil also leapt onto the purely white boat quickly.

Ed was waiting for Lil from the deck of the sailboat. Upon reaching him, Lil immediately pushed his shoulder with her whole body weight.

I told you not to do that!

Ack!

Tumbling backwards while holding on to Lil, Ed fell onto the carpet on the sailboats deck. Lil, who fell on top of him, slapped his shoulder and forearm.

We were outside! That kind of thing! I told you not to do it! I told you!

Instead of feeling the slightest bit of pain, Ed simply laughed. His laughter was so lively that even Lils body, lying on his chest, was shaking.

Obviously Ed is enjoying every second of it.

At that moment, Lil began to ponder if she had already found it interesting to play along with his rhythm.

Nonsense. Theres no way Im that childish. My preferences are completely different from Eds childish sensibilities.

Lil shook her head and raised her upper body.

I wont stay with you. Lets enjoy the festival separately.

Just when Lil was about to get up, Ed wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her down. Lil fell back with him, and they once more landed on the wool carpet, both still panting as a result of their running.

Between breathing heavily and smiling brightly, Eds mouth appeared to be very busy.

But you can enjoy the festival from here, too

Ed gathered Lils flowing hair and tucked it behind her ear. Lil frowned, but Ed imitated her expression before raising his eyebrows to make her laugh. Although Lil tried to keep herself from laughing by wrinkling her face, she couldn't overcome it and before she knew it, she was laughing too.

Its not funny at all, but I cant help but laugh And strangely, I dont hate it

Ed, who noticed that Lil had finally loosened up, drew his face closer to hers and spoke in a whisper even though the surroundings were already quiet.

Theres no one else around.

Lil suddenly raised her head and looked left and right. True enough, the harbour was quiet. There were only screeching seagulls wandering around the nearby piles. The rest of the crowds and merchant ships participating in the festivities were bustling on the main dock opposite from them.

She also noticed that their sailboat was actually drifting towards the sea. Lowering her eyes, she found that the sailboats rigging came loose from the dock pilings. She couldn't tell when they were released, but nonetheless, she and Ed were steadily moving away from peoples eyes.

Ed took his hat off and slowly sneaked his upper body closer to hers. His tongue suddenly licking her ear made her feel drowsy. Annoyed by his intention to catch her off guard, she raised her head and bit his earlobe in return. Nipping it for a while, his muscular shoulders eventually started to tremble and a moan escaped his lips. Lil felt satisfied and she pushed his body back down again. After all, the sight of the man lying carelessly with his hair tousled caught her fancy. With the blazing sun causing his face to frown, Ed lowered his gaze, but when their eyes caught one another again, Lils heat rose for no reason. However, she wasn't the only one getting excited. She felt something hard rising from his body as she was sitting on top of him. Lil knew it would be dangerous for them to continue like this, so she went on to grab his cheeks, pressing his lips together.

Who naughtily ran away after stealing a kiss from my lips in broad daylight*?

Ed playfully rolled his eyes and answered cheekily.

Me?

Yes, you. Youre so cocky.

Lil bit his bulging lower lip.

The only soft parts on Eds body were his earlobes and lips, so Lil naturally became obsessed with them. While she pressed their lips together and sucked slowly, Ed took her hand, which was still holding his cheek, and lowered it. After he intertwined their fingers for a short moment, his hands moved towards her waist.

His fingertips hadn't even touched Lil yet when she already flinched and trembled.

Ed, whose lips had been bitten, spoke in a low voice.

Why?

Lil replied, twisting her waist a little.

I thought it would tickle.

No way.

Ed started laughing right in front of her.

I didnt mean to tickle you like this.

..!

As he spoke, he grabbed her waist with both hands. Lil was startled and struggled, but when Ed started to tickle her more persistently, she tried to escape by rolling onto her side.

Does it tickle that much?

Aaaahhh!

Lil, who was stamping her feet and screaming, eventually grabbed his shoulder with one hand and threw a punch.

Yikes!

Ed narrowly avoided her fist by turning his head. But as a result, Lil could take advantage of the loosening hand gestures and attempted a counterattack. She moved her wiggling fingers up and down his side, but Ed remained motionless in his half-lying position.

Its a shame. I can tolerate your tickles

Oh yeah?

..?

The calm expression on his face signalled a challenge. Raising an eyebrow, Lil lowered her hand to his pants and asked coldly.

Then how about here?

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The more Lil pressed down on it like she was playing the keys of a piano, the more Ed shuddered his shoulders. As she moved her fingertips even further, he seemed to have stopped breathing all together. His eyebrows gradually became more and more distorted, as if he was holding something back.

Ed eventually grabbed the back of her hand.

Im going crazy

Even though Lil thought she was being childish, she didnt stop and just smiled mischievously.

Ed narrowed his eyes while tightening his grasp on her hand. Raising his upper body, he lifted her up and sat her closer on his lap. Lil instinctively gripped his shoulders and turned to face him as his tongue licked the side of her neck and caused her senses to jumble.

Lil took a deep breath and looked up at the sky. It was blue without a single cloud in sight. As the sun shone down on her dazzled vision, she soon closed her eyes lazily

Lil squinted and lifted her hand to block out the sunlight.

Seeing how my body is covered with a blanket, it seems I fell asleep.

She peered ahead and saw Ed, who was adjusting the sails knots. He slowly turned to look at her. His shirt, billowing and swirling in the breeze, appeared like a little sail. Ed waved his hand eagerly when their eyes met as if they hadnt seen one another in a long time, even though they were on the same boat.

As the boat glided through the gentle water, a faint slapping sound could be heard every time the hull met the flowing waves.

Lil took the water Ed offered.

Just woke up?

When did I fall asleep?

Not so long ago.

Dressed casually with his shirt that stuck out of his pants and on bare feet, Ed looked like an infallible sailor.

Lil struggled to get up and stuttered towards the bow, following Eds lead.

