

## Northwest 61

Chapter 61

Are you feeling bad?

What can I say?

Lil rested her chin on her knuckles and smirked, turning her eyes to Courants table. Ed unintentionally followed her warming gaze. Courant was wiping the corners of Mellies lips covered in stew.

You look happy.

Who wouldnt be delighted to see a kid like Courant serving as a great older brother?

Ed glanced back at Lil, before opening his mouth.

Why, was your broth Ahem, um What brother isnt like that?

There are a lot of bad brothers out there

Lil mumbled, before clearing her throat.

Well, Ill bet you werent like that.

Ed could feel Lils eyes full of contempt piercing his cheek. Ed objected, upset that he was yet again misunderstood.

Im an only child. Besides, the Captain seems to be misunderstanding something. If I were to be an older brother, Id be the gentle and caring kind.

Ed smiled at Courants younger sister, who had been staring at him for a while now. When she was caught, her eyes widened in embarrassment and her face, sprinkled with her cute freckles, turned red. She quickly hid behind her bunny doll. Lil snorted, not knowing what the scene meant, but Ed cut her laughter short due to his hurting pride.

Why are you laughing at me? Dont you acknowledge my looks?

Bullshit.

Suddenly, Ed recalled something he had forgotten about because of the many distractions. He touched his chin and shook his head.

Now that I think about it, I need to shave. Walking around like a beggar isnt the courteous way of sharing the beauty given to me

Its said that if someone listens to nonsense long enough, his ears will rot. Because, pus will fill the ears that have been abused

When Lil noticed that Ed had finished eating, she raised from her seat and pulled him up. Ed, who was still caressing his cheeks, had no choice but to be dragged along. Lil grabbed the patient by his armpit and climbed the stairs as they did before.

Oh, Captain! Dont be so rough! Im still a patient!

Shut up

Thats too much.

Seeing that you talk so well, it seems like youll fully recover soon. Ill owe you nothing when youre healed. The debt has been from you to me and from me to you. Once you get well, this ridiculous sense of responsibility will disappear. Leave before that, its a warning.

Hey, what happened to the I cant kill someone I saved with my own hands?

I changed my mind when you kept babbling nonsense.

Ed complained, but Lil didnt listen. She let go of him at the end of the stairs on the second floor and walked down the remaining hallway alone. She ignored what Ed said from behind and opened the door. After entering the room, Lil walked toward the window to open the closed shutters. The road in front of the inn was visible through the raindrops.

After finishing their meal, Courant and Mellie left the building. When Mellie, who was running, fell, Courant carried the child.

Lil stared at the back of Mellies tiny head, which could barely reach Courants shoulders. She remembered the time when she was just as small. Courant was also about the same age as her brother at the time.

But he hadnt been good to me

When Lil was even smaller than Mellie, her brother treated her like any other brother would. He wasnt very fond of her, but it didnt bother him that much either. It was after some realisation that he began to be disgusted with her. Lil could still vaguely recall how terrifying it had been for her younger self.

*My brother was the first to notice that I was different.*

The sound of a little girls heels echoed in her head

- *Flashback* -

*Tip. Tip. Tip.*

Footsteps run through the luxurious hallway.

Brother!

A girl with a bunny doll on her side stood in front of a colourful door and knocked. There was no answer. A little hesitant, the child pushed the door and stuck her head in. On the bed was her brother, covered in blankets. He wasnt visible, but she could hear his low sobbing, so she knew. The child, who was pacing in front of the door without doing this or that, finally made her way to the bed.

Brother?

Liloa walked up to him and stepped on the little stair next to the bed. When she lifted the blanket a bit, she saw a red face covered in tears.

Go away!

Oh!

With his slender arms, the boy nervously pulled up the blanket again. Liloa looked around and noticed the books stacked on the bed. Some were spread out at random, some were torn, and some were thrown upside down. Liloa sighed and patted the blanket. She understood how upset her brother must be now.

The noble families of the empire frequently hosted or participated in salons. One of those salons consisted of a small event organised to showcase the successors talent by publicly attending their lessons. The guests were mostly nearby nobles, peers, and those who had studied under the same teachers. Despite the fact that the spotlight was on a young child who has not yet come of age, it was an event that had to be carried out without neglect, even if it seemed minor, as it was related to the familys dignity. That was the reason why numerous academic lessons, excluding archery and horsemanship, were held in preparation for this public gathering.

The lesson presented this time was a history lesson by Viscount Bombe. However, Liloas brother had never been a serious student and he didnt change his lax attitude when preparing for this event. He had a habit of causing trouble or skipping classes. The Viscount, resentful at it, publicly humiliated him by putting up difficult questions. Her brother, who was asked a question he didnt know, was embarrassed in front of the 20 people watching. As time passed and he still couldnt answer, their father kicked his chair back in anger and left the hall during class. It was only natural for the boy to retreat to his room, trembling in shame. Furthermore, their father ordered him to find out the correct answer by evening. As he was forbidden to ask for anyones help, it goes without saying that her brother was deeply troubled.

Looking at the state of his room, it seems that he still hasnt found the answer. With dinner less than half an hour away, Liloa knew how she could help her poor brother. Thats why she ran to his bedroom while trying to avoid their fathers eyes. She whispered the answer close to the blanket like she was sharing a precious secret.

Brother. The answer is Mehquis Ulami.

There was no answer from the boy under the blanket.

Brother. Viscount Bombe seemed to ask for an object, but the answer is a person. Mehquis Ulami!

Perhaps her older brother couldnt hear her, so she bowed down further.

Mehqui

He suddenly took off the blanket and asked sharply.

How do you know that?

I read it in the library.

He raised the blanket again as if he didnt trust her answer. Liloa examined the backs of different books that had fallen around the bed and eventually picked one up. She carried the heavy book to the bed, opened it, and found the desired page.

The boy jumped up and snatched the book Liloa was reading. She groaned as the book was ripped out of her small hands, but he didnt care. Her brother, who had been staring intently at the pages, soon threw the book away.

In which part does it say something about Mehquis Ulami? The King couldn't solve the riddle after all!

The Spear of Glory is not a weapon, but a person's name. The last remaining King's Spear, the glorious knight Mehquis Ulami, was imprisoned for treason! He had already spent 15 years in prison before the conquest of Zen began, but because of his sentence the King couldn't reinstate him, so they changed his name. In the next chapter, there's a part alluding to General Triumph Yeah! There. If you read that, you can tell that it's Ulami.

The boy, who had his spirit raised, looked at Liloa with curious eyes. In response, Liloa rolled her eyes innocently.

After that, for a while, her brother called Liloa and asked her questions whenever he had time. When she answered correctly, he praised her and gave her candy. Whenever she answered a very difficult question, he gave her a beautiful headdress or doll she'd never seen before. Ten-year-old Liloa, so intoxicated with the recognition of her only brother, forgot that it was about the content of a book she'd read secretly, and enthusiastically boasted of her knowledge.

## Chapter 62

One day, her brother asked.

Do you know who Madame La Pondue is?

After agonising for a moment, Liloa gave a clear answer.

Ah! The duke who ruled the principality of Daltin. A female duke.

How do you know her? She was overthrown within a few months of governing the principality. She has no achievements to her name.

Madame La Pondue's admirable. She knew that once she got married, her wealth and status would belong to her husband. She didn't like that, so she didn't marry and became the Duke herself. But people accused her of killing her brothers and sisters in the past, so she was hanged.

*{ What was the expression on my brother's face at that time? My younger self was probably too engrossed in brushing the hair of her beloved doll, so she didn't see, but now I could easily imagine. }*

A lot had changed since that day. He began to call her a spoiled beast and was ashamed to even sit at the same table. He said it was intolerably barbaric for her to state her unfiltered thoughts as a woman. He tried to tame Liloa as if he were taming an animal, saying that her words and actions were comparable to that of a dog. He even feared that Liloa would marry untamed, so he personally set and directed a schedule to correct her. Liloa, tired of her brother's harsh treatment, eventually pretended to obey. But no matter how silent she was or how low she kept her eyes, his madness only grew stronger with each passing year.

Her brother emphasised the word patience, one of the great virtues that a woman should possess. To nurture her patience, Liloa had to do all sorts of ridiculous things. It also didn't stop with practising silence.

Physical pain, such as violence and punishment, wasn't the only pain one could experience. Mental torture was no less than physical pain. As a child, Liloa's soul had been locked in a terrible prison from a young age. She couldn't read what she wanted to read, she couldn't see what she wanted to see, she couldn't hear what she wanted to hear and she couldn't say what she wanted to say. There was no difference between that and having her actual tongue pulled out or her ears cut off. Of course, in reality, they were all still neatly attached. That was why her desire to enjoy her senses and abilities to the fullest constantly grew. She had the ambition to live as a human being, to enjoy the freedom to roll her tongue and release her soul into the world. But that natural and trivial fulfillment was withheld from her, it wasn't even allowed for a single moment.

It raised a question within Liloa.

*If everything would be cut off from me like this, why was I even born with eyes, nose, mouth, and ears? I'm born with the same characteristics as my brother, but why am I the only one to suffer from the pain of having my flesh cut off later in life?*

Liloa was plagued by such strange questions over and over again. But because she had no one to answer or listen to her questions, they piled up year after year and grew inside her. Nonetheless, her brother's prison remained unchanged. The prison, which became narrower as Liloa grew, strangled her whole body.

- End flashback -

Lil looked at the darkness. Standing somewhere in that darkness was Mortu, the god of death, who has followed her like a shadow since childhood. When her brother told her to shut up, he came and cut off her tongue. When her brother told her to walk gracefully, he came and took off her legs. He repeatedly detached and reattached Liloa's limbs until she began to walk in time with the music. After accidentally witnessing their stable keeper and her father's mistress affair, she pretended she didn't see it, but still, he came and plucked her eyes out.

