

NORTH X NORTHWEST

Chapter 8

Lil laughed gently, she squeezed out all the information a guard on his level could know. It was only a smile out of satisfaction, but the pathetic guard interpreted it as an invitation. A rough hand approached her. Lil pushed the hand down with her fan before it could touch her chin.

“Oh, God no. No! How dare you touch her? You need to pay in advance.”

Ed intervened between Lil and the guard, making the startled guard take a step back. As a sign of superiority, Ed corrected his posture.

‘He’s a bit too immersed in his role.’

Lil looked up at Ed and waved her unfolded fan in the air again. Her lips, which were now covered by her fan, seemed bent attractively.

“If you ever come by, ask for Lil.”

“I, I’ll do that.”

Ed tried to stay true to his given role till the end and kept imitating the appearance of a bodyguard. Lil criticised the clumsy steps for being more like a man in need than that of a tough guy.

By the time they were out of sight, he asked dejectedly.

“Why? Isn’t this similar?”

“No. Not at all.”

By the cold reply, Ed soon felt discouraged, straightened his knees again, and walked sullenly. Lil watched the sunset-filled sky.

“I’m done with my business now.”

She had to return to the accommodation, where she stayed with the sailors, before nightfall. They need to have an important meeting to prepare for the Admiral’s arrival.

“Where’s your house? Let’s go.”

“Oh? Did you finally accept me?”

“Yeah.”

Ed frivolously took the lead. Lil stared at his back and shrugged her shoulders, feeling irritated. Unaware of her gaze, Ed looked back to reassure her it was only a short walk.

‘When we headed to the Count’s house, it felt quite far, but we’re already back.’

Lil looked at the sign where they’d stopped.

“Oh, are you staying in this inn? You don’t live in a house? You sounded like you lived in Amiaeng for a long time, but you must not be a native.”

“I travel a lot for work. Still, I know Amiaeng better than the natives here, don’t you think?”

Lil followed Ed into the inn where she first saw him. Smoke from cigarettes and cigars mixed with the smell of alcohol filled the enclosed space. The vicious drinking game was still lively, but now, in addition to that, naked skin was fluttering all over the place. The scent made her sway back and forth, in an attempt to get rid of it, Lil fanned endlessly.

‘Even after experiencing this for years, I can’t get used to the smell of tobacco.’

Eyes, smeared with makeup, quickly became wet. She raised her nostrils and lowered her eyebrows to squeeze out the tears. With difficulty, a drop came out and dripped down her face.

While having a runny nose, she made her way past a few gambling tables, finding the barkeeper.

“Bring a bottle of Qanyon to this gentleman’s room.”

Ed glanced back.

“Qanyon?”

“It’s my drink. Let’s go.”

She rolled her eyes and patted his shoulder, signalling to take the lead. However, Ed turned around and wrapped his arm around her waist.

“Why are you treating me like a girl?”

Lil dabbed her runny nose with her sleeve and slapped his arm. Of course, he didn’t budge. For the last few steps of the stairs, Ed picked her up in a swift motion as she struggled in his arms with her feet dangling in the air till they made it to the room. After entering, Ed closed the door and put her down. Lil staggered for a bit, but moved away steadily, still feeling wary of him. Ed only grinned at her behaviour and unwrapped his cravat.

“Did you suddenly become delicate? Why are you acting like this?”

“So noisy. Let’s just get it over with it.”

“I don’t think I’m going to get it done quickly.”

“Hm, we’ll see.”

Lil entered the bathroom to wipe her face stained with tears and makeup. She blew her nose and called from the bathroom, checking if Ed might come in.

“Can you hear anything?”

Lil deliberately made a few loud sounds. Reassured, she rummaged through a small leather pouch she took from her chest and pulled out a slender vial about the size of a ring finger. When she opened the lid, a slightly bitter smell emanated. Using her fan, she blew away the scent.

'The amount is just right.'

She took a deep breath and smiled. Turned around and opened the bathroom door.