The sailboat was cruising along the coastline of Roahn. Lil and Ed sat under the awning of the forecastle and watched Roahn moving further and further away. They watched the people dancing and enjoying themselves on the main pier where the festival was in full swing, emblems that were hung all over the city, various flags planted on buildings and on top of the highest hill, the Retiro mansion which stood magnificently overlooking the city.

Thanks to the sun, the dry wind passing by Lils ears was warm. She muttered in a voice that was still half asleep.

The wind is warm yet refreshing

Yes. Its very different from the South. The South is too humid and the temperatures are higher there.

Ah, I guess thats why you were so dodgy in the South.

Ed spit out the wine he was drinking and coughed.

What are you talking about? It wasnt like that! Of course, I was born on the Northern Continent. The Northern Continents summers are as cold as the winters of Roahn. You have to wear animal fur all year round!

Oh, come on

Ha!

Now that Im here out on the open sea, I finally understand why Ed complained a lot about how hot and muggy it was in the South. Even though the temperatures arent that far apart, the humidity is very different.

Lil sucked the dry air into her nostrils, ignoring Eds impassioned explanation about the northern continents climate.

Its always fun to tease him.

Lil tried to keep a straight face to avoid revealing her childish feelings.

Anyway, it truly is funny. I feel like I become weird whenever Im with Ed. Things that werent usually funny to me became funny, and I began paying attention to the childish things that I normally dont care about. At the same time, I can cast aside any gloomy or serious thoughts. Like the current situation with my family

Liloa, are you listening? Thats why I was able to brave that snowy mountain. I wasnt easily cold since I was a child I was only twelve years old when I went there But was that snowy mountain called a snow mountain for no reason? Of course

Ed went on by explaining that the northerners were a race who were used to the cold until he got sidetracked again.

In fact, Lil found Eds story about his adventures in the snowy mountains to find herbs from the Northern Continents legends quite fun to listen to. It made her temporarily forget the things that bothered her, even though she knew she hadnt made any countermeasures. The snowstorm from Eds stories didnt only cover him but also Lils visions of the duke, Venua, and Mortu. Her head was instead filled with the sight of a twelve-year-old Edgar, climbing a snowy mountain in search of medicinal herbs and eagerly leaving his footprints on it.

I dont hate this optimistic serenity at all.

Lil rested her head on his shoulder and listened to the tales of young Edgar and his expedition into the snowy mountains.

Anecdotes from Eds childhood continued until sunset. Although there were a few sad events, his life was undeniably dynamic. At times, Lil would laugh softly or be caught by surprise. At other times, she would start to giggle or even fight back her tears.

When there was a break in Eds story, Ed would draw Lil, and Lil would draw Eds face. Through this, Ed found out that Lil had no talent for art. He couldnt resist teasing her because of it, which resulted in another chase on the small boat. Only when red clouds rose over the horizon did they wrap themselves in blankets and lean against the mast.

Lil laughed the whole time until her lips and cheeks felt sore.

Whenever they went on a rampage, the small boat would flop across the waves like a piece of paper, so Lil and Ed had to do all kinds of tricks to keep their balance.

Its normally nothing special, but how could it be so enjoyable now?

Ed muttered as he looked at Lil, still unable to hide her grin.

Now you finally look your age

Who are you talking about me?

Actually, it always seemed like you lived at least 10 years longer than me.

When did I?

On the Bell Rock you rarely laughed heartily, it always sounded more forced. But when you came to Roahn, it was the first time I heard you laugh so happily.

When did I do that? I always laughed in the same manner you did?!

No. You were like an old man who lived a whole life and has seen the whole world.

With a hoarse voice that didnt suit him, Ed sang a known song but changed the lyrics to Liloa that old man.

Lets see for how long he can sustain his teasing.

Lil jumped up from his arm, where she had been leaning.

It mustve been very difficult for you to live while supporting this old man.

Its an honour to have my hard work recognised.

Without a word, Lil moved her hips to the side and got away from him. But Ed followed suit. She tried to push his thigh with her knee, but he didnt budge. In the end, Lil gave up after a few more half-hearted attempts.

Lil and Ed naturally looked side by side towards the coast. They spotted a few children playing on a small beach of mixed pebbles and sand on the east side of Roahn.

The water at sunset turned dark red and the sea breeze blew refreshingly.

In case you find Roahn uncomfortable, you can go somewhere else. Do you want to go to the South again?

No

You can go anywhere. Just dont forget our lifetime contract.

The South is over for me. Even if I do eventually decide to go back, I have to solve my problems here on the continent first. Especially if Im not going to continue wearing the necklace.

Then

Ill go to Obernyu.

Lil shook her head as though she didnt like what she said herself.

I know its clearly a trap, but I cant turn away from my father.

Ed had sent a messenger to inquire about Sesbron, and the news that the Archduke was indeed in a critical condition was widespread.

It may be quite a distance from Roahn to Sesbron, but Sesbron and Obernyu arent that far apart.

They say he could really die soon. It never occurred to me when I was living without thinking about them, but now that I still have the chance to see him on his deathbed, Id like to do that. Its something I didnt get to do for my mother.

In fact, getting to Obernyu isnt difficult at all. Im most worried about Venuas next move. I wont mind if whatever hes plotting only applies to me, but I wont be able to bear it if he involves Ed too.

Youre coming with me, right?

Of course. We have a lifetime contract.

That damn lifetime contract again.

I'll never let myself become a burden. I promise you that.

Ed? A burden? Even a passing dog would laugh. Because of Ed's favour, the only burden he causes me is the burden on my heart. His social status, combat abilities and medical knowledge actually make me look like the burden

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Nothing will come from staying stuck in Roahn like this. If I want to know what the hell is going on and why Venua wants to take me with him, I have to go to Sesbron.

That's true.

Well, since you decided to come with me, I won't say anything else. I already know that saying things as I'm going to solve it on my own or I'm sorry because I can't help it won't work on you.

It's not free, so don't worry.

That's good to hear. What's the price then?

Come with me to the jungle once this is all over.

What?

The jungle. Or who knows, we could go to a desert. The thing is, I plan to search for places still untouched by civilization.

Are you talking about finding more relics?

Yes. And because you agreed to our lifetime contract, let's go find those relics together.