But even now, despite having escaped her brother's grasp, she still couldn't get away from Mortu.

Lil crouched her body and sank deeply into the shadows.

*If I hide in the darkness like this, then the god of death can't recognize me, right? Will he pass by without noticing?*

Lil tightened her arms around her knees.

*Screech*

Reality penetrated her ears as Lil turned her eyes away and stared at the floor. Light squeezed in through the opening door. As the gap widened, the rays of light that had slipped in reached her feet. The thin light gradually spread and a clear voice was heard.

Liloa.

Lil raised her head. Cesar approached her crouching form and held out his hand.

Where does it hurt?

It's nothing.

Cesar looked at her worriedly. Lil quickly shook away her memories before he noticed her melancholy and jumped to her feet. Her voice sounded resolute.

You woke up early?

Cesar, who still has his doubts, asked again.

What were you doing here?

Oh, its no big deal. I was just thinking about the past

Are you going to the marina?

When Lil took a few steps toward him, Cesar came in and closed the door. Lil, who didnt doubt that he had stopped by to go to the marina with her, stopped in wonder. Cesar walked across the room without giving an explanation and opened the shutters.

What are you doing?

Cesar was silent for a while, not looking back. Lil had no difficulty guessing what he was thinking. His gestures signified that that story was about to come out again. But this time, Lil has no objection. The Bell Rock couldnt sail due to a lack of crew and the southern seas would soon become a battlefield. In fact, even if the Bell Rock departed, it wasnt clear where to go or what to do. She couldnt say that she wanted to keep playing the part of a pirate.

Cesar opened his mouth with difficulty.

Liloa. Only fifteen people have been filled in this week.

So?

Thats still less than half of the original crew.

So? What do you want to say?

Half of the League has the opinion that we should watch the Mondovi fleets movement for the time being without undertaking any activities. Liloa, we cant guarantee long-term voyages as long as the Admirals roaming the southern seas. Why do you keep on recruiting?

If the Admiral comes as you said, theres no guarantee that Panichi will be safe. So, what are we going to do? Stay here like sitting ducks?

Lil walked nervously and sat down on the bed. Cesar walked over calmly and sat down next to her. His warm and tender hands took hers. With him acting like that, Lil felt like she could no longer vent her anger. After taking off her necklace, Cesar diligently collected her messy little hairs with his finger and put them behind her ear.

Liloa. I love you.

Out of habit, Lil instantly opened her mouth.

I love you too.

Now, this kind of life Cant you see the end?

Lil closed her eyes tightly. She pressed her lids hard in the hope to keep the tears at bay.

*What can I say? The answer is already a given. It was clear from the beginning that Cesar didnt rescue me to live a life of piracy. He still desires the life he had before. The life in which well settle*

*in a peaceful village and continue our overflowing love Then one day, Ill give birth to a child and well raise that child Well happily grow old together*

Lil, who felt suffocated, struggled to answer lightly.

Its what we expected, right?

In an instant, his face was filled with happiness. She could see it despite how faint it was. The sound of him exhaling in joy and the feeling of his breath on her cheek suffocated her only more. Lil wanted to turn her head.

Okay Give me time to think.

Lil smiled at Cesar as he approached for a kiss.

Years ago, when Cesar invited Lil to go with him, the word together reflected a very clear desire. Cesar asked her to go with him, but he didnt say hed set her free. Nevertheless, it was the unchanging truth that Cesar rescued Lil.

*It feels like Im in debt for the rest of my life. But does it have to be love?*

*Must the princess, saved from the monster by a brave knight, love the knight? Even if the princess never wished for his salvation and she never wanted his love? Rather, the princess warned him, dont reach out to me. But the knight saved her and loved her anyway.*

*What should the princess do?*

*When she receives unsolicited salvation and unwanted love, and when she tells lies that she doesnt want anything else, can she continue to pretend to believe that lie? Can she ignore him by pretending she doesnt know? He who gave up everything for her salvation*

I love you

Lil lived in Mortus castle.

Mortus an undertaker and the god of death from ancient tales. When the men of the Empire gained reputation and fame, their grave sites would match their status. They would be buried with the best view, which could even lead to territorial disputes. But if they were married, they simply dug a hole next to it and had the coffins prepared for their wives to only fit the hole. Of course, because the womans body wasnt measured, it could differ from the size of her coffin

After reading Mortus ghost stories as a child, Lil suffered from the illusion that he was always following her. The experience of having her mouth closed and her legs controlled by someone else felt like Mortu cutting up her body. The god of death, who cuts bodies and makes them ready for their coffin, has mutilated Lil alive for as long as she knows.

*Those who are trapped in such a situation, wont they desire freedom?*

Chapter 63

Lil assumed that Cesar didnt really know her heart when he reached out to her. Even when she stayed motionless, in his eyes the situation called for him to offer his help. His victory or defeat depended on the willingness of Lil to grab that opportunity.

She could still vividly remember Cesars outstretched hand.

*I had warned him not to do this, but his hand still turned towards me.*

At that time Lil had been overcome with a sudden thirst. Her throat had been slowly drying up and twisted with an unknown longing, unbeknownst to her it had been shouting for freedom.

*Freedom! Freedom!*

She initially wondered how she could quench this thirst and when she looked around at other people, she discovered the sweet taste of water that was known as freedom.

That had made Lil hold his hand.

*But looking back, was it done with a sane mind?*

Like everyone else, Lil wasn't perfect. She said she was determined, but in fact, she was not. If the desire for freedom was gnawing on her left, Mortu gnawed on her right side. And in Mortus hellish castle, Lil may have already gone mad.

*When a single ray of light suddenly crosses the darkness, all eyes are drawn to it, so I couldn't help but look at it, too. Who can resist that light? Who can close their eyes and not be drawn to its breathtaking beauty?*

Blinded by the freedom she longed so much for, Lil fell into Caesar's arms. She finally swallowed the sweet tasting freedom, but the price of her irresponsibility was high. She had a hard time turning away from a man who said he only wanted love and nothing else.

*Can I even turn away from this man?*

She wanted to love him. Lil had truly tried, but till now, she was unable to do so

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Caesar left and Lil, who was alone again, closed the shutters.

Laying on the bed, her dizzy spirit was sucked back into Mortus castle.

Many shadows were chasing her in that castle, which some call the underworld and some call hell. In this place, Lil was always at a disadvantage. It was common to have no legs while running or have no eyes while looking around. That's why her corpse-like body failed to run away again today. So instead, she hid behind a pillar she often hid behind and started talking to herself as she trembled in fear.

No, don't come to me, because I'll be obliged to give it back again don't

The words she uttered like a spell were useless. The darkness that approached quickly stopped just before her feet.

Hey, stop it! Oh no!

A hand emerged from the darkness.

Kyaaaaaaaaah!

She couldn't stop crying. She didn't know if her eyes were still properly embedded, but tears just kept coming out. Lil spoke pleadingly.

Don't give it to me, I won't take it. Please



The hand gently grabbed her hand. Lil twisted her wrist with all her might, trying to get her hand out. But her efforts were futile and it handed the lump to her.

Please no

Lil looked down at it with trembling eyes. With her tears still pouring down, Lil sobbed sadly.

*This is your heart*

Lil's tears flowed constantly over the bloody lump of tissue. Seeing her despairing state, the god of death whispered.

*Why dont you just quit?..*

No no

As it was slippery, the heart slipped out of her grasp. Lil looked at her feet as something fell in front of it. While she looked down, her whole body began to tremble in contemplation. Instead of the marble floor, Lil was standing on a never-ending pile of hearts. Distraught, she opened her arms wide.

*See? I still have this much left*

The god of death chuckled at the same time.

*Cant I take your whole body from you then?..*

No, you cant because Ill have to pay you back I have to take it back I have to give it this much

As if being sucked into a swamp, she could see her feet gradually disappearing. She tried to lift her knees with all her might but to no avail.

This, this much

In an instant, she sank up to her knees.

This is a lot

Suddenly, she couldnt see below her waist. Her eyes stained with panic stared in the air, but the death god only gazed down at her with joy. It was getting harder and harder for her to breathe. In despair, as her death watched, Lil thought.

*Im suffocating*

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When she woke up, Lil lay in bed like a corpse. After some time, she finally got up and left the room. The hall was filled with breakfast eaters, but she couldnt muster up the will to care. Lil went down the stairs without any thoughts, passed the alley without any thoughts and walked over the market without any thoughts. From her head to her ankle, with every step she took, it felt like she was walking through the air.

Even when she bumped into someones shoulder and overheard abusive language, Lil kept walking, or when she stepped on a duck crossing the road, Lil kept walking. As the morning dawned, the market became more and more crowded. Nonetheless, Lil was unconcerned. Not far from the market was the tent for recruiting new crew members for the Bell Rock. After entering she saw

Jericho dozing off on the chair in front of her desk. Impatiently, Lil kicked the chair to get Jerichos attention.

Hm? Oh!

Jericho rolled on the floor, woke up and lifted his head with a drowsy expression as if was having a pleasant dream. But instead of getting up, he moved his body into a more comfortable position and the eyes that were wide open a moment ago closed again. Lil slid into the chair, leaving Jericho to sleep on the dirty floor.

*In the end, hes still like this. Its been a struggle for us for years.*

Aaaaah!

People passing by were taken aback by Lils sudden outburst. Even though she screamed out of nowhere, she didnt feel any better. Lil struck herself in the chest with her fist, ignoring all the stares. Her heart, which had been thrown into a massive hole with no end in sight, kept falling endlessly. She was filled with nothing but emptiness. The Bell Rock rules, the Bell Rock Code. They were all engraved by her own hands, but Cesar defied those rules in an instant.

