

Northwest 28

Chapter 28

I could die from happiness.

Lil sat back with a toothy grin on her lips, recalling the sensation when she slapped Ed on his back. Her fingers wriggled with delight.

Huh

But after a moment, she reverted to a grim expression and clenched her fists.

He still acts the same way as he did when I first saw him in Amiaeng. Smirk and sarcasm are his trademarks.

Only his actions stood out when we met at the Counts mansion. It could be because he was suspicious of my intrusion from the start. After all, he was trusted by the Count, or because he harboured resentment towards me for tying him up on a bed.

Her thoughts stayed un-concluded.

Is this discomfort driven by my endless doubt? This takes ages. I feel anguished every time I end up facing a wall again. Today was another failure. Theres still no way of proving it.

Lil struggled to shake off her irritation and eventually stared at the map hanging in front of her.

For now, there are other things I need to take care of besides Ed.

The ship was currently heading to an island called Marchand.

There are only a few imperial territories among the numerous southern islands and Marchand is the best-governed imperial island of all. Its clear as day why the empire made Marchand their base in the South and not somewhere else. The empire, which operated hundreds of ships during the expansion period, was concerned about the worsening condition of the gums of naval forces on long-distance voyages. Of course, the outbreak among mere sailors was out of their interest, but the problem was that even officers were infected. Unfortunately, it didnt end with just rotted gums, as a result, the bodys immune system weakened, making it unable to fight off various diseases. It led to countless deaths, making it a great loss to the empire.

For a long time, the academies and doctors on the mainland set out to solve this problem and eventually discovered that the sailors in the South experienced none of these symptoms. It wasnt long before they found out that it was because of the fruit called Erimyan. The juice of the sour and sweet fruit could be enjoyed for a long time when its chewed, so most southerners enjoyed it as a snack. Its also cheap and dried food is a necessity for long journeys, making it an ideal fruit for sailors.

The island of Marchand was known for its Erimyan trees.

The empire obtained Marchand through the slaughter of the natives. Over time the island developed into one of the most prominent strongholds of the southern navy. The huge commercial city, home to families from navy and military officers, provided the same convenience as the mainland. Going as far as having banks.

It was because of those banks that the Bell Rock was heading for Marchand.

Lil's ship mainly robbed merchant ships off the coast of Amiaeng, so their journeys were at most a couple of months. Even that was one of the longest. Nearly all of them ended in a few weeks, but she wasn't sure how long the voyage would be if the admiral invaded the South.

We need gold.

Lil threw the journal, containing the estimated calculations for their budget, on the table. It was difficult to predict the bleak looking future. There was no way of knowing how long they'd be out at sea, therefore it was unclear how much they needed. That uncertainty made her uneasy.

Damn it, I can't concentrate like this.

Unable to get rid of her impatience, she glanced out the window of the office.

We'll arrive in Marchand before sunset.

Lil took out her boots and slid them on. Instead of the usual triangle hat, she put on a feathered one and even wore a vest made of fine fabric. To finish the outfit, she grabbed some rings and tied a cravat around her neck.

This thing always makes me feel like I'm suffocating.

Both Cesar and Lil were able to speak with an accurate Sesbron accent. Making it easy to pretend to be owners of a small business from the capital, travelling from and to the mainland. In addition, Cesar had frequently visited them over the past several years, using a ghost account.

This time, though, the tension level is different than usual.

She stuffed a few gold coins in her pocket and raised her head at the sound of someone knocking on the captain's door.

Captain! Captain!

Come in.

Courant hurriedly opened the door and gave his report in a panicked manner.

There's a fight!

What?! Where?!

The cabin decks!

What about the old man?

He's the one being beaten.

Lil came out of the captain's room and walked towards the stern at a brisk pace. On the way she caught Jericho by the shoulder and signalled him to follow, together they hurried to the cannon deck.

Marenzio was sitting on the stairs connecting the cannon deck and the cabin deck. Lil growls at his grinning face as she comprehends the situation below her.

Marenzio! What the heck are you doing?!

Oh, Captain!

