

NORTH X NORTHWEST

Chapter 6

When she pressed the dagger lightly, blood started to flow.

“You look like someone I’ve known for a long time. I couldn’t take my eyes off you for even a second. Forgive me if you felt uncomfortable just now. And since you don’t want me to follow you, I’ll stop... Hmm, scratch that. I want to be with you. Well, then I’ll be useful, so why don’t you take me with you?”

The knife was still pointed at his neck, as his throat kept moving, the skin kept being scratched. Seeing this, Lil raised her eyebrows.

“I’m Lil.”

She wiped the bloody blade on her clothes. Of course, her guard was still up. Ed glanced at her chest, which she was using as a towel. He smiled nicely and walked alongside her.

“Oh, so you’re going to let me accompany you?”

“Do you want to die?”

“I’ll shut up.”

“You’re gonna shut up, but you’re gonna keep following me?”

“I see you’re looking around the streets like it’s your first time in Amiaeng...”

“It’s not my first time.”

“Anyway. Whatever you’re looking for, buy or sell, I can be very helpful. I’ll help you.”

Lil shook her head in disbelief.

“From the beginning till now, you acted like a pervert. So how could you possibly help me?”

“Ask me about anything that’s been going on in Amiaeng. And no, please call me Ed... I know high-quality information about, for example, the Count of Amiaeng, like how many women or men he has slept with. And for the reason I just confessed, I can do anything for you.”

“I can’t decide if you’re plain stupid or if you have any ill intentions?... Then what do you want from me?”

The words sounded sour, but in fact, Lil was tempted.

‘Even if his introduction as an informed person, who even knows some gossip about the Count, is a lie, there is nothing wrong with listening to vain stories. The real reason I’m here is to collect information about the Navy anyway.’

“Well, isn’t it obvious?”

Ed put both hands on his waist and quietly twitched his lips. Lil had no idea what he meant by that and carefully observed the man.

‘He’s tall, about one head taller than me, and his shoulders, arms, and chest look strong. Well, I experienced firsthand that he also has great reflexes.’

Lil moved her eyes to his face and tilted her head.

“Show me your forehead.”

“Hmm? Why?”

When she raised her eyebrows instead of explaining, Ed hesitated at first, but soon enough reluctantly swept up his bangs. Lil smirked in approval.

“Your appearance is good.”

‘Strangely, his hair and beard run on the edge of messiness, but his skin doesn’t seem to be coloured by enduring labour under the sun. Why is that?’

Why does he give off such a noble impression? Anyway, it isn't a face I don't like. His clothes are wrinkled but still clean. Above all, his posture is straight.'

Lil now poked around his solid body with her index finger.

“What are you doing?”

“Your body seems fine.”

She ignored Ed, who was flinching in embarrassment, and looked up and down a final time before she finished her judgment.

“Well, not bad...”

“...”

“What, what are you looking at? I'm just giving my opinion, with my beauty, I can't just put anyone in my bed? You should know that.”

“Didn't you say you aren't a prostitute?”

Lil was dumbfounded and sighed in vain.

“When did I say I'd get paid by you? It's just an exchange of favours under a mutual agreement. So, you like me, and I should also like you, right? Well, I'll see what will happen today and make a decision based on that, so do well in helping me first.”

Lil waved her hands and took the lead. Ed quickly caught up with her and held out his hand.

“Call me Ed.”

Lil gave a clear smile. She looked down at his stretched-out hand and turned her head away.

“Oh, my. You're so feisty.”

Ignoring his grumbling, Lil snatched an apple from a fruit stand.

“Do you know Admiral Retiro?”

When Lil observed the shopkeeper’s reaction, she noticed that there was no answer to her action.

“Did you just steal that?”

“No.”

Lil took a bite of her apple.

“ ... ”

“Are you looking for a law in Amiaeng?”

“ ... ”

“Why don’t you answer my question? If you know the affairs of the Count so well, you’ll probably have some news from the Capital.”

It was a sharp observation. Ed sighed, he was about to talk past it. Out of habit he touched his earlobe and opened his mouth.

“Admiral Retiro?”

“Yeah, the Admiral of Peninsula, whose hobby is to skin people alive. The Admiral who cuts fingers and toes and eats them in his soup.”

“What...What are you talking about?”

“I heard it on the streets, that sinister man has a very noble hobby. How scary.”

“ ... ”

“He’s the grim reaper himself.”

“ ... ”

“Why aren’t you saying anything? You’re already proving to be useless.”

“You’re so impatient! Yes, I’ve heard of Admiral Retiro. They say he’s coming to Amiaeng soon.”