Still, Lil couldnt refute him. He saved her. For Cesar, the most important thing was Lils safety, the rest was just collateral damage. It was obvious that he would never understand what the Bell Rock meant to her. Hes just waiting for Lils play to end soon. After that, he hoped to be able to give her a better life. He put up with her long whim for the sake of that ending. As he couldnt leave her, he was forced to participate.

Thats why Lil couldnt say a word to Cesar. As he also devoted many years to the Bell Rock.

Besides, Cesar constantly appeased Lil. He was never compelled. He would have resisted if he had been forced, but he was always gentle. Nonetheless, they fought frequently in their early days. But the more enraged he became, the more bitter Lil reacted. That was when he realised he acted the same way as he accused Mireille of. And Lil realised that the more she went against him, the more guilt she felt as this was far from repaying him for everything hes done for her.

So they both cut off their own tongue. The less they talked and the less they expressed their feelings, the faster they got along. Since then, theyve had good days without much friction. Thats why Lil was unable to express her true feelings now; Her resentment toward him for giving her life and the Bell Rock but then taking it away, as well as the sorrow she feels for herself or the desire to bring back every sailor who has fallen victim to the sea.

*If I could bring them back, Id swim and wander the Ingres sea for tens or hundreds of years! I wish I could, but I cant.*

Its obvious that this guilt will only increase. Without him, this life wouldnt have been possible, and going against him felt so shameless. Lil grabbed her mouth as her stomach came up.

*No. I cant spit it out.*

Captain. Are you feeling sick?

Lil heard a voice she didnt want to hear in her current state and eventually quickly gave up a gag. Ed, who had been a few steps away, anxiously and quickly approached her.

Captain? Did you eat something wrong?

Lil hit Eds hand, which reflexively stretched out toward her to check if she had a fever. At the same time, a furious tone was uttered once again.

Goaway

Your complexion isnt good.

Why the hell did you come here?

Although Im a patient and in recovery, Im still a doctor. I was going to rest until noon, but I decided to walk around the market for some sightseeing. The market has been open since quite early in the morning even though the sun is still rising.

Ed sat down on the floor next to Jericho.

I wanted to say thank you, so I went looking for the Captain and someone mentioned youd be here.

Lil, who isnt in the mood to deal with Ed, gave a sharp answer.

Stop talking to me.

My stomach You see, the stitching on my wound was beautifully done. Your craftsmanship is amazing.

Ive never seen a traditional Delorian embroidery knot so perfect in my life

For some reason, Ed has the talent to make you feel like youre losing if you dont answer, so Lil shouted a lie.

I didnt do it!

Ed shouted back, raising his voice at the same time.

What?!

Why do you think I did it?

Ed answered inwardly.

*Well, youre the only one who knows how to embroider the Empires traditional style on the Bell Rock*

Well, thats of courseUhWell, didnt the Captain ask me how to do a suture?

The ships carpenter did it, so go see him.

Uh, wheres he then?

Hes dead.

Chapter 64

Headnote: Warning for mentioning gore and violence.

Suddenly, Lils face hardened terribly. As he witnessed her shift that seemed to fall into the abyss, Ed felt the need to change the subject. Because the longer she was silent, the colder the mood and the harsher she would be. Ed quickly looked around and pointed to the fish shop owner who happened to catch his eye first.

But why doesnt that person have a nose?

However, as it turned out, there were more than one or two people who had this.

Huh? Its not just that person That woman, too Then that man Hm? Why their nose?

Lil had to swallow a hollow laugh at Eds attitude of taking such a lighthearted approach to a typical Southern tragedy. The expression on Eds face told her that he really didnt know why and she felt a strange sense of duty to enlighten him.

Are you asking because you really dont know?

..?

Every day, slaves are dragged onto merchant ships or into fields. If a slave attempts to escape and gets caught, their nose will be cut off as a mark that they tried to run away. Its a practice that the Garni association came up with.

In an instant, Ed distorted his face in displeasure.

What?

Thats why Im glad we have the island of Panichi! You see, on this island, they can hide, young man

An old man appeared out of nowhere and flopped down next to him. Lil jumped to her feet, more startled by what he said rather than his sudden appearance.

Anunchio! You senile old man! You know who this guy is, so dont tell him that!

Hello, Black Whale.

Hello and dont do that also!

Lil snatched the bottle that Anunchio was about to drink. Ed greeted the good-natured but ragged old man.

Now, go away quickly!

Your Captain and I have different beliefs. He wants to keep this place a secret, but if its up to me, I want to write its name on the white sand beaches But I cant blame him.

What are you talking about?!

Young man, Ive heard you had a lot of trouble under that bad-tempered Captain. Did you say that youre a newcomer?

Who told you that?!

My name is Ed.

Despite Lils nagging, the old man calmly invited Ed to a handshake. Ed chuckled secretly and took the old mans hand. The old man noticed his smile and winked. Ed stiffened in an instant and struggled to get his hand out of his grasp.

Welcome to Panichi, young man, call me Anunchio.

Thank you, Anunchio.

No, whats this nonsense! Show Anunchio some respect! Hey, call him Captain. Whats this absurdity of my crew calling a highly respectable man by his name?

However, Anunchio ignored Lils complaints again. In situations like this, it was common that she acted stubborn as she didnt want anyone to be on par with the Leagues founder. Defeated, Lil clenched her jaw and slumped back into the chair.

Young man, this is the stronghold of the League. If you thought Amiaeng to be the base of operation of the southern pirates then you are mistaken. Do you believe we could have survived in Amiaeng, where the imperial nobles and Navy come and go?

Due to taking the time to think about an answer, Ed hesitated for a moment.

Oh, no.

Indeed. We couldnt stay there. The League needed a safe place to hide the rescued slaves and Panichi, surrounded by high terrain, was well suited for that purpose. The marks you see, are not only engraved on the slaves but also on those who oppose the aristocrats. Those bastards enjoy putting marks on our faces with an iron or a knife, making wounds that cant be hidden or washed away. Thats why they pluck our eyes out or connect our mouths with our noses Those imperial bastards are fools who believe that thats the only way they could keep us in check.

As you can guess, young man, this island was quickly filled.

At this point, Lil thought Ed would have started laughing, but he was unexpectedly quiet. He sat neatly, listening to Anunchio, like a grandson intently listening to one of his grandfathers stories.

The Empire treats all foreigners as slaves. It sounds absurd, but when you think about what happened to us, it makes me think that it might be true. Seeing how they stormed our land, shook our homes and fields, and sold us as slaves. But whats a slave? We dont know. Because theres no such word in the South. The only unpaid labourers in the South are livestock. And you have to be a complete madman when you cut off the noses of grateful livestock See, I dont understand it at all. I just cant. Ive lived with this body for decades, but I still dont understand why we have to be slaves.

Anunchio narrowed his eyes as he recalled something from the past.

When I first encountered people from the Empire, I was astonished. The monsters Id heard so piercingly about had the same shape as me. I couldnt distinguish myself from them no matter how hard I looked. Independent beings who walk on two feet, with facial features in the same place as me and move based on their own thoughts! They even plough fields and make love! Then, did they only see skin colour?

Anunchio, who unexpectedly took another bottle of wine from his pocket, drank it gully. While the old man sighed, Lil observed Ed.

*His expression of disgust and displeasure doesnt appear to be a lie.*

She thought Anunchio made the right call to tell him personally. Ed would have figured out the identity of the island even if Lil hadnt told him. He could hear all this information if he just stood on the market for an hour. It was inevitable from the moment she brought him along. Anunchio, who knew Ed was a navy officer, was attempting to edify him by telling him first-hand.

Lil tilted her head. Anunchio has such charisma. It also wasnt the first time he was able to convert a naval deserter.

*Can he bring this arrogant Ed on our side? But Ed doesnt have the same air as other naval deserters, so he might not understand Anunchios whole story.I guess hes still*

Kyaaak!

The market suddenly erupted with screams. It was followed by shattering glass and the sound of something being smashed. Ed was the first to respond and moved his head as quickly as the wind. On the other hand, Lil and Anunchio only shook their heads at the familiar noise. The morning market was in shambles. Shouts came and went, and eventually, a woman, caught by several people, was dragged away. However, it wasnt violent.

Anunchio wiped his lips after another long sighted and explained.

That woman is poor Lully. I dont know how she got out of her house, but Lully well When the Garni association first occupied the island of Corado, her husband was part of the vanguard that resisted. The brave Demeko. He lasted three days, but in the end, he was captured alive. The brutal bastards tied Lully to a stake and tore Demekos stomach open. His spilt organs were wrapped around Lullys neck and shoulders. She was tied to her husbands mutilated body for a week, and after that, she went crazy

Lil looked at Lully who struggled forcefully when she was dragged away. But Lil had to turn her head when people tried to gag her.

Its always sad to hear such a tragedy. Im going to see Lully, alright? I want to know how she got out of the house.

Lil answered bitterly.

She must have used her teeth and escaped.

Anunchio nodded his head, wiping away the drops of alcohol on his beard.

Then Ill go, Black Whale.

He lightly lifted his hat. At the same time, Lil mirrored him and tried to lift hers, but realised she wasnt wearing one, and instead fumbled with her finger in front of her forehead. The old man, who smiled mischievously, stopped walking and turned to look at Ed again.

Young man.

Yes, Captain?

The Empire calls us pirates. But whats a pirate? A thief who steals from the sea? That would make the Empires the real pirate here, wouldnt it?