Where's the contract stating that?

Ed simply tapped his temple.

Lifetime contract He only talks about the lifetime contract, but he never specifies what kind of contract it actually is.

Lil vaguely considered it like an oath of love, but Ed brought up this lifetime contract every time they did something. That was also how Lil knew it was part of that contract that they had to eat together at least once a day. One time, she asked him about it, to which he responded in shock asking, Didn't we agree to a lifetime contract?. Lil wanted to clarify that she meant to ask about the specifics of the contract, like who was involved in the contract and what it entailed. She was even meaning to set a date to codify their contract. However, she was easily distracted by every cute thing Ed did, adding in the fact that she didn't dare to organise such a huge clause. As a result, Lil didn't say anything.

We have a rule that we can't be apart for more than a day.

Since when has there been a rule like that?

Since we agreed to the contract.

Wait what? What on earth is he talking about?

Lil didnt bother to say those words though. Ed, on the other hand, smiled, as though wanting to let her know his clear feelings. He then waved their clasped hands back and forth. Lil was curious as to why Ed seemed so excited about it, but she eventually let go of her curiosity after anticipating that she might have a hard time in the jungle.

I have to live like this with you till I die?

Yup. Thats why we called it a lifetime contract.

We? From what I remember, you were the one who said it first

So?

No, what I meant

As Lil murmured, Eds face suddenly invaded her view and he rubbed the tip of his nose against hers. Lil was secretly happy whenever he did that, and Ed knew it, too. When their eyes met, Ed smiled at her. It was obvious that he was trying to distract her, but she found it rather charming and not at all contrived.

Dont you like it?

Its not that

Dont you want it?

No

So, you like it?

Hes so persistent.

Lil responded helplessly.

Yeah

Youre going with me, right?

Okay. Yeah, lets go to the desert or wherever. I mean, what is the worst that can happen besides dying?

Instead of responding, Ed just proceeded to smile.

Are you already excited to travel with me?

Yeah. I think itll be fun.

Yeah, right

Ed just accepted Lils answer casually.

The concept of fun and me are incompatible, however, Ed doesnt know that yet. But why do I feel like I want to do something that never suited me before?

Lil tried to reflect on her feelings that even she didnt quite understand.

I think it will be more fun with you. Yup, I think itll be a lot of fun.

Thats good.

But its been so long since Ive done anything to have fun. I dont even know since when

How come?

Even though he looked intently at her for a moment, it helped that Ed didnt rush into comforting her.

They simply leaned against each other in silence for a while. There was no need to be chatty or preoccupied. It was enough to sit next to each other and stare at the same thing

When a lighthouse in the east began to twinkle after a while, Ed adjusted the sails to return to the dock, and their sailboat drifted to the southwest for quite some time.

Itll take a while to get back. Arent you hungry?

Lil shook her head when her eyes remained fixed on Roahn. As it became increasingly dark, lights came on sporadically beyond the small cape. In the hilly Roahn, the buildings were built along the curves of the land, so the city lights shone in multiple layers.

The night view is beautiful.

The entire city was planned out and built from the time of the first lord.

It seems he had excellent aesthetic sense.

You could say it runs in the family.

Lil nodded.

Just by looking at the Retiro mansions gallery, which resembled nothing short of an art museum, she could easily tell that he belonged to a family obsessed with aesthetics. But, Ed never really elaborated on that further.

During her silent appreciation of the cityscape, a flickering light near what she thought was forest, caught her attention.

What is that?

Ed narrowed his eyes and followed Lils gaze.

Its an old hunting ground that was abandoned because it was difficult to manage. As nature took over its now considered part of the forest.

But did you just see that? It looks like someone is there. The light is moving.

As it was a hunting ground, there were some buildings built there, which were naturally abandoned as well. The atmosphere around that place turned quite grim in recent years as smugglers have been using it. So, what you saw is probably them.

Smugglers? And theyre being left alone?

Thats not part of Roahns territory. Strictly speaking, it belongs to the Great Trade Route.

Ed nodded indifferently while Lil continued to stare at the lights that flickered from time to time in the dark forest.

Before it got dark, there were no ships that looked like smuggling merchant ships. Are they using those abandoned buildings for their storage?

Lil was in deep thought, but soon the sailboat made a sharp turn and she eventually looked away from it.

When the day to leave for Obernyu was decided, the entire mansion became busy. Levi also decided to return to the Imperial Clairaut along with Lil and Eds journey, so the two women had even less time to see each other.

Whenever Lil was exercising or reading a book alone, she would occasionally remember Levi.

The person I used to talk to every day has been busy making house calls for the past few days and spends a lot of time in the greenhouse. Its funny we havent seen each other considering we live under the same roof.

Lil put down the gun barrel she was cleaning and stood up, checking her watch.

Its eleven oclock. With the sun standing this high, Levi is most likely staying in the greenhouse. It seems like shes spending a lot of time in the greenhouse these days to harvest and package herbs shell take with her to the Imperial Clairaut.

Lil thought about going there to visit Levi.

Despite the fact that Lil had only known Levi for a short time, she felt a strange bond with her which developed naturally. Just as Levi told Lil that it was her first time seeing someone like Lil, Lil expressed the same sentiment towards Levi. Lil admired Levis enviable gaze as well as her unspoken kindness. She wanted to be like that too.

When she saw Levi treat someone, she couldnt have been more respectful. Because Lil eventually stopped serving as a soldier, Levi, who has her own accomplishments as a person and did her part as a doctor, appeared to be very outstanding in Lils eyes.

Of course, Lil was certain Levi hadnt accomplished this easily. Even though she never asked directly, Levi seemed to have overcome her obstacles with her unique gentleness, unlike Lil. There were times when Lil considered being a little gentler from now on, keeping Levi in mind as her example.

Huh? Lil?

Approaching from behind Lil, who was pacing at the door leading to the greenhouse, came Levi. She was wearing dirt-stained gloves and holding a small flower pot.

I know youre busy, but I thought you might like to have a cup of tea with me.

Ah! Yes, of course!