“I already know that. But the man who was so determined to not go is suddenly coming. It’s clearly Sesbron’s doing, do you know what kind of threat they used?”

“Threat?”

A snort was heard. By the unexpected response, Lil looked at him suspiciously.

“If you think the Admiral’s the type to blindly follow the Emperor’s orders, then you’re wrong. Don’t you know, even a Marquess can find ways to protect himself from power.”

Lil easily agreed. She’d already heard something similar. The emperor had tried to control the admiral for the past few years, but the man didn’t budge.

‘Edgar Eichendorff-Retiro, when I first heard his full name, I thought they made it up. The name Eichendorff was just too absurd. But when I asked around, I found out that the Admiral was originally from a family called ‘Eichendorff’ in the North and their wealth was enormous. It wasn’t even comparable with the Marquess of Roahn, who ruled over the Mondovi Peninsula.’

“It’s understandable. There are diamonds in the North, right? Imperial aristocrats crave rare jewels. At first, colourless and transparent gems were popular, however after a few yellow and red ones appeared, the trend shifted.”

“Well, we also can’t ignore their unrivalled shipbuilding technology. The sophistication of the ships made in the Northern continent is different from that of the Empire.”

“I’ve heard that they increase their wealth by trading all kinds of luxury goods.”

'Not only the nobility, but also the imperial family enjoyed the benefits, so the Emperor bestowed him the title of admiral. In addition, if the Admiral was to disappear, the pirates would rampage the West Sea again, thus special treatment was logical. Knowing his temper, if the Admiral ever was wronged, he truly would disappear to the North. And there'd be a good chance that even the Emperor couldn't do anything about it.'

"Now that I think about it, even if the Admiral throws everything aside and flees to the northern continent, they can just chase after him and drag him back, right? Is the Monferrand Strait that notorious? Is the Navy incapable of crossing it?"

'Monferrand Strait is located between the mainland and the northern continent. No one knows whether it's just a strait or a small sea. I heard rumours that only Admiral Retiro knows the way through Monferrand and could safely go back and forth between the Capital and the North. Of course, I think it's absurdly exaggerated.'

"Don't even get me started. It's said that all ships secretly sent after the Admiral sank. Also didn't the 3rd or 4th prince die, while scouting a sea route near Monferrand? Why else would it be called 'the sea of anger' or worse 'the sea of death'?"

"Hm, it's still strange. Why would an Admiral, who already has anything he could ever want, come to Amiaeng? Well anyway, he's a complete madman, that's probably why."

"This is a rumour only a few people know about..."

Ed lowered his voice, even though there was no one around them. Without realising it, Lil leaned closer to him.

"I heard he's looking for something."

"What?"

“He’s looking for something at the request of someone.”

“What’s he trying to find?”

“Well, I’m not the Admiral, how should I know?”

Lil narrowed her eyebrows and pondered on his words, soon she relaxed her expression.

“Turns out you’re not completely useless. Are you sure about this? Where did you pick this up?”

“I had a close relationship with one of the Admiral’s aides, I have quite a wide foot*.”

‘It’s not hard to believe when I think about how nosy he was. Besides, even if this is false, it’s much better than not knowing. All rumours consist of some facts. I’m not naive enough to think I’d obtain perfect information about the Navy in Amiaeng. One needs to listen as much as possible to recover the truth, right? But assuming it is true, what the hell is the Admiral looking for? And a request, from who? What could possibly persuade him? Also...’

“Why did he pick Amiaeng? Just for fun?”

She grumbled a few more words. Thinking about the fall of Amiaeng made her uncomfortable.

‘I always thought his reputation was exaggerated but considering the fact that all the pirates from the Anatole Sea have been killed, the rumours about the Admiral might actually be true.’

The image of Admiral Retiro, which she only saw once from a distance, crossed her mind. Her memories from almost a decade ago were hazy. At that time, he was neither an admiral nor a marquess.

‘I only remember his tall stature, agile swordsmanship, and his complete dominance at the Imperial Military Academy.’

Lil thought about the month-long stay she'd given to her crew.

'A month...It's too long. We need to leave before we encounter the Admiral. The Bell Rock's now safely disguised as a merchant ship, but if our luck runs out, it can cause unnecessary friction.'

She needs to go back and discuss this with the navigator, Cesar.

"What are you thinking about?"

Suddenly, Ed put his face right in front of hers. Out of reflex, Lil hit him.

– *Slap!* –

A light frictional sound was heard, followed by someone's cry.

**Footnote:*

Having a big foot: Korean proverb: To have a wide circle of acquaintances.

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