This time again, Anunchio looked straight into Eds eyes as if he was hoping for an answer. The old man had deep wrinkles all over his face, but his eyes were as bright as he had never aged a day. Ed replied, lowering his eyes a little.

Thats right.

Hehehe! Look at this youngster!

Anunchio grinned and patted Ed on the shoulder. Feeling the pain transmitted to his stomach, Ed put a forced smile on his lips. Then the old man snatched the bottle that Lil had taken away and

disappeared into the noisy market. Ed, who was watching Anunchios back without saying a word, suddenly asked.

What does he do? I dont think hes just a Captain.

With Anunchio gone, Lil expected that it would be up to her to answer Eds questions. But even though he already found out about Panichi, she wasnt planning on letting her guard down and will be carefully selecting her answers. Even if it was the goal to get Ed on their side.

Anunchio oversees the management of Panichi. Hes retired, but everyone here still respects him enough to call him Captain.

He deserves it.

His affirmation seemed to be imbued with some kind of respect. In a not-so-bad tone, Lil went on to say what she was going to say.

Actually, some of the Bell Rocks income is used to supply the island. Its the same for any other ship in the League.

Chapter 65

What?

You heard me. However, this time, as a lot of the Bell Rocks money was used for rewards, the funds were low. But anyway, thats our mission.

Are you doing this out of righteousness?

Lil, who slowly got her spirits up, was once again in a bad mood and stared at Ed.

Stop saying annoying things. The wealth of the Garni association is increasing day by day with the enslavement of the natives of the islands it has seized. So, some of the work of the League includes assisting them in escaping and bringing them to Panichi or other locations to hide. You just heard about poor Lully, right? Things like that happen daily on the islands closer to the Empire. By setting examples like this several times a day, the fear they experience becomes so intense, that they start to behave like livestock out of themselves. Is that a legitimate way to make money? These arent even imperial lands. Theyre supposed to be pristine islands free of slavery. Its simply their place of residence. Im not sure how anyone could even consider looting without hesitation while wielding superior weapons and displaying unimaginable cruelty.

So, is this merely righteousness? In the first place, did the League take away anything that rightfully belongs to the Garni ships? Where on earth does the logic come from that cargo produced in the South belongs to the association? This isnt imperial territory nor under imperial law. Its unforgivable that theyre exploiting that point. Under what law can they claim the cargo to be theirs?

Ed shrugged his shoulders, listening silently.

Is that the official position of the League?

Aye.

Ed mumbled something and nodded. Lil looked down sideways and saw Ed with his head down as if he was counting the grains on the floor. Although Ed didnt respond as usual and sympathised by listening to what she said, her suspicions that he was only pretending to do so nagged at her. Ed

turned his head when he noticed her observing gaze. He straightened his posture and made eye contact with Lil, whose eyes were on a higher level than his.

Dont misunderstand, Captain. I dont think the Leagues position is wrong.

The squinting innocent eyes didnt seem like an act, so Lil sighed and turned away from him.

Im glad you agree, but you dont need to feel forced. Im in no position to sit here and persuade you or anything.

Why do you say that?

Because a war will start soon.

Are you talking about the Mondovi fleet?

Aye.

Whats the League preparing for?

Preemptive attacks are excluded, for now we cant do anything other than to wait and see. You dont need to know the details.

Isnt the Captain participating?

Well, I dont know yet

The end of Lils sentence was overshadowed by melancholy. Ed, who thought Lil was upset about losing her crew, started to wonder when she even became depressed by a mere question. The loss of her crew didnt appear to be her only source of concern. Ed tilted his head to look at Lils face, which appeared more tired than when Anunchio was still around. Lil shook her head in the hope to shake away her worries and restlessly moved her body around in her chair. Ed, who didnt want to get caught staring, quickly acted like he was trying to get rid of his fatigue by moving his own body.

Why are you so sure that the Admiral will destroy the South?

Because hes a maniac with a flashy history, and, obviously, hes coming down with his fleet.

Even if the Admiral insisted that he wouldnt advance in the South?

Well? Who knows? He may have thought that theres no more fun in the Aengle sea anymore, ah, I dont know! How do I know whats inside the head of a madman?

Unless Lil looked down at his side, she couldnt see his face as she was sitting on a chair and Ed was sitting on the floor. Which was fortunate for Ed. It gave him the opportunity to turn his head and thereby cover his contorted face upon hearing his association with a madman.

That The one who skinned the pirates heads alive

No, why do you believe such nasty rumours so blatantly?

Didnt you confirm them?

Ed held back with all his might.

*It was a joke! However, if it turns out that even that was a lie, the little trust we built so far would crumble down again.*



Ed took a deep breath, quenching his urges that boiled like lava.

The Captain seems to hate cruelty very much.

Thats right.

Why do you hate it so much?

You dont need to know.

But Ed was intrigued to know why. While Lil was still focused on stretching and working out her muscles, Ed poured out his words to provoke the stern woman, wanting to know her thoughts.

Torture is a great way to induce confessions. It has been done and researched for hundreds of years, and as a result, various torture techniques are currently known and used in the Empire. There are so many methods that every person has their own preference. Torture isnt just used to extract confessions. Its also effective as a means of creating dominance by installing fear, which is mainly happening in the South. Its the same in battle. Is there any doubt about it?

Didnt you just say that you respect the stand of the League?

Im only speaking rationally.

Lil, who was eagerly stretching her arm, suddenly dropped her hand. As if he knew that she wouldnt back down easily, his green eyes asked if he was right about what he said. Lil opened her mouth, unable to shake the feeling that she would lose if she didnt respond.

Okay then, let me use torture with a hammer as an example. Its a method loved by many torturers because it can constantly inflict an appropriate amount of pain without killing the person. But, do you really think the truth can be found by simply breaking the shoulder blade? Is the name of the rebels mastermind hidden in the ribs and the identity of their other comrades stored in the knee? Remembering the truth is the job of the mind, so Im not sure what theyre attempting to achieve by torturing the body. Sadistic behaviour is pointless and ineffective. Similarly, the spirit of resistance to those seeking to break free cannot be engulfed in his nostrils. Tell me, have you ever seen a slave who doesnt crave freedom? No matter how many chains are hanged on a slave, the slave will never obey completely. He will consider fleeing whenever he has the chance and does whatever it takes, even if it means sacrificing his own flesh. Additionally, the fact that the act of torture must be repeated proves that its useless.

Nevertheless, the Captains words are unrealistic.

I admit that there is a practical usefulness. It incites fear. But what about an innocent man who was robbed of this usefulness? How is one supposed to confess to a crime that doesnt exist?

Okay. Thats if theyre innocent. But what if theyre guilty?

Even if a man turns out to be guilty later, there is no guarantee beforehand that he actually is. Whether he can endure the torture depends on his mental strength, not on the fact if he did it or not. If a murderous prisoner can endure torture, does that make him innocent?

Then what should be the right thing to do?

Its up to the judges to find out whats really going on in ones mind

After finishing that sentence with a heavy heart, Lil turned away from Ed, whose staring became bothersome. As she didn't have anything in particular to do, she rummaged through the papers on the desk for no reason. After some time, she picked up the almost empty list of vacancies. Lil stared blankly at the list, the expression on her face said it was something she had long feared seeing.

Ed spoke in a low voice.

Is that why the Bell Rock doesn't rule by the whip?

Lil doubted her ears for a moment. She slowly repeated the sentence, which seemed to have come from another world, in her head. Once, twice, three times. At this point, she couldn't believe that she had heard it from Ed. Lil shook her head. Still, the sight that caught her eyes remained the same. An unfamiliar man sitting on the ground. At this moment, Ed felt strangely foreign. Lil first thought was that that sharp observation couldn't come from the madman she had interacted with so far.

What?

No physical punishment. There is no whip, no knife in the back of the hand, no keelhauling, no beating by the crew, no useful means, right? That's the Bell Rock.

Still bewitched, Lil answered.

You're right.

That's not surprising then. It fits with your reasoning.

Yes.

Well, it must be because you deeply care for each and every one of your crew members.

Lil nodded in suspicion, she couldn't shake the feeling that she was talking to someone else.

I haven't read many books, so I'm not good at putting my thoughts into words, but it's a given that all people live independently. Whether it's a man or a woman, a noble or a slave, a mainlander or a foreigner. An individual's body and mind are their own and cannot be controlled by anyone else. Only the owner has complete control over the body and thoughts. It certainly is a marvelous and valuable authority. For every human being. Regardless of gender, social status or ethnic background, they are all born with this right. So, it's only natural that it's important to them and it needs to be respected. I don't do it because I particularly love and cherish my crew. I just treat them the way they deserve to be treated.

Because of her clumsy tongue, she awkwardly spoke words that may have come across as inappropriate. Lil had already thought about this concept hundreds of times, but it felt unusual for her to express them aloud for the first time. Lil touched her lips as though she were touching someone else's lips. Her mouth, which felt clear, was soon filled with a cool taste. As if she had swallowed a mint, a pungent and abundant aroma flowed down her throat to her chest and eventually spread to her stomach.

Suddenly, Ed started to laugh.

Ha Haha! Hahaha!

Lil, who was still intoxicated by some strange sense of satisfaction, turned her head in surprise. Ed, on the other hand, tilted his head back as far as possible and laughed so loudly that it took his breath

away. He even slapped his thighs in delight. However, at some point, his laughter faded and was replaced by groans as a result of the discomfort in his gut.

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After a while, the laughter abruptly stopped.

Captain.

And in an instant, the smile disappeared from his face. Because of this sudden change, Lil replied a bit awkwardly.

What?

In all my life, I didnt think Id ever hear such words with my own two ears, so I had to laugh for a moment.