I already told the servants to bring the tea to the greenhouse.

Outpacing Lil, Levi opened the door of the greenhouse.

Come in.

Opening the door connecting the main building with the greenhouse, and stepping outside, Lil and Levi arrived at the greenhouse space. White sunlight poured through the glass walls and ceiling, which were designed to block wind and rain and let the sun through. At first glance, Lil felt like she

had stepped into the light, but then the greenhouses unique moist air and fragrant herbal scent wrapped around her.

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The majority of the plants that occupied not only the greenhouse but also the back garden of the mansion were all medicinal herbs. Throughout that greenhouse, which Levi carefully managed, were various refreshment tables.

The two walked side by side to a table not far away.

My hands are dirty so I cant cross my arms with yours. Its a pity.

Lil smiled slightly at Levis kindness.

Are you sure you arent busy? I know I shouldnt take up the time of the well-known doctor.

Oh my, what do you mean?

Levi, who was sitting on a chair, scoffed and said that Lil was exaggerating. Still, the subtle joy on her face was undeniable. Lil asked the woman who was using her hand as a fan to cool her flushed face.

What kind of herb is that?

Levi set the flower pot down next to the table and took off her gloves. She then responded while placing her bare hand on her stomach.

Its a herb thats believed to be effective for pain here. Its called allbee*.

Theres such an herb?

Its not widely known yet. But there are quite a few people who have found it effective, so Im researching it.

Lil nodded in admiration before looking down at the allbee, which was a herb with thick stems and thin leaves.

You mainly treat women, right?

Oh, thats right. Theres a huge shortage of personnel in this field. Actually, throughout history, there has been little to no research on the female human body. Thats why Im studying advanced medicine at the Imperial Clairaut.

Just then, the refreshments arrived and a tablecloth was spread between them. Levis maid held out a basin while Lil waited for Levi to finish washing her hands. As soon as the latter was done, Lil proceeded to ask.

It must not have been easy to enter the Imperial Clairaut.

Ah, now that I think about it, it was indeed quite a long journey for me.

Lil nodded, showing Levi her willingness to listen. Meanwhile, as if she were about to start a long story, Levi lifted her teacup and quenched her thirst first.

Even though the late Marquess left for the Empire with Edgar, he still often visited Weissland*. Every time the Marquess fleet landed, the castle would be filled with strange items, so I eagerly waited for the day when the Marquess would come. Of course, it wasn't just me, my friends and even all of my relatives were like that. As for Edgar at that time Well, I guess he was basically a pain in the Marquess neck? Because he always got into accidents.

So he's been like that ever since he was young?

Oh, you don't even know half of it. Compared to then, he's grown to be an impeccable gentleman now. Anyway

Ed sometimes appeared as a spice to Levi's epic, mentioned occasionally to add flavour to her story. The same was true for Levi and Linhardt's love story. Levi's long journey soon reached its peak when she told Lil about how she cut off her own hair, infiltrated the Marquess squadron to board his ship the Adventure as a sailor, and set foot on imperial soil.

At this point, Lil's intently listened to Levi's story with her mouth almost wide open.

But then what? The Marquess and my uncle, you know, the butler of this mansion, almost went out of their way to send me back, so I had no choice but to get Edgar on my side.

But why resort to Edgar? I don't expect him to have been any help at all.

No matter how stubborn the Marquess was, his stubbornness was no match against Edgars.

Ah

I tried to persuade Edgar by explaining that I had an organ in my stomach that he would never have, and that I knew hardships he could never imagine. Even now, when I think about it, I'm not sure where that strength came from. I think I almost grabbed him by the hem of his trousers. In the end, I persuaded him by saying I could do more research on childbed fever than he could. I was desperate and cowardly used it as an excuse, knowing he couldn't ignore me if it was about his mother. However, the fact remained that there was truly no medical science that focused on women's bodies back then. So I was saying whatever I could. While studying, I realised that there was indeed no research in this field. Does it make sense that no one had studied the organ that has made the greatest contribution to human history?

...!

On a rare occasion, Levi hit the table but quickly put down her hand, probably because she was surprised at her own action.

Now that I'm actually pioneering it, I'm so dumbfounded that nobody has done so.

Pioneering

Levi casually said it with a shrug, but Lil was thrilled.

I was arrogant in believing that no one else was present like me. I was mistaken in thinking Ed was my sole companion. But there are people like Levi, who are on the same path as me without even realising it. Even if some of them don't know where it leads them The path I thought I was on may have become a path because someone stepped on it before me

What, why are you here? Why in the greenhouse

Lil heard Eds voice, but she was so focused on Levi that she answered half-heartedly, so Levi was the only one who glanced up at Ed. That was only for a moment though, and Levis attention soon returned to Lil, glad that she finally met someone who would listen to her story with such a level of interest. Lil even ate a simple meal in the greenhouse, ignoring the strange and harsh smell of the herb colony.

Even though the two had busy schedules, they left the greenhouse only after promising to have dinner together every night until they left Roahn.

Because of this, when the ladies announced that they wouldve dinner together, the two men were momentarily confused. But since Ed had to have dinner with Lil and Linhardt had to have dinner with Levi, there was only one peaceful solution. The four of them ended up spending the few remaining evenings at the same table.

With her back against the headboard of her bed, Lil read a book until late at night. In the light illuminated by the lamp, the paper looked yellow and gradually blurred

As soon as her head nodded, she opened her heavy eyes.

I dont know when I dozed off

Upon checking the desk clock, Lil found it was almost midnight. She listened for signs outside the residence but didnt hear anyone coming or going. Glancing at the clock again, Lil reached for the silver tray next to it and picked up the letter on the small velvet cushion with two fingers.

Ed had left the residence early that morning. She vaguely remembered someone kissing her forehead before she tossed and turned, sleeping till late.

[Liloa.]

