

# NORTH X NORTHWEST

## Chapter 4

She was silently followed by Alain and Cesar. She was lost in her thoughts and muttered.

*‘No matter how hard I think about it, I can’t come up with an answer.’*

“...Why did he change his mind and turn his fleet towards the South?..”

Alain merely shrugged.

“Who knows? The nobles must have promised him an enormous amount of gold coins.”

“No, the Admiral refused to lift a finger even for the Empire, so a few bucks won’t persuade him.”

“Look, Captain. Why else would the loathed Admiral come to wipe us out? It’s his hobby to kill people and scalp their heads, and if he enjoys killing, it won’t feel like work and he won’t hate it.”

“No, he might just hate leaving his hometown and coming to the Southern Seas, Alain. Until now, he said he didn’t want to come to the South and even openly refused in front of His Majesty. So, knowing that, can’t we conclude that he doesn’t like the southern expedition? Murder can be done in the West, too. It’s not like there’s nobody in the West left.”

“What’s so important about the Admiral’s reasons? Captain, we’re going to be killed too. That’s what’s important. That we’re all about to be hanged.”

Having a cold sweat, Lil clenched her fists and looked around the city for no reason.

“Who said we’re gonna get hanged?”

“It’s obvious, isn’t it?”

“Stop talking nonsense and bring me more information.”

“Should I call the other officers?”

Lil nodded and fixed her hat.

“Let’s meet in the evening.”

“Okay.”

Alain disappeared in the crowd without delaying any further while Lil gave Cesar an eye as he stood silently.

“Admiral Retiro, is he like that? Skinning heads like a cannibal?”

“I don’t know, I haven’t met him since he was promoted as Admiral. But his personality was already pretty unique in Lebrun, too.”

“Hmm. What kind of threats or rewards could Sesbron use on him? You’ve met the Admiral before. Is there anything you can think of?”

“He’s just an old acquaintance.”

“From what I’ve seen and heard from rumours, even His Majesty can’t convince that Admiral.”

“I don’t really know either.”

“Try to remember, Cesar. You have a good memory.”

Cesar thought for a while, then eventually tried his luck. It’s just a guess, but because it’s coming from him, it’s probably close to the truth.

“What I can be sure of is that the Admiral is not a person who can be moved with money or power. Something in the Southern Seas caught his attention,

and he likely decided to leave the Peninsula to satisfy his curiosity or his enthusiasm for adventure.”

“I heard that he has had a hobby of collecting strange things for a long time now. Could that be it? To catch the yellow-striped white-tailed birds of Amiaeng?”

“The Admiral collects artworks.”

“Oh, really? So, scalps and art? He sounds dangerous.”

“...”

“I’m going to look around today.”

“And at night?”

“I’ll be back. I’ll meet you at the place we stayed last time.”

Cesar nodded and went back to where they came from to investigate the situation of the navy. Lil stood at the side of the road for a moment before waving her hand. Cesar looked back and signalled her to go first.

Amiaeng’s downtown was only a little street with a few shops.

Lil looked around and slipped into the nearest boutique.

The woman of the store was scuffling with a merchant in front of the checkout counter.

*‘That’s a relief.’*

Lil picked up a dress as quietly as possible and sneaked behind the partition. There she took off her justaucorps\*, vest, and shirt.

*‘Since getting on a pirate ship, I pretend to be a man all the time, but there are days like this when I need to wear women’s clothes.’*

Lil took off the necklace from her neck. The jewellery with a red stone as big as her fingernail was a strange tool that enabled her to look like a man. With this on, no one saw Lil as a woman.

*‘I still don’t know how this kind of magic is possible, but I gratefully accept the relic of the ancient magical era that came into my hands by accident.’*

Lil kissed the special jewel, then tucked the necklace in between her chest.

*‘This damn dress doesn’t even have pockets, so there’s no other way.’*

The merchant went out and the woman began to approach the dressing room. Lil roughly put on a wig and stamped some powder on her face.

“Oh, my. My lady!”

The woman noisily tilted the partition. Lil readjusted her chest without even glancing at her.

“No, there’s no way I wouldn’t have seen a beauty like you come in. Where did you come from?”

“I’ve been here for a while.”

“Oh, today is the day that the satin has been brought in, so if you had told me in advance, I could’ve chosen some for you!”

No matter how much flattery poured out beside her, Lil only concentrated on her reflection in the mirror.

*‘It seems that my chest line should go down a little more.’*

“How did you tighten the corset alone? You’re very strong.”

The red lips moved restlessly on her fair face.

“By the way, the young man who just came in disappeared. Did you see him? He had black hair over his shoulders, was a bit short, and had a slender build. He looked like a sailor. His face was white, too.”

“ ... ”

At the description of a young man with black hair, Lil raised her eyebrows.

*‘Did she see me come in? I came in without making any noise. Did she really notice me?’*

“Did you see him?”

“No.”

“Huh. I think I saw someone, maybe it was a sailor from the northern continent? He disappeared like a ghost.”

“ ... ”

You really don’t know? His hair was... Yes, that’s about right, as long and black as yours. And his skin was like... Oh, it was exactly this white. He was definitely a man, but he looked quite feminine.”