What are you trying to say?

Authority. Do you know that the concept you explained to me doesnt exist? Do you even know what you were talking about?

What I was talking about? Of course, I know.

Ed shook his head firmly as if he knew it werent the case.

Let me tell you a story.

Again, out of nowhere?

Seems like the Captain doesnt know everything, so Im here to make it easier for you.

Lil folded her arms as to say lets hear it. In response, Ed turned his body towards her, cleared his throat and began to speak.

There was a creature.

Lil raised her eyebrows but eventually frowned again to indicate that she was listening.

For convenience, lets call this creature a beast. The beast lived on barren land and fed himself by eating other animals and grazing the grass. The grasses were dried, twisted and thin and reptiles were the only animals that could survive there. As a result, hunger became the norm. They lived on the plains at the foot of a mountain with endless meadows on the other side. To sum it up, the north was a mountain range and the south was a meadow. Do you follow?

Yes, go on.

As lightning often struck, the meadow was a burned down terrain filled with crates. It was so rough and bumpy that the soles of ones feet would be torn just by standing on it. The dry atmosphere was the perfect fuel for big wildfires, easily ignited by even the slightest heat from the sun. The land, devoured by flames, was desolate. But even though the beast lived in such circumstances, it never thought about crossing the mountains. The mountains were so densely packed with withered thorn bushes that even during the day, creatures couldnt see anything through it and the nights were even more frighteningly dark.

What are you getting at?

Just listen. The beast lived on the land and gave birth to cubs. Its young would grow up and produce offspring, too. Then, one day another beast was born, he was an ordinary beast with no unique features. Neither his mother who gave birth to him, nor his father whose blood flowed through him, nor his brothers born from the same womb, knew he was exceptional. But he was special. Do you know why?

No, I dont.

Even though he received such a blunt answer from Lil, Ed continued his story steadfastly.

He had a tiny seed in his heart. It was a seed that never existed before and humans would later call this seed the will. For the first time, a beast was wondering what would lie beyond those mountains. In the beginning, he thought it was just going to be as unbearable as his home. But after some time passed, the picture drawn in his head started to differ from the barren lands. And when he almost died from curiosity, he decided to cross them. While most other beasts feared the act of passing the mountains, there were some that decided to follow him. As a result, he led a small group through the range. It must have been an excruciatingly difficult journey, but they eventually made it. What do you think they found?

Just like Anunchio had done to him, Ed looked at Lil with serious eyes, waiting for her answer. Simultaneously, Lil looked down at Ed, whose face became obscured by a ray of sunlight. His shirt, face, and hair were suddenly dyed by the morning sun. For some reason, she could sense the origin of human life from that golden light. It reminded her of a wheat field. The golden waves one will find after they pass barren land and cross rugged mountains. It felt endless. The corners of her mouth slowly lifted as she imagined the exhilarating scene. When she could even hear the cry of a herd of water buffalos, it felt like she heard the rich sound of life.

..!

The will was the start of building a civilization. The beast that held the treasure of mankind in its heart wasnt distinctive. Has he had it since birth? Did it develop later in life? Im not sure, but what I do know is that he embraced it. That precious seed Now, lets assume that this creature wasnt just a mere beast, but actually a human being carrying that treasure. He breaks out of traditions and sows seeds on barren lands that seem impossible to grow. Its up to future generations to cherish it, bear precious fruits and bloom brilliant flowers. It will require generations of effort. The farmer doesnt need to be disappointed if his seeds didnt sprout in his life. Its a task that will naturally be handed down to the next in line. If you want to see it pay off, have a child. In that sense, that curious beast from the beginning became a rather successful farmer.

Ed smiled as he observed Lils reaction. At the same time, Lil contemplated the story and remained silent. Without saying anything, Ed cast his gaze beyond the market. Looking at the horizon, he eventually broke the silence.

Do you understand why Im telling you this?

No.

It seems that the Captain has one, too.

What?

Something precious. I was convinced by it today.

What a seed?

Ive been wanting to say this to the Captain for a long, long time

He returned his gaze to Lil. Instead of asking for an explanation, Lil only stared at him. Ed hesitated for a moment like a man trying to bring up something rather embarrassing.

Its an honour to have met someone like you in this short life.

Ed used a vague sentence as his definite answer.

My sarcasm about torture earlier was just to see if the Captains will was genuine. I apologise.

Lil couldnt tell if Eds words were true or false.

*He wanted to say this for a long time? And why is it an honour to have met someone like me? What a strange development*

Lil looked at him a bit awkwardly as if she were seeing him, who always acted sly before, for the first time.

What do you mean? How long ago?

Its the result of keeping track of the gap between the ancient and the present times.

Huh I see, well, Ive never even heard of such a thing before.

It was unclear to Lil if Ed simply misunderstood her question or that he was waiting for an opportunity to change the subject out of embarrassment. But Ed continued to talk about his story with much enthusiasm.

Its the achievement of a prominent professor. The Imperial Clairaut doesnt just teach medicine, you know? You can hear all kinds of myths there. Its a real treasure trove for knowledge. Would you like to hear more?

Theres more?

Ed stretched out his legs and nodded.

Actually, the beast was indeed a human. When the humans who ruled the ancient world were destroyed by the wrath of the gods, the few surviving humans were embraced by the Mother of All Things as she took pity on them.

The surviving humans?

Yes, the Mother of All Things held them and when the gods momentarily turned their eyes away from the world, she safely anchored them. The children who crawled out of the boat were innocent creatures that knew nothing. With their pure souls, they were able to avoid the eyes of the gods. Then, when the world fell and the gods left, she stayed. The Mother of All Things who had to wait until the destruction was over, was left alone in the human world.

While listening, Lil stared unconsciously at the green shining sea in the distance.

She cried out of sadness because her brothers and sisters had abandoned her, and she cried out of pity for the humans left behind in the barren land. The sea began to recede with her grief. So over the years, the coast where they set off had been transformed into barren land. The water had

evaporated. It's just a little joke, but they say that the original sea didn't have the bitter taste of salt as it has now.

Ed laughed. Lil unconsciously followed his example and smiled without realising it.

Anyway, this was the land the beast discovered. Some of the water that had disappeared came down as rain. The rain fell and fell till it formed rivers. The animals and plants that the gods, who were angry with the humans, didn't pay attention to, were able to survive. The beasts happily settled in a land where life was alive and vibrant.

So, that land

Is the Central Continent we know today.

Lil opened her mouth in astonishment. Thinking about it, there are hundreds of millions of people living on the Central Continent. She couldn't even imagine how long that story had been flowing through time.

*And the fact that someone in the modern world is aware of this distant story*

Lil asked bluntly.

How can I believe you? Can you prove it?

Now the goddess of the sea. Originally, it was just god in the ancient language, but I'll call her a goddess for convenience. The name of the goddess of the sea, Orsay, has long been forgotten. No one calls her Orsay anymore, right? Instead, we use the word mother. Do you know why we call the sea that? She's called the Mother of All Things, but to be more specific, she's the mother of all living things. Even livestock survived by sipping the water of the river squeezed out of her. Plants that were dying were brought up by the rain, humans were even rescued by her hands. Orsay was forgotten, but those innocent children knew. She embraced them and saved them. So the proof you seek can be seen anywhere and everywhere in the present world. Can you believe me now?

Why is this story about the origin not widely known?

Ed shrugged his shoulders, dismissing it as nothing.

Maybe it's not the time to announce it widely.

Ed, who actually was the professor he spoke of and thereby the discoverer and researcher of this myth, decided it'd be best not to say anything about it, simply because he was lazy. He reasoned that if he was ever bored to death, he'd write a book about it. But for the time being, Ed just liked the fact that Lil was the first person to hear this story.

**End of volume 2.**

Chapter 67

Aah!..

Ugh

The non-commissioned officers that had clung to Sagastar's waist and shoulders fell down. The large commodore swung his arm without even thinking about controlling his strength, as a result the defenceless Captain Long was pushed to the end of the drawing room and almost toppled to the floor. The captain, who isn't easily scared, trembled like a man on the verge of death.

Com Commodore

An officer from the Southern Legardon fleet had been watching the disaster unfold and caught the stunned captain. Captain Long staggered and landed with his head on the shoulder of the officer who was just in time to support him. His eyelids fluttered in bewilderment.

Um Who are you?

Im Sergeant Sorola, Sir.

Thank you

The captain stood in the arms of the officer who was a span shorter than himself, and trembled at the sight before him, in his eyes it looked like the world was about to end. Sagastar was enraged enough to beat the local Marchand navy with his bare fists.

*The reason for his rage is understandable. He missed the Admiral because those idiots from the Southern Navy didnt conduct a proper background check. Second Lieutenant Sagastar, If only one person had suspected that strange title, we wouldve been facing the Admiral right now, whod be stuck in jail for identity forgery and impersonation.*

Commodore! Calm down ugh!..

Victor Sa ahhhh!..

No matter how hard Captain Long tried, it was of no use. Sagastars physical strength was the strongest in the fleet. Currently, there are tons of people, including the captain, who were one by one thrown to the floor. Even if the admiral took off his rank and faced the commodore in a fair fight, it would be impossible to win with just pure strength. The captain groaned in confusion.

*One mad Admiral is enough for the fleet, but now even the Commodore is in a state of disarray. Its amusing to have one, but if there are two, its a completely different story The future is getting dark.*

Finally, Sagastar overcame his rage from the first ordeal, returned to his seat and sat down. His hair, which had been neatly tied at first, was messed up in a wretched look. The Captain beckoned a sergeant beside him to do something about the birds nest on the commodores head. The sergeant who received the order approached Sagastar with a comb, looking as if he was going to die. The western and southern navies gathered around the drawing room and were watching the pitiful figure. Fortunately, Sagastar returned to his senses and had his hair brushed without any fuss. Then, only after staring at the scene before him, did Lieutenant Eme start explaining in a flustered manner.