His handwriting is bad Its as unusual as his personality. Its written in cursive letters that were difficult to read before, but now that Ive gotten used to it, I can recognize the elaborate letters. Now it even looks like it had been stamped. To be honest, the phenomenon wherein his handwriting looks like fine print to me now, whereas it looked horrible before, may be because of something changing within me. And judging by the way he appears more handsome to me day by day, I guess Im clearly losing my objectivity towards him

Without fail, Eds radiant face flashed through her mind.

Lil let out a laugh as she felt ridiculous for herself. She was getting worried that if she continued like this, her mind would be ruined at some point. She looked back at his letter countless times next to her pillow. When he started to work at the naval office again in earnest, Ed made it a habit to send her letters all the time, the content ranged from trivial small talk to awkward confessions of love and everything in between. Ed wrote to her in a chatty manner, as if he wanted to convey all his thoughts to her. Even though Lil sent replies sporadically, his enthusiasm didnt subside at all, and it reached the point where his letters piled up for her to read.

Lil stroked the edge of the paper.

Liloa

Out of nowhere, his handwriting seemed to call for her with Eds own voice. For some reason, Lils heart ached and it caused her to frown.

Whenever I think of him, my heart tightens. Sometimes no, quite often actually. A faint pain would prick formlessly among the overwhelming joy.

With the letter lying on her chest, Lil stared blankly at the ceiling.

I wonder if Ed felt the same way while he was waiting for me, preoccupied with my recovery In any case, Ed has been spending long hours in the naval office instructing the naval attaches who will handle the affairs when he joins me on our way to Obernyu. I also remember Linhardt saying in passing that the southern expedition had been a huge failure and that it could stress Ed out. Looks like hes not coming in today.

Lil turned off the lantern and snuggled into the blanket. In the darkened room only the ceiling was visible due to the moonlight shining faintly on it. She closed her eyes again. Mortu, who had tormented her for years, disappeared as if it had been nothing but her delusion. In addition, Lil wasnt immune to having her sleep depleted like this, so she couldnt hold out any longer. She quickly fell asleep with her hands full of blankets

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Lil woke up, rubbed her eyes, and raised herself.

It felt like someone had entered the room, but Im the only one here

She was certain though, that fingers belonging to Ed had adjusted her blanket to cover her better, stroked her forehead, and then touched her cheek before moving away.

Clad in a thick robe, Lil left the room while carrying a lantern. As it was cold in the hallway, she adjusted the hem of her clothes while her shadow, slanted against the wall, showed her shrugged shoulders. The sound of her soft footsteps on the carpet made its way up the stairs to Eds bedroom.

Ed?

Lil pushed the door that wasnt fully closed and with the little source of light she had, Lil found Ed stretched out on the bed.

After Lil started coming in and out of his bedroom, Ed began tidying up the warehouse-like space. Of course, most things were just moved to the next room, but his bedrooms condition was now well-maintained enough for Lil to be able to walk toward his bed without difficulty.

She checked the clock and noticed it was already past midnight.

I thought Id stay with him tonight if he were still awake. But, given that he couldnt even take off his clothes, I guess he was extremely tired.

Lil turned off the lantern she had brought with her as well as the light next to his bed. She then lay on her stomach beside him and stared at the face that was half buried in the blanket. At some point, a smile appeared on her lips without realising it

Oh no, not like this.

Lil gave herself a sloppy slap on the cheek and sighed helplessly before looking around Eds bedroom that was dark without a hint of dawn. At first, Lil thought about taking off his jacket, but she was worried that it might wake him up. Without being able to do anything else, she could only look at Ed.

I never really understood why Ed pushed his face in front of me to make me look at him, but now I want to look at him so much that its almost embarrassing Especially when it feels like its never enough even if I can freely look at him right now I can tell Ive been more objective in the past Meanwhile, this guy may have dropped his swords and guns, he now uses his face as a weapon, confusing me with a simple smile At the very least, Im aware of it But that doesnt mean I can help it

Lil realised she was losing herself more and more each day.

Moreover, admiring Ed as a person brought her more satisfaction than admiring his looks alone. And that sensation went further than strangely tingling toes or prickly fingers.

It reminds me of the tickling sensation I felt when I was playing in the flower gardens as a child who knew nothing. At a time when the world seemed perfect to me, and I loved being at the centre of it all, not having to think about what else to do Funny, for no apparent reason, its as if I can suddenly smell fragrant grass from somewhere.

Lil twitched her nose and wondered whether to enjoy this ridiculous moment or lament at the foolishness of seemingly escaping her reality.

In the end, she moved and sat on the chair next to the bed, resting her pensive face in her hands. She deliberately opened her eyes to glare at him, but she just as quickly melted away. She did come to see him. However, now that she was actually looking at him, she felt so satisfied that she lost track of time.

I clicked my tongue at Levi, Linhardt, and Ed, but in fact, I guess Im no different I just dont show it on the outside

Lil whispered.

I like you

Ed was lying on his stomach. The hair on the back of his head fell to the side and sprawled over his cheeks and ear, exposing the nape of his neck. The loose collar of his justaucorps hung a little lower.

It looks like he had tried to take it off in a hurry but failed.

Out of nowhere, Lil felt the intense desire to press her lips there. Although it wouldve been very satisfying for her to act on it, her reason prevented her from doing something that could be considered harassment against a sleeping person.

No. But, were very close, right? We sleep together while we hold hands, so this much should be fine, I guess? I dont think Ed ever feels too bad when he presses his lips on my body when Im sleeping Even so, he needs his sleep. Seeing that the light on his bedside was still lit, it seems like it hasnt been long since hes fallen asleep.

Lils self-control was stronger than anybody elses because she could stop herself from giving in to her desire to wake up someone who needed their rest. Satisfied by her generous and mature choice,

she picked up the blanket that Ed had kicked in his sleep. Since it was tangled under his knees and couldn't be easily pulled out, Lil quietly climbed onto the bed and gently lifted the hem of the blanket

Lil's eyes met Ed's, who looked at her absent-mindedly.

Liloa?

The moment Lil heard his dry voice, she completely forgot about her generosity and maturity, especially when she saw Ed's face, which had been raised to look at her for a moment, before falling back into the blanket.