“ ... ”

“Come to think of it, my lady. You look just like that gentleman...”

Lil pushed the woman’s chest with her elbow, pretending to pull up her clothes. The plump woman groaned and fell to the side. For a moment she was startled by the soft collision before she spoke with an excited voice.

“You should go with this! I like it.”

Lil then tossed two silver coins at the surprised woman. It was an excessive amount for a pair of clothes and a few accessories that weren’t real jewellery. Not surprisingly, her pure white face was in full bloom as if she had never frowned in the first place. It seemed that she had long forgotten about the gentleman from the northern continent.

“Goodbye, my lady. I hope you visit again next time!”

“ ... ”

“Huh? Why don’t you answer? Yes?”

Lil completely ignored the woman and left the boutique. There was a market nearby, so the street was bustling. Flags and signs hanging from buildings fluttered in the wind. A group of people busily carried boxes with a specific label. It seemed that another merchant ship had arrived at the same time as the Bell Rock did.

*‘I first need to go to a pub to verify the information I just overheard.’*

Lil remembered that the largest inn in this neighbourhood was in the next alley.

She looked down at her irresistible outfit once more, unfolded her fan, and smiled effortlessly. As she walked while flapping the fan with sky blue feathers, she could feel glimpses coming from all angles.

It wasn’t surprising to get this much attention as a woman walking down the street in a provocative dress and heavy makeup in broad daylight. Besides, in anyone’s eyes, Lil’s appearance resembles that of a native from the empire. Even despite the presence of mixed races and nobles in Amiaeng, she would still stand out. Compared to the southern races, the people from the central continent have a more slender physique, are less muscular, and have reddish-white skin.

Lil arrived at the inn with a smile that matched her disguised appearance. The loose wooden door opened with a dull sound.

The hall of the inn was chaotic and noisy. Even though it was only midday, the gambling games were rampant. Cursing and shouting could be heard everywhere, bags of money were flying around, and beer glasses and fists went back and forth like weapons. In some corners, knives were already being sharpened. In general, southerners had a laid-back nature, but those in

Amiaeng were a mixture of island descent, nobles, and mixed-race people who all have a particularly fiery temperament.

Lil approached the inn's bald yet bearded owner as he looked at her and whistled.

"Are you open for business?"

Of course, she didn't like being treated as a prostitute. On the way to the inn, several annoying things happened, but Lil was pragmatic. If there was a faster method, she wouldn't hesitate to go for it, she wasn't the captain of a pirate ship just to remain acting like a dignified noblewoman.

Without saying a word, Lil gave him a couple of coins.

"Intel about the Navy."

The owner leaned forward and whispered.

"A person is staying on the second floor, the second room around the corner. I don't know anything else."

"Is there only one navy? Or didn't the unit stay overnight?"

"Well, there are rumours that the Admiral of the Peninsula will be arriving soon, but no battleship has arrived yet. Some people think it's just a rumour but seeing the Count of Amiaeng announce it so passionately, it must be true after all. If he gets caught making a mistake again, the imperial order will relegate him from his position. Even that pig of a Count wouldn't be stupid enough to let that happen."

"When will the fleet arrive?"

"We don't know the exact date because it hasn't been long since the news reached us, but if they sail from the continent, I think it will be here around the 30th."

“Are all fleets coming? How big is it? The squadron? Or... The actual fleet?”

“Well, if you’re so curious, go ask the navy guy upstairs.”

“I was going to do that.”

“Softly. The bed in that room is old.”

The owner pretended to wink, but when he made eye contact with his wife in the kitchen, he turned around and hurried away.

Lil climbed the stairs to the room on the second floor.

*‘After all, it’s much more useful pretending to be a prostitute and entice men and women of all ages, than being a meddling captain with a small face and body. Those Amiaeng folks never trusted strangers. The naval forces staying on the island and the pirate den were especially vigilant. However, people didn’t think that prostitutes could do anything other than sleep around, so they freely leaked information and secrets.’*

To take advantage of that blind spot, she dressed up as a prostitute. It wasn’t a hobby she enjoyed, but there was no reason to save face at a time when people’s lives were at stake.

Lil cleared her thoughts when she pushed the drunk who reached for her chest.

*‘There is no naval presence on the street, and there is only one sailor staying at the inn, so even the scout fleet has not reached Amiaeng yet. At least the Admiral’s fleet isn’t nearby. I think I don’t have to rush as much as I thought. Of course, leaving as soon as possible will lower the possibility of being tracked, but his reason for landing in Amiaeng couldn’t be ignored. Since I must dispose of the spoils looted from the Imperial merchant ships, I have to weigh the profits and losses in detail before deciding when it’d be the right time to depart. Sailors whose contracts end in Amiaeng must have their wages paid and the vacant positions must be filled. There are many things to*



*do. In that case, I don't think there will be much to get from that navy baboon on the second floor, so I'll go straight to the Count's house to avoid wasting time.'*

While being distracted, a sudden pain hit her face.

*\* Footnote:*

*Justaucorps: a long, knee-length coat worn by men.*

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