"Is the Qanyon here?"

Ed was already filling his glass with Qanyon. Approaching him, she picked up an empty glass.

'Qanyon's not only very fragrant but also has a terrible taste. It'll cover the remaining flavour and the first effects of the sleeping pills.'

Ed started humming happily. Because of that, Lil gritted her teeth inwardly but laughed excitedly on the outside.

'Pervert, I'll punish you soon.'

When the yellow-brownish liquid filled the cup, Lil asked Ed to bring a towel from the shelf. Ed turned his back without a single doubt whether it was due to excitement, a lack of vigilance, or something else completely.

'It wasn't unheard of for someone who turned his back to consume a drug-filled drink.'

Lil casually took the towel he brought and wiped her face.

"You like Qanyon, don't you?"

"Well, it's alright."

"Can't believe people like a liquor that strong, I prefer wine."

She was not interested whether Ed liked wine or not. But for the sake of her acting, she nodded.

“Shall we have a drink now?”

Lil bumped her glass into his and drank it all at once. Ed stared at her, clearly surprised when he saw the already empty bottom of the glass.

“I can’t believe you drink it like that. You have to savour it with both your nose and tongue...”

“Stop talking about noble things.”

He tried to enjoy it slowly, but there would be no man who could stay still when they saw the woman in front of them pouring a bottle of Qanyon. As soon as Lil held the empty cup and smiled, Ed took the glass to his mouth. Unsurprisingly, he also drank the glass at once. Lil put down the glasses and grabbed his shirt.

“What shall we do now?”

The eyes that she looked in were already hazy. Ed shook his head a couple of times, unsure if it was due to sudden drunkenness or some kind of trick. He staggered and tried to grab Lil’s wrists, which were still holding his collar. However, the force coming from his arms wasn’t even enough to kill a mosquito.

Lil smiled when she saw his face full of doubt turn into that of realisation. His eyes and mouth, which had been lively all day, were quiet.

“You...”

She wasn’t afraid of the growling man, who was slowly losing his mind.

“Yeah? What am I?”

“The drink...”

‘As expected, the effectiveness of the drug is fast.’

Ed's outstretched arm fell. While holding his head, she watched him slowly sink to the ground.

"I told you I wasn't a prostitute, right? According to Sesbron's etiquette, it's a crime to be a pervert."

"..."

When she pushed hard, his unconscious body collapsed on the bed.

"Consider your work paid by letting you stay by my side for half a day."

Before he even opened his eyes, Ed noticed something was wrong with his body. He felt like he survived a storm and got washed ashore. His limbs were stretched and he held no strength in his bones. Consciousness came and went in a repeating manner, just like a wave curling on the beach, up high before being pushed back down again.

'It feels warm. It seems my senses are finally coming back.'

The sun was blazing on his cheek, making him wonder if he'd actually been dumped on the beach after taking the drugs. Ed tried to wake himself up, but his body didn't cooperate.

'Fuck, this is all because of those damn sleeping pills...'

He opened his eyes wide. He was lying on a bed, unharmed. Of course, he tried to get up right away.

'Why can't I move?'

Ed 'deliberately' drank the glass Lil gave him despite knowing it was drugged with sleeping pills.

'However, the sleeping pills don't explain the immobility of my limbs.'

He looked in the direction of his right arm, but even after giving it strength, it didn't come into view. The sun shone also from the right side, making him

squint his eyes. Ed soon noticed that his wrist was connected to the bedpost. He glanced back at his left arm and subsequently looked down. His arm and legs were in a similar state, tightly held in place with a piece of torn fabric.

'Where are my...clothes?'

As the situation slowly dawned on him, the sound of creaking footsteps walking down the hallway stopped in front of the door.

"Cleaning. Can I go in?"

"..."

Ed didn't respond. At first glance, there weren't any clothes within his eyesight. It wasn't implausible to think he was completely stripped naked.

'Should I shout 'no' and solve this myself or ask the man behind the door for help?'

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