We we were able to decrypt the Mandus Officer code it was the day after we found out he was an imposter.

Are you saying that was the best and fastest you could have done?

Oh no, Commodore

So what else do you know?

The lieutenant no, the fake bastard No, what should I call him? Do you know who the criminal is?

At this point, Commodore Sagastar, who couldnt reveal the admirals identity, stared only fiercely at the bewildered Lieutenant. His eyes lit up as if they were about to burst into flames. With his red

hair and red eyes, Sagastar looked like an incarnation of the fires from hell. Lieutenant Eme quickly corrected the name after wiping the sweat from his forehead.

Anyway, he

The imposter There was an incident He disappeared after he got caught up in a fight with some bums..

What did you say?!

Sagastar, now hearing the second ordeal, slammed his fist on the desk. The Mondovis naval forces realised the gravity of the situation and began to move. Although there was no clear evidence that second Lieutenant Sagastar was their admiral, they felt it in their gut. He had to be the Admiral. And his disappearance called for a response similar to their time at war. Out of Sorolas arms, Captain Long quietly summoned his subordinates. On the other hand, the Legardon navy had no idea what was going on and were merely watching them with interest.

A few days earlier, we received a report about a robbery case on an Erimyan farm. The witness report matched with the description of the criminals given by Sergeant Sorola. The purpose of the theft was either to prepare for a long voyage or to sell it on sea. As either option required a journey towards the ocean, we started with searching the local coasts. During the process of determining the missing persons identity, it was discovered to be a fabrication.

I cant believe you were so complacent!

As Sagastar couldnt stay seated any longer, he jumped up and walked around. Lieutenant Eme stopped talking because he was appalled at what he had possibly done wrong. In response, Sagastar turned around, pierced his cheek with his eyes and waved his hand to continue.

The The witness is here Sergeant Sorola?

Puzzledly, Captain Long looked down at the young navy next to him. Although the sergeant eagerly looked for help, the captain merely shook his head, patted his back and pushed him toward Sagastar. The young sergeant clenched his hat on his chest as if it were his lifeline. He opened his mouth and moistened his lips to prepare for his narration.

The second lieutenant, I mean the fake lieutenant, was accompanied by a small merchant who looked wealthy due to his fancy clothes and accessories. They had six opponents, and from whats been investigated so far, they werent from the Southern League of Pirates. Anyway, I I saw the gang following the two of them into an alleyway, so I ran into the alley to warn the second lieutenant, but the second lieutenant threw an apple at me and it took me out

Sergeant Sorola closed his eyes in shame. Some of the Southern Navy officers chuckled at the content and some even burst into laughter. When giggles were heard from all over the place, Sagastar lashed out with a roar.

Who laughed?!

The spacious drawing room became quiet as if it had been splashed with water. Sagastar growled like a wild beast.

Come forward!

No one came forward.



If you dont come out, I will punish everyone gathered here.

Only then did about ten men step out from the crowd. Sagastar dangerously cleared his throat and the officers immediately straightened their postures. With their chin up, legs spread and hands behind their backs.

You have had the insolence to make a mockery out of your colleague, yet you evaded accountability. Did you let out a laugh that you couldnt even take responsibility for? Ive never seen such a cowardly Imperial Navy in my life. How dare you commit such an act in front of the Vice Admiral of the Empire, who commands the fleet under His Majestys command?! In addition, refusing to acknowledge it, is disrespectful to me and seriously undermines the dignity of the Imperial Navy. I will rule this felony with ten lashes. Lock them up immediately and execute their punishment at noon tomorrow.

Lieutenant Eme, overwhelmed by Sagastars intimidation, shouted to have them drag out immediately. Meanwhile, Sagastar looked at Sorola with an unabashed face.

Continue.

What? Ahh, yes! When When I opened my eyes, the fake lieutenant was already down. I was too far away to confirm if he was dead or alive.

..!

The sound of the possible death led to whispers everywhere. The irritated Sagastar frowned and raised his hand as a signal to shut them up.

I couldnt check it. But his companion tried to deal with their remaining opponents.

Sergeant Sorola kept silent about the fact that hed fled in a daze while yelling to the others to do the same. It was a cowardly act punishable by a minimum of a hundred whips. Nervously, he swallowed his dried saliva, fearing that his lie would be discovered.

How did you escape from that chasm? If that lieutenant collapsed during the battle, its clear that they werent some ordinary thugs.

I I

If you fought against them, chances are you wouldve been kidnapped, too. Did you run away from a fallen comrade?

WWell, I decided I should ask for help.

Really?

Yes, I dashed there with backup troops, but there was nothing left. Fortunately, I remembered where he fell down, but there were no bloodstains there. If the imposter had won, the bodies of those 6 thugs wouldve been left in that alley, but they werent. Assuming that the lieutenant was captured alive, we began the search.

Only then did Sagastar, feeling a little relieved, slowly rubbed his brows. Captain Long quickly approached him and whispered something in his ear.

A message for departure has been sent to the Visha. The rest of the fleet waiting in the Amiaeng will soon be in the region

The agonised Sagastar nodded his head without looking back to his captain. Captain Long turned to Lieutenant Eme instead of Sorola.

Lieutenant, have you searched inside Marchand?

Yes, however the search ended on the third day. So, we put the ships that departed within those three days from the incident on the suspect list and searched the coast. For security reasons, Marchands pilots record the appearance and characteristics of the ships going into and out of the port in detail. I note that over a hundred sailing ships left Marchand in those three days, but if we analyse it more closely

Thats enough. Well read those details in the report.

Yes, Captain.

Sagastar, who had been listening quietly, abruptly crossed the drawing room and approached the window. All eyes in the room followed him. Sagastar came to a halt in front of the recording officer, who was meticulously recording the situation from his desk by the window. Startled by the shadow cast on the paper, the recording officer stood up. Sagastar took a new piece of paper out of the stack on the corner of the desk and handed it to him.

Write this down.

Yes, Commodore.

Chapter 68

The recording officer fixed his glasses and sat down in front of his desk again.

The Central Office of Marchand, as well as several of the Legardon ships, will now be requisitioned under the command of the Mondovi fleet. The Southern Legardon fleet, which is undeniably imputable for this major incident, will aid Mondovi in resolving the case promptly. The matter is regarded as kidnapping. To find the hostages, we will search every ship and every uninhabited island. If the victims cannot be located, we will scour the waters. Anyone who neglects his duties, from sailors to officers, will be severely punished.

[ Vice Admiral Viktor Sagastar of Mondovi. ]

Sagastar put his signature under the completed document. Lieutenant Eme was wondering why the commodore was wearing the title of Vice Admiral, but came to his senses and approached Sagastar when Captain Long pushed his back. The lieutenant, who was only in charge of managing the military officers until his senior would return from the Legardon headquarters, had an internal conflict over whether he could sign to such an important task. But now that he was standing near Sagastar, he felt pressured into signing it. He reluctantly took up the quill and wrote his name.

[ Lieutenant Dilire Eme of Legardon. ]

Immediately after, the recording officer quickly made two copies of the document and handed it back to them. Sagastar only signed one of them, and then took the lieutenants quill as he was about to sign the second paper.

We will delay our reports to Sesbron for about 30 days at the discretion of the Mondovi fleet. In other words, the time given to you is a month. If the hostages are not rescued by then, His Majesty will be directly involved in this matter.

When he slowly turned, Sagastar looked around the crowd and declared.

If it happens to come that far, you'd better be prepared to die.

\*\*\*

Ed was walking over the market when a sudden chill made his body shiver.

Hm, I'm feeling a rather strange chill.

*I usually feel this kind of chill as a warning just before Sagastar explodes, so I can always take cover before it's too late. But why now?*

Ed tilted his head and gently stroked his arm. As he made his way out of the market, he looked around him. Children with palm fruits were running around the edge of the market. The streets were buzzing with the mixed sounds of carts rolling over with loads and the voices of men and women of all ages. Ed passed a woman walking in haste while carrying a large basket.

*If a week has passed and the wind has been good, the fleet might have arrived at the coast of Marchand by now. I ordered them to leave Sagastar out of it, but I can easily guess that Sagastar would somehow stick to the Visha. They probably didn't even try to land in Amiaeng. In fact, even if I did say, Do whatever you want, it wasn't an order, so Sagastar couldn't annihilate the pirates even if he wanted to. That stubborn man is a human being who can read between those lines. So, he must be on the Visha. The reason for the Visha is obvious as that ship is much faster than the Grignard. He's most likely dragging my medium-sized sailing ship in the hope to catch me much quicker. Moreover, he'll definitely get off the yacht and spy on Marchand without quietly waiting in the waters of Marchand as I told them to. If so, that naval officer..!*

Ed recalled a fact he'd forgotten. Sergeant Sorola. The young officer had run away after witnessing Ed lying on the ground. At the time, Ed introduced himself as a second lieutenant from the Navy, so there's a great possibility that a search would have taken place to rescue him.

*If that's the case, Sagastar, who would've heard about it in Marchand, could very well suspect my kidnapping or death. Whether I lived or died, Sagastar is a man who could only be convinced by seeing it with his eyes.*

Well, then

Ed entered the inn, took the stairs, and walked down the creaky hallway on the second floor. Lil went into the last room earlier. So Ed knocked on the door of the room next to it. Hearing the sound of a sigh, it seemed to be that someone was inside.

It's me.