The muffled sounds from his now hidden face were strangely pleasant to hear. Even though Lil secretly imagined waking him up more often in the future, she apologised with her last traces of conscience pricked.

Did I wake you up? I'm sorry.

What is going on?

Ed squinted his tired eyes.

I came because I missed you, but you were already asleep.

Hearing that makes me feel so excited.

I was going to cover you with a blanket.

Hm You said you came to cover me with a blanket, but seeing as you haven't even covered me at all, I think you have something else up your sleeve.

..!

Lil was left speechless after he hit the nail right on the head, but before she could react, Ed's nose and lips began twitching in anticipation of a kiss. Finding the obvious gesture cute, she probably wanted to kiss him more than he did.

Lil lay down next to him and wrapped her arms around his neck. Ed whispered as he briefly sucked her lips.

I went to see you earlier

You should've woken me up. How could you make me miss you like this? See? I even came all the way here in the middle of the night in my nightgown.

My bad

Based on his mumbling voice, he seemed to be still half asleep. Ed muttered some more unintelligible words while pressing his lips against the side of Lil's neck and having his hands smoothing her breasts over her negligee. As it had been some time since Ed touched her like this, it felt even sweeter to Lil. So, she followed his lead and stroked his soft hair. But when she tightened her embrace on the back of his neck

Ah! Wait! Wait a minute! What is this?!

What's the matter?!

We need to get up for a moment.

..?

While Ed, who didnt understand what was going on, got up, Lil lit the lamp. The bright light illuminated Ed, who was standing in confusion next to the bed.

Is that a uniform?

Ed scanned his outfit and answered upon remembering something.

Oh, I needed to wear this as I was to receive an edict.

I see. I was just surprised surprised to feel that there was some metal there

Lil and Ed both looked down at his chest at the same time. It was the emperors medal, hanging below the epaulettes, that sparkled in the orange lantern light. Only then did Ed come to his senses and approached Lil.

Are you hurt anywhere?

I didnt get stabbed anywhere. I was merely startled by something sharp when I was fumbling around.

Still, Ed looked at her palms intently. Lil, however, was only interested in his uniform.

When he was on the deck of the Visha, I only saw it in passing, so this is my first time seeing Ed dressed up in such a neat uniform.

There were shiny golden tassels tightly wrapped around the three stars on the epaulettes.

Those are the admirals epaulettes. When I lived in the South, this crimson uniform was something I hated and dreaded Emotions that were like a mountain that I couldnt overcome. However, seeing Ed wearing it now gives me a completely different feeling

Lil looked around the bed with her eyes filled with curiosity.

Wheres your hat?

Ed raised his head and gave her a suspicious look, but Lil simply widened her eyes and raised her eyebrows to look as innocent as possible.

What?

You seem suspicious

Come on, get it quickly.

Ed approached the couch and lifted the bicorne hat that he had left there. The hat, shaped like two horns, was decorated with feathers and gold threads.

Lil put her lips together and whistled.

How fancy.

Its an officially appointed ornament.

Ive only seen a triangle hat before, so try it on.

Ed sat down next to her and narrowed his eyes. He couldn't help but feel suspicious. Nonetheless, Lil merely tipped her chin upward to urge him on. With a reluctant gesture, Ed brushed away his bangs and placed the hat on his head.

Junior officers wear it horizontally, senior officers wear it like this.

He carefully adjusted the hat.

Lil actually knew how to wear it.

Senior officers and admirals wear their hats with the horns pointed back and forth.

Ed, who pressed the end that came down to his forehead, raised his head slightly. Half of his face was now covered by the shadow of his hat, making it seem like he was looking at Lil with only one eye.

Do you like it?

His green eyes reflected in the light glowed softly. As Lil stared at his wonderfully smiling face as if possessed, she lost her last remaining bit of objectivity

Chapter 269

Uh huh

I guess it has gotten your fancy?

That's right To think I only came to see you

As Lils frank answer caught Ed by surprise, he spoke with a pleasant smile.

Your honesty comes when I least expect it

And just so you know I don't like to share what's mine.

Really? That's new to me.

I've been greedy since I was young. I wanted to do everything myself and have everything to myself. I just seemed to have forgotten about that as I grew and lived my life being thrown around here and there

Lil's words trailed off as she remembered all the times she had been thrown around here and there. Thankfully, Ed didn't ask or pry as usual. He also didn't follow her sunken gaze. Instead, he merely remained still.

Lil decided to change the subject quickly.

Come here.

Ed, who had been sitting on the bed and tried to stand, was suddenly pushed by Lil and knocked over. The hat he wore rolled over his shoulder. Now that Ed was lying down, Lil intently stared at the man who returned her gaze with a surprised expression. Yellowish light shimmered over his smooth skin.

Ed muttered, tossing his hat somewhere overhead.

What made you push me like that after you told me to come to you

Placing one knee on the bed, Lil cupped his cheek to get him to look at her again.

When Im with you, I feel different. Its like Im going back to my old self From a long time ago when I was really young

Eds brows furrowed in confusion. He wasnt sure what to make of what she just said, so he asked while holding Lils hand against his cheek.

Is that good? Those were good times, I hope?

With you, I sleep well, I eat well, I laugh, I talk a lot more and Im becoming greedy again

Untying her waistband, Lil climbed onto Ed, allowing her loosened robe to flow down her body and onto the floor.

Sweeping the hair that fell in front of her out of the way, Lil asked.

Are you going back to sleep again?

It seems like youre not planning to let me go back to sleep

I will show you mercy if you beg me.

Lil played with the straps of her negligee without taking her eyes off him.

I wont beg.

Ed reached out as soon as Lils hands moved down and untied the front knot of her nightgown. Surprisingly, however, Lil swatted the mans hands away with the back of her hand, causing the hem of her dress to fall down her shoulders. Ed then tried to grab her exposed shoulders, but she restrained him from touching her this time as well. Finally understanding that he wasnt allowed to hold her, Ed obediently lowered his arms to the bed.

Lil initially pressed her lips lightly against his to soothe him, but when it seemed that he was about to say something whiny, she bit his lower lip and a short groan filled his mouth instead.