Marenzio got up too hastily and rolled down the stairs. Soon after, a shout was heard to clear up the commotion on deck. Lil lost her patience and stomped her way down the stairs. Hearing the Captains voice, the cabins became quiet as they were caught red-handed.

Lil looked around.

Wheres the old man?

HereCaptain.

Alain stood up with difficulty. Seeing this, Lil opened her mouth.

Whats the meaning of this?

Captain, its just that, that Alain

She was speechless when she heard the reason.

What? Erection medicine?

She snorted.

One of the upper deck watches must have heard my conversation with Ed last night.

Were you all living too comfortably, huh? So, you decided to turn into a bunch of pigs?

You beat the boatswain over some medicine? Ha! What did I say about the rules?

That the rules govern us, not the whip

Did you guys break the rules because you enjoy being treated as beasts in need of disciplinary whipping?

Oh, no, Captain Please forgive us.

Forgiving you is not my job, Jericho!

Yes, Captain.

All the sailors on this deck

Captain, I didnt hit him!..

Me too!..

..Me too!..

Bystanders are also considered accomplices. If all of youd tried to stop it, it wouldnt have come this far. Anyway, all of youre in for the payment how much?

Jericho, the Bell Rocks wage manager, solemnly opened a booklet that contained the rules of the ship. Most of the content was also included in the contracts. When the booklet came out, everyone was in contemplation. Some even fell to their knees and prayed.

If you assault a sailor with a higher rank than you, youll need to extract two silts from the promised reward for that voyage.

Did you hear that? Its two silts. And we have the audience over here, so those guys

One silt, Captain

Add one silt, making it a total of three silts. Marenzio you were only observing the chaos on deck. Someone in your position needs to inspect and control the crew, due to your negligence you need to pay seven silts.

Marenzio, standing to her, distorted his face as if he'd been struck with lightning.

What?

Any objections?

Anyone who objected to the rules had to cut off the hand that he used to sign the contract with. Marenzio tapped Jericho's shoulder and wanted to ask if there was really something like that but in the end, remained silent.

Finally, Alain, you failed to keep the peace as the crew's boatswain and got into a fight with a fellow sailor. So, you'll be fined seven silts as well. However, since you were beaten unilaterally, you'll be compensated with special meals for a week. Any objections.

No, Captain.

Good, get Ed to take care of the wounded. Jericho, write down a list of those involved and give it to me before we reach shore.

Yes!

Lil took a last glance at the solemn sailors before she went up the stairs.

She understood the anxious minds of her crew.

In the past, the imperial fleets' invasion of the South was ruthless. In addition, rowing ships were mostly operated by slaves, so southerners who were defeated by the overpowering Empire were often taken as galley slaves. Anyone would be afraid when they think about the possibility of experiencing the same tragedy as their fathers and grandfathers.*

The gruesome past left a bitter taste in her mouth.

The Bell Rocks crew were relatively well controlled by financial measures and discipline. Not from the start, of course. The Southern League of Pirates was a moderate organisation. Lashes and harsh punishments were still used to effectively suppress a crew. Therefore, everyone looked down on the young captain insisting on discipline only. Many challenged authority and Lil had to subdue them each and every time. At first, they regarded the captain's blatant declaration as a sign of weakness. It took quite a long time for the crew to appreciate that their captain didn't wield with force. Because of this, even a small commotion was rare now.

No matter how much it started as a joke, they beat the boatswain.

Lil pessimistically estimated how long this unstable society, shaken by the faintest fears, would last.

She climbed to the upper deck. The deck, unaware of the situation below, was preparing for their upcoming arrival. Lil leaned against the railing and looked towards the bowsprit, listening to the murmurs of sailors and the sound of the ship hitting the waves. Her sensitive nerves picked up even the softest noise.

She tried to calm down and sorted out her thoughts.

Its exhausting to stay so sharp. A Captains sensitivity and anxiety are contagious to the crew.

Theres still a mountain of work to do, so its of no use standing here. Although it was a short voyage, Im thankful to have no conflict with the Navy. We left Amiaeng without any trouble and even the weather was nice. Objectively, were not doing too badly.

In times like this, I need to keep my composure. I shouldnt give fear any room in my head.