Judging from the lack of response and the following silence, the room seemed to be right. Ed waited a little longer. After a while, Cesar appeared through the open door. He just stood there quietly without telling him to come in or asking why he came. As he'd never seen him so gloomy, Ed opened his mouth first.

Is this a bad time?

Well, personally I like to solve this matter the sooner the better. So, I'll keep it brief. How did you track me and Liloa?

Cesar became very annoyed by how Ed referred to her as Liloa. Lil didnt know any better than that Ed saw her as a man, so she didnt give an extensive explanation for the wound on her neck. Cesar, however, was very suspicious about Eds intention to leave such marks on her body. He heard her vague explanation, but he didnt see it in person, thats why he thought there wouldve been enough other ways to fight back. But his pride wouldnt let him ask Ed directly, so Cesar examined Eds face carefully, looking for the sign of a man in love, like himself.

Hey, arent I supposed to be an uninvited guest? Why are you looking at me like Im the one you miss so much?

However, Eds face was only light, and there was no sign of jealousy or vigilance at all.

I overheard a conversation of the Marchand Navy.

What was it about?

Answer me quickly, Sagastar may have already started to go crazy.

It was said that the person claiming to be Commodore Sagastars brother was kidnapped and that the suspects were dressed in the same manner as those who stole Erimyan from a farm. No lockdown was issued, instead, they forced all vessels leaving Marchand to go through a checkpoint. There were rumours that the Erimyan was stolen to be sold, but since the robbery was impulsively executed, I assumed that it was stolen in preparation for a long voyage. After that, we simply followed the route to the ocean.

Did those officers believe that the Sagastar family has a second son?

It seemed so that evening, but its probably only a matter of time before they discover the truth.

I see

Is the fleet in Marchand?

Its either arriving soon, or it has already been there.

*Its been a week since Cesar left Marchand, so the information Sagastar will receive will be more accurate. Maybe the situation is even worse than I initially thought.*

All right, Ill take my leave now.

Ed waved his hand and walked back down the hallway. As for now, delivering a message became his number one priority.

*I have to send word that Im alive and well. Otherwise, Sagastar will start looking for a needle in a haystack*

Ed returned to his room, locked the door and opened the medicine box that someone had left on the table.

*Im glad someone brought it here, it wouldve been troublesome if the incense was still on the Bell Rock!*

In a panic, Ed rummaged through the medicine box with his hands. Empty bottles were everywhere. The missing oil was the first thing that caught his eye. Normally, various goods were perfumed during his outing, but he sealed the oil safely away in a small bottle as his pigeon wasnt supposed to arrive at an unexpected time. Without the scent, his pigeon, which had left the fleet by now, wouldnt

be able to locate Ed. Ed doesn't know where on the map the island of Panichi is located, thus he has no idea how close or distant his pigeon is. In the face of this possible problem, Ed rolled his head with heat.

*Knock, knock*

A knock interrupted Ed. He ignored it at first, but after some time had passed, he heard the same sound again.

*Knock, knock*

Twice at intervals. Ed knew who was standing in front of the door without having to check. He swung the door open, and as he expected, it was Cesar standing in front of him, waiting.

I have something to tell you.

Ed was sure Cesar had taken the oil and his other medicine bottles.

What do you want? You want me to get off the Bell Rock?

Cesar entered the room without answering. Ed, who frowned, took a few steps back and waited for Cesar to carefully shut the door behind him. Cesar looked at the open medicine cabinet and spoke.

I'll send a letter for now as Sir Viktor might be moving the fleet. I don't want any unnecessary problems to occur.

What kind of password or code do you use?

Ed snorted, walked to the bed and flopped down. He sat so heavily that his wound ached. Ed almost screamed, but he held back with all his might and ended up swallowing his groan while looking at Cesar.

Since the fleet is in Marchand, I know what you're thinking, Captain\*, but I just want to keep the Visha close, I have no intention to attack the Bell Rock.

I don't trust you.

So you think I'll just give you the password?

I can't write something I don't know. I need to write something convincing.

Then do you think Sagastar will believe that the sender is me?

Chapter 69

He's a very capricious man, I know. That's why he needs proof.

Hey, you're clearly not aware of how far Sagastar's meticulous personality goes. Besides, Sagastar now thinks I've been kidnapped by pirates. Or dead. And in the midst of that delusion, the code suddenly changed?

If I were Sagastar, I'd assume that even the pigeon's oil had been taken away. He might think I'm dead, but Sagastar will never leave his suspicions behind. Do you think I invented a code that can be easily imitated by impostors? The knowledge is available to me and me only.

The code itself proves that it's me.

Nevertheless, Cesar shook his head sternly and refused to admit defeat. Ed knew all too well that he had created a situation where he'd look extremely suspicious. With the interference of Duke Mireille and Ed himself showing interest in Lil, it wasn't unreasonable to think that he would signal his fleet and forcefully take Lil. However, he didn't want to explain what he thought of Lil.

Unless you become me, you won't be able to take away those doubts. What else can you do?

Ed raised his eyebrows once as if he couldn't help it. Although Cesar's expression was grim, he didn't take his eyes off Ed's unreadable face.

*As Edgar mentioned, it's indeed possible that he's acting independently from the Duke as Mireille would never have tolerated such a delay.*

Ever since Ed got injured on Lil's behalf, Cesar has been wondering what Ed's true objective on boarding the Bell Rock had been.

*It's obvious that he's interested in Liloa. But in what kind of way? Is it simple interest? Plain curiosity? Or love?*

When Ed grabbed his stomach, Cesar's eyes were automatically drawn to the wound.

Your threat of harming Liloa is useless now. And this time, I have the upper hand. You see, it's not just the incense that I took from your luggage. The fact that those other medicine bottles contain a colourless and odourless liquid means that they've been processed so precisely for a reason. As I couldn't tell them apart, I took all of them.

Allow me to explain a possible scenario to you, I can set up a bunch of sentries to cut off your contact with the outside world and mix one of those unknown potions into one of your daily meals. This island is a closed-off place and as an outsider, no one would be willing to help you.

Still. The code is confidential. I can't tell you. Don't you ever want to go back to the capital? Just knowing it is enough to accuse you of treason, so I advise you not to dig any deeper.

Cesar kept silent and ground his teeth.

*Among the potions I brought in, there's at least one that works as a truth serum. But what if my random choice turns out to be a deadly poison? Even after a week of experimenting on rats, I can only divide them between poisonous and non-poisonous.*

Using one of the potions now would be a big gamble for both Ed and Cesar.

Don't do anything rash. Some of the drugs you took are really dangerous. Let me make a suggestion instead, Captain. Bring me any book you read. That will do. I'll write using that title so that you can verify the content. That's all.

It's not the official code, but it can't be helped. You can try using the official code system, but Sagastar won't believe it.

Think about it. This is the best option for you and me, so just do what I say. I don't like Sagastar turning over the South either. When I return to the fleet, that will only lead to an increase of unnecessary work, which then increases the likelihood of me having to stay in this terrible sunlit South. Besides, I wasn't interested in the southern pirates in the first place. I'm not planning to give myself more work.

And to give you a more convincing reason, as you said, I have no intention of killing Liloa.

You saw it yourself, so dont ignore the fact I blocked the bullet meant for her. Isnt that enough proof?

Or do you think I got shot for my own amusement? You can call me eccentric, but Im not that crazy.

Gunshot wounds are hard to predict as the path of the bullet can be redirected by the muscles in the body, or it can get lodged in the bone and thereby unable to be taken out. Of course, one doesnt necessarily die if its not taken out

But anyway, if I had got shot in the wrong way, I might have died on the spot or died of excessive blood loss later even before I was transferred to the Bell Rock. No matter how rare a genius I may be, Im not the Mother of All Things that controls fate or someone whos arrogant enough thinks he can manipulate it.

Cesar, clearly displeased with the fact that Ed had risked his life for Lil, took another look at him trying to find a hint of affection in those eyes. But Ed instinctively hid such signs. It was the beginning of a silent war where Cesar didnt ask Ed out of pride and Ed didnt elaborate on the reason for his sacrifice.

Ed realised that Cesar was suspicious of his affection. He could tell because the glances that were shot at him were so intense that it was impossible not to know what they meant. But it was understandable, it wouldve been stranger if a lover wasnt feeling envious when another person casually talks about the one they love. However, Ed was sceptical about Cesars ability to fully understand Lil.

*Is their connection deserving of the moniker lovers? Cesar is obviously involved in Liloas disappearance from the Dukes residence. I can easily guess that Cesar was the one who helped Liloa in gaining her freedom. Liloa must have really yearned for that freedom. And I must say, running to the South and becoming a pirate Captain can certainly be called freedom. But Liloas joyful expression earlier almost reminded me of a cute little chick breaking out of its shell. She looked like a person who was surprised to hear her own voice flowing into the world for the first time. Instead of it being a mere echo within herself. She must have been unaware of her voice. That shouldnt have been the first time if she shared everything with her lover. But she showed her slightly clumsy attitude in front of me of all people, someone whom shes been wary of since the beginning.*

Ed found it disturbing. So, he didnt avoid Cesars eyes.

*Does he truly think he knows her? What the hell does he think their relationship is based on?*

As youre so desperately trying to convince me, Ive nothing more to say about this matter. It seems that you have only just begun to build a bond with Liloa, so a person who suffered so much because of his curiosity wouldnt want to blow up that opportunity in an instant.

You understand me very well.

What kind of book do you need?

The book had to be chosen carefully. Even the same book couldve been edited differently, or it could be a book that wasnt on the bookshelf of the admirals office. However, the more detailed Ed would explain it, the more likely it was that Cesar would discover the method. Ed pondered for a moment and continued without having any choice.

Bring anything except for a textbook, Ill trust your insight.