Lils mouth watered as if she was eating something delicious and became curious to taste a little more. So she traced Eds mouth with the tip of her tongue to savour it. A tingling sense of satisfaction washed over her as she bit into his soft fleshy tongue, and her fingers, bristling with pleasure, grabbed his hair in delight.

Their breaths bursting out and mixing, were hot.

Ed cupped her face, reflexively. His thumb pressed against her lower lip before moving down to her chin and neck.

Strangely, the more Lil sucked Ed in as to devour him, the stronger her hunger became.

Heat and moisture rose from the bodies that became more and more intertwined with each other. Ed then embraced Lil and skilfully switched positions, climbing on top of her. His breath wandering up her negligee stopped at her now exposed chest. The pleasure created by Eds tongue swiping above the hem of her nightgown pricked Lils toes like needles, causing chills to rush from everywhere on her body down to her feet.

When the back of Eds neck throbbed and his breathing became laboured, he pulled at the sleeves of his justaucorps behind his back and shook his arms as if shaking off something bothersome. At the same time, Lil tugged at the nape of his neck while he attempted to remove the rest of his coat.

With their lips ones more close enough to kiss, Lil suddenly ordered him.

Dont take it off.

..?

Between their gasping breaths, she bit his upper lip before licking it to soft the sting. She then whispered.

I like it better that way

What?

When youre wearing it

Taking advantage of Eds momentary pause, Lil took control again and rolled them over. She dug deeper into him, becoming increasingly impatient. Her hands traced Eds bulging veins along his neckline, undid his cravat, and unbuttoned his shirt. She then slipped her hand under the thin fabric and felt his heartbeat. The pulse she sensed beneath his strong muscles throbbed as if it were calling to her. In response to it, her fingertips pressed firmly against his skin till his sturdy body couldnt be crushed any further. Indulging herself with him, Lil felt the sexual sensations moisten her own skin as her touch travelled across his abdomen and beneath his navel

Ed grabbed her wrist.

Liloa?

His strained voice, crushed between patience and desire was barely audible. However, the clear conflict she heard in it actually stimulated Lils excitement.

She removed the hand that took hold of her wrist.

Its okay. I have some good news.

What?

We can do it

Who told you that?

Ed tried to come to his senses by blinking his eyes several times. But, the way his forehead and ears glistened with sweat only gave Lil a sensual impulse, so she replied with a mischievous smile.

Levi.

Eds lips twitched out of embarrassment. He didnt know what to feel. He wasnt sure if he should be shocked that Lil had asked Levi about this, hurt that Lil trusted Levi more than she trusted him, or confused that Levi somehow intervened in his personal life. Nonetheless, Lil believed Ed would also follow the advice from an expert and continued to lower her freed hand.

Wait a minute so, you two have become close enough to

Is that a problem?

No, its all good.

Hearing his answer, Lil decided that she no longer wanted to give him a chance to protest.

Still sitting on his lower abdomen, Lil wiggled her waist backwards, thereby grinding over his groin, causing Ed to hurriedly bite his lip. When she raised her hips a bit, she reached into his pants and gently moved her wrist.

Ah Liloa, wait wait a minute.

The moment Lil put some strength to her fingers, the sound of Eds suppressed groans persisted. Looking at his long, tilted neck made her want to tease him even more. So Lil lifted her thumb and rubbed the tip. She slowly drew circles on the smooth area until Eds frequent exhalations became increasingly irregular and intense.

Lil eventually lowered her hips again and carefully positioned herself on top of him, who was swollen tightly. As soon as her damp place made contact, her moisture mixed with his sticky substance.

Its hot

Fiery heat boiled up, almost melting her, while her running heartbeat rang in her ears as if it were going to burst.

Lil held out her hand, which she had initially rested on his lower abdomen.

Hand

Eds left hand held her, making it so that his hand and forearm, which were in contact with hers, would support her weight.

The bulky pressure between Lils legs gave her a premature sense of satisfaction. As her stomach throbbed from the thrilling anticipation, her wet inner walls opened smoothly

And Lil slowly swallowed Ed.

Feeling relieved and reassured that there was no foreign pain, she began to move her waist forward.

The only light they had was a dying lantern, but Lil could see Ed clearly. The more she moved her waist, the more he bent his head towards the end of the bed.

The curve of his tilted chin, the bridge of his nose, the nape of his neck glistening with sweat, the manner of his panting, and his sweaty chest and abdomen The man before me looks extremely handsome

The sensation of her fine downy hairs standing on edge added to her skins sensitivity.

Lil raised her hips till Ed was about to escape her body. Goosebumps run down her back, leaving a tingling trace. When she landed on him again, she clenched their interlocked fingers and dug her nails into the back of his hand. His tight thigh muscles wriggled beneath her and the sound of his legs sliding stiffly across the bed tickled her ears. They werent moaning yet, but the sound of their long, drawn-out breathing was already mesmerising and ecstatic.

Allured by her bodys response to such sensuality, Lils eyelids closed in a drowsy ecstasy and an exclamation flowed from her opened lips. When she tilted her head back, her hair fell from the nape of her neck and around her shoulders.

Lil soon figured out how to overlap her body with Eds to further heighten her pleasure. The tickling sensation inside her lower body teased and tormented her. Pressing down on her stomach, her legs supporting her body trembled until her back, which had been following the regular flow till now, gradually began collapsing forward. Startled, Lil grasped the sheets instead of Ed with her free hand.

As he entered her deeper and deeper, her body melted more and more away

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In that brief moment of pause, Ed pulled her by the waist and Lil fell directly onto his chest. As Ed started to move underneath her, an overwhelming surge of pleasure caused her lower abdomen to tremble. Lil momentarily gasped for air after having held her breath, while her partners hot lips pressed against her forehead and temples. Eds arms wrapped further around Lils waist and his hands grabbed her buttocks. The two, now completely overlapping, rose and fell in unison along with the thrust of Eds hips. Long-suppressed moans began escaping Lils lips one after another. In between them, she kept calling for Ed with a clear sob in her voice. Not being able to stand the pressure any longer, Lil buried her face in the crook of Eds neck but was taken aback by a force that lifted her up.

By the time she realised what was happening, her back was already pressed against the bed and Ed rushed in again. His thrusts were so deep and heavy that Lils mind went blank. It heated her brain to the point where it felt like it was going to melt and she threw her head in the back of her neck.

Despite the dim lighting, Lil could sense his intense gaze on her and soon his warm hand brushed her messed-up hair off her forehead. Lil, who felt like she was falling from somewhere, desperately grabbed his arm and whispered for him to hurry. Ed, however, moved neither quick nor slow and kept meticulously hitting a specific place deep inside her belly over and over again.

As time passed, the intensity escalated. The pace quickened as the pair pressed their foreheads together and mixed their breaths. Lil, aching for the release that appeared to be within reach but couldnt be obtained, bit his lip. However, the moment she expressed her impatience, a surge of pleasure rushed in like a tide and her racing breath stopped. At the same time, her mind wandered while her body was met by an explosive feeling that spread like a spasm. Heightened pulses seemed to be jumping out of her skin creating goosebumps all over her body. No sound was heard as though her vocal cords were paralyzed. The same appeared to be true for Ed as his body draped over her. He remained motionless, still deeply touching her body as if he were sinking indefinitely into her.

After what seemed like an eternity of nothingness, the invisible light flickered before Lils eyes and darkness slowly returned. Lil embraced Eds shuddering body in the afterglow of their pleasure and Ed, in return, hugged her back and kissed her. They locked lips for a while and exchanged affectionate whispers.

From time to time, as his voice mixed with fatigue laughed, her heart would tingle anew

Ed spoke, flipping the side of her soaked hair.

How do you feel?

Lil unconsciously looked at the scar on her abdomen.

Oh, its okay.

Then Im glad

I think we could go for another round.

..?

Shall we start again?

It was only for a short moment, but confusion spread across Eds face before it was replaced with relief after realising it was only a joke. Lil, on the other hand, found it rather amusing to make fun of Eds obsession with her recovery, especially how he had been treating her like a sack of wheat for what felt like forever. Ed narrowed his eyes as if he could guess what was going on inside her head, but Lil only innocently raised her eyebrows.

Ed soon shook his head slightly and raised himself.

I hope youre not thinking about overdoing it for the time being And I think we should wash up first

He suddenly realised he still had his shirt on, unsure if he had even tried to take it off or not. After all, during the peak of their activity, Ed thought that most of his garments had been removed.

After taking off his badly crumpled shirt, he put on a robe.

Hm So, you like uniforms and tying people to a cembalo. Your tastes are a bit peculiar, dont you think?

Lil, who had been lying down lazily, knelt on top of the bed. Liking the rough yet soft feel of the blanket, she wiggled her calves back and forth.

Are they?

Lil pondered on her own sexual preferences as she absentmindedly stroked the shirt that Ed had just taken off.

Well I dont know. I never cared about such things before But I did indeed ask Ed to not take his clothes off Not even his crimson uniform thats now being crumpled beneath my knees It gave me a strange sense of conquest. I still feel unfamiliar with this version of myself, but I also seem more vividly myself than ever before

It wasnt like this before.

Buried in her thoughts, she didnt realise Ed had come back with a towel and was wiping her and himself.

Does this mean your requests might be more diverse?

I didnt mean it like that

Anything. Whatever you order me.

Ed smiled as he imagined the range of possibilities. Lil, looking at the expression on his face which clearly showed that he liked it, went into the blanket she had pulled. She then opened the end of the blanket so Ed could come in as well.

Arent you tired?

Im never tired when Im with you.

Again with the nonsense.

Ed shook his head with an unwavering expression.

Its true though. This is what love is.

I guess I need to try harder because you still dont know true love.

How? How will you try harder?

Whats the fun in telling you in advance?

Ed lifted his chin confidently.

Hes always been just like that. He always knows what I want and what I like. Thanks to that, Im always happy, and I enjoy every moment I spend with him. Thats why, like he said, my feelings for him keep getting deeper and deeper But if I think about it the other way around, I still have no idea what Ed wants or what he would like. Ed never asks for anything, apart from the occasional expressions of affection like hugs and kisses, and he never tries to correct my words or actions

Lil chose to not keep her questions to herself and asked what she was thinking about.

What do you want me to do for you?

I told you, I dont want anything

I dont really want anything from you either, but looking back on our relationship, from the very beginning, you already knew how to treat me in a way I liked.

Did it seem schemed?

Not at all. I never saw it that way.

Im still thinking about what it can be. But theres something coming to mind

..?

Lil extended her hand towards Ed, who stayed still for no reason. Reaching for his face, her fingers caressed his cheek and earlobe soothingly.

Shall I tell you my story?

..!

She shifted her gaze to watch his reaction.

Not just the stories youve heard from rumours or the things you can guess. But about my real self.

That wont be very pleasant for you.

You guessed that right.

Then no, I will never want to force it out of you. I cant enjoy something I demanded.

But its not just for you. You said it yourself. That it was hard for you to think like me. The way this world has taught you is so different from mine. And yet you orient yourself towards my perspective. So, yes, its for me, but it can also be for your research. Because in the end, you and I are so similar. I want to speak out loud about the life I couldnt tell anyone about. And it isnt just my life. Its a life

of sorrow and humiliation, where tens of thousands, even millions of people die with rotting hearts. Its for you, for me but also for them

Still, Ed couldnt agree easily.

When I acted as a doctor on the Bell Rock, I would badger Liloa to tell me the captains story whenever I got the chance. However, even though weve become closer after landing in Roahn, I couldnt bring myself to utter that line again I just cant Probably because I dont view Liloa as a mere object of my curiosity anymore. Its now difficult for me to delve into Liloas past and uncover the source of the non-existent concept she speaks of

Someday Wont it be better if I tell you someday, just out of the blue? Because youre right, I still need time. The reason Im telling you about it now is because I want you to at least know how I feel. That my lo love is this much.