The sun went down.

Lil had been sitting there even after Ed left.

*No, it might be someone else wearing Eds skin. Was that really him?*

Lil remembered his face, which was smiling so brightly like he couldnt stop himself, and he gazed upon her as if she were an important and interesting person. His stare had an entirely different significance for Lil; she felt like she wasnt just a woman with a womb, born to please her husband by bearing children.

*Does he know what he was talking about?*

As her face had slowly turned red, she didnt dare to ask him, so she had no idea what he was so happy about.

*Was he glad to meet someone who shares the same thoughts as him? I know I was, but for Ed, it may have been different. Maybe hes someone who finds joy in discovering a priceless treasure He was really convinced I have something like a seed inside me*

But Lil never thought of herself as such a great person. Ed had followed her eyes eagerly as if he were looking at someone standing on a high podium. At first, Lil had looked elsewhere, but eventually, she returned to his green eyes. His shining eyes were clearer than the sea off the coast of Panichi. It had puzzled her how they could look so transparent.

Lil looked down at the list of crew members in front of her. Only one applicant was written on the blank paper. Under that one sentence she began to scribble something.

[ Ed Limbs intact great doctor able to play musical instruments ]

Lils mind couldnt stop wondering about him. Hes someone who emerged out of nowhere as a companion on the path where shed been wandering alone for more than 20 years. She grew tired of walking every day on an endless road with no end in sight, whether it was a month, a year, or 20 years. Lil had given up on her predictions of what would happen at the end and who would arrive. So, how couldnt she be intrigued by Eds sudden appearance?

Lil always had one returning thought.

*If one day I meet my companion, the first thing Ill say is that Im pleased to meet him. Then I will say Ive been alone for too long, and Ill ask, who the hell are you? Where did you come from? What caused you to walk on this endless road with me? Did you spend a long time alone, too?*

Chapter 70

Lil was very curious about what kind of life Ed had.

In terms of power play, the empire is the epitome of discrimination. It wasnt unreasonable for the Southern people, who are suffering from this discrimination, to think they were no different from the invaders. Lil shared the beliefs that those southerners had, but she noticed that the mainlanders didnt. However, the word equality was regularly mentioned in the empire, which was seeing significant changes in status due to the infusion of gold and capital. But, the equality demanded by the middle class was solely for the purpose of eliminating the nobles and capitalists, other classes were thoroughly excluded from this discussion.



Lil didnt know Eds exact hometown, but he told her was from the North. She also heard him using a flawless Sesbron accent, so she knew he frequented the capital on the mainland.

*Does he think that human lives are all the same because hes a doctor? But*

The doctors that Lil had met so far did not. Then she remembered the time when she saw traces of torture on his back.

*Is it because youve also been treated harshly?*

Even so, it appeared to be a hasty conclusion. After exhausting all potential explanations, Lil determined there was nothing else she could ascribe Eds beliefs to as she simply didnt know much about him.

Filled with disappointment, she thought to herself.

*Should I ask him?*

No way!

Surprised by Lils sudden shout, Jericho woke up in an instant. At the same time, Lil quickly brushed off her stubborn feelings of regret. Jericho with his half-open eyes shook his head and looked up at Lil. He then raised his body, leaned forward and put his head on her thigh. This action was met with a kick in his side from Lil.

Gosh!

What are you doing?!

CapCaptain?!

Still only half awake, Jericho looked at her with a bewildered expression.

I told you to keep your seat. Who permitted you to lie down?

Jericho looked around frantically as if he had finally come to his senses. His eyes were met with sunset everywhere.

Has it already been half a day?

Yes.

What?

Jericho lamented while repeatedly hitting his forehead on the desk. He decided to punish himself before Lil could kick him again.

Oh, no, no

Lil spoke inwardly.

After all, there were no applicants. You or I, we didnt meet anyone new

she stopped his odd self-harm by grabbing his neck.

Jericho, stop hitting your head and listen to me.

Yes?

Whats your hometown? Palconae?

Aye, Captain.

Right.

Lil got up, grabbed her hat and looked at her surroundings. She had something to say to Anunchio and was planning to go straight to his house. When Jericho saw her finishing her work earlier than expected, he got up behind her and opened his mouth.

Were done for today?

Yes.

Oh, thats great! Well, not a single person showed up

Aye. The Bell Rocks doomed.

Thats right, Captain.

Seeing you eagerly agreeing like this, shouldnt you be heading back to Palconae, too?

Jericho pushed the chair under the desk with one hand and rubbed his mouth with the other.

The Captain once told me that if I work until my retirement, I would make enough money to buy a house with a decent piece of land. Then I can get married, raise my children, and eat and live with dignity until Im old.

I did say that.

My wifes a seamstress with her own shop, so were both working hard to make that dream come true. Also, were both in good health, a baby might be born sooner than later Those other sailors may have left for now, but all they can do is receive their savings and spend it on unnecessary things. When they do that, theyll be broke in a month and need to get back on a ship. I dont want to live like that.

Youre right.

And if youre on the Bell Rock, you dont get beaten, right? On a previous ship, I was once almost whipped to death. I dont want to experience something like that again.

Yeah. Good motive.

When Lil moved, Jericho followed her even without knowing where she was going. She then bought three bottles of qanyon from a nearby stall. Jericho smacked his lips and stared at the liquor in her hand. Seeing the drooling sailor, Lil frowned displeased.

Didnt you already have your share yesterday? Looking at how you slept through your work today, I can only imagine how bad it was.

What does that have to do with anything? When you land on an island, youve to drink and rest a lot so that you can restore your energy to work on the ship again Are you heading to Captain Anunchios?

Aye.

Good.

Jericho walked alongside Lil as she quickly turned and resumed walking. Lil didnt allow him to come with her, but she also didnt make any effort to get rid of him. So in the end the smiling Jericho followed suit.

Actually, when I first saw the Captain, I thought you would be awful. I think it might be because of your pale and gloomy face. But that particular day in Amiaeng, that old man and I were chased by this loan shark and the Bell Rock was the only vessel sailing that day. So I had no choice but to get on board, even though I didnt want to. Back then, I would never think I would end up staying here.

And when you declared you would rule without the whip, I looked down on the Captain a little. In the Empire, even 10-year-old boys raised to become officers are taught to cut the backs of elders old enough to be their grandpas. So, I thought it was ridiculous that a Captain said he wouldnt do it. But now we know, its because the Captain cares about us, huh?

Its embarrassing to admit, isnt it? Hm?

Its not that I care about you guys

In response to her frank remark, Jericho nudged Lils forearm with his elbow. When she turned around, he had a devious smirk on his face that she had never seen before, and Lil whacked his elbow with her hand.

You crazy guy!

Heh, youre embarrassed.

Get your ugly face away from me.

After Lil gave him a look of intense discomfort, Jericho hastily cleared his throat and murmured.

Why are you so eccentric?

But Lil didnt respond, so they walked quietly down the street in a silence that became more awkward with every passing second. Especially, when this silence was only between the two of them as the rest of the surroundings were noisy. Jericho, who had been looking around the bustling market for a bit, tapped Lils shoulder again.

CapCaptain.

What?

I think Im just annoyed that the Bell Rocks going out of business, dont take my teasing personally.

Huh?

When the navigator went crazy and started talking about how he was planning to rescue the Captain, he also said that he would reward hefty sums as compensation for everyone who joined. Despite all that money, I wouldnt have participated if the Captain wasnt the Captain. Anyhow, what Im trying to say is everyone knows this. So dont worry too much because soon people will assemble like clouds, fighting to be on the Bell Rock.

As Lil quietly turned to face the grinning Jericho, she debated whether or not she should tell him that she was resigning as captain.

Jericho.

Yes?

Didn't you learn a lot from that old man and Cesar?

Without Lil and Cesar, Alain will probably be chosen as the new captain. Marenzio would be her second guess as he has the ability to rise, but he's more likely to be beaten in politics and would lose the vote as his head is only filled with sawdust. In the end, if Alain will be elected, the position of boatswain would become available, so Lil reasoned that Jericho could serve as both the navigator and the boatswain.

Isn't it your dream to become a boatswain or a navigator?

Yeah, well I gave that up because I was planning on staying on the Bell Rock for a longer time. Anyway, as long as that old man doesn't die, he'll retire with me, and the navigator goes with the captain, right? I like how things are going. No big complaints.

When Jericho scratched the back of his head awkwardly, Lil nodded weakly and walked around the last corner. The house that they were heading to was located in this alley. The majority of the southern structures were modest and made of wood and soil. The curved road they were walking on was packed with light grey-white buildings with two or three floors. Lil passed several similar-looking residents and knocked on the door of the largest one.

Who is it?

Lil.

Oh!

When she heard the raucous voice, she knew it wasn't Anunchio who was opening the door. Lil looked up at the man with shoulder-length curly hair and a sharp moustache in the shape of an upside-down goose. As he curled the end of his moustache with his delicate fingertips, he held out his other hand as if he was pleased.

Long time no see, Lil Schweiz.

Great to see you, Jarles\*.

Lil shook his hand and walked into the building. High-pitched voices could already be heard from the room where the drinking party was happening and in the living room they passed, a group of people were playing cards. It was normal for this house to be so crowded as the owner is in command of the island. Lil followed Jarles and went into the kitchen. Anunchio and some captains from the League were gathered and conversing around a brightly lit table. Anunchio, who was speaking to a captain with short hair, raised his head.

Lil is here.

Those who turned their heads following Anunchio also greeted Lil.

Lil Schweiz! Long time no see!..

Oh, Black Whale. How are you!..

Lil removed her hat and greeted them as Jarles pointed to the chair next to him.