

NORTH X NORTHWEST

Chapter 9

The innkeeper, now standing in the doorway, stared at Ed with his mouth wide open. Surprised by the scene in front of him. The confusion in his face made way for an expression clearly stating, 'I don't know and I don't want to know.' For a while, they stared at each other in awkward silence.

Suddenly there was a burst of laughter coming from the bed.

"Ha...Haha...HAHAHA...!"

Frozen in place, the innkeeper didn't know how to react to the sight of an almost naked man, who had his limbs bound to the bed and was laughing like a madman.

The laughter only grew louder.

"...He must be crazy..."

Mumbling to himself, the innkeeper was close to calling security but turned around again. It was because something suspicious flashed into his view. The man squinted his eyes. After a quick glimpse, a tattoo became visible on the man's left upper arm. The innkeeper sighed and stepped into the room. When he looked a bit closer, he was certain.

'I'm reluctant to approach him, but this man...'

After hesitating.

"Are you in the Navy?"

Even though he said it, he had a perplexed impression on his face. The innkeeper made his way to the bed and released one of the man's legs.

'Although he's still laughing, he doesn't seem to be completely crazy, seeing how he's just laying still on the bed without any convulsions or seizures.'

After reaching that conclusion, the innkeeper untied all of Ed's limbs one for one.

The laughter stopped.

"Innkeeper."

The man looked down at Ed, surprised by the sudden calmness of his voice.

"Get me some clothes. I paid in advance, which should be enough."

The innkeeper nodded and was about to leave the room.

"Innkeeper."

The man looked back silently.

"Do you remember the dark-haired woman who was with me yesterday?"

"Ah, yes."

"Does she come here often?"

"No, sir. It was the first time I saw her. I'm sure of it. I won't forget a face like that."

A moment later Ed got dressed in the shabby clothes the innkeeper brought and rolled up his sleeves.

'I haven't washed my hair or shaved my face in a few days and I'm even wearing these worn-out clothes. If people saw me like this, they'd probably throw me a coin if I held up my hand.'

Ed went downstairs and took off his eyepatch. He swept his hair out of his face, revealing his intact green eye. When he opened the door of the inn, he was blinded by the blazing sun.

'Are there still some side effects left?'

"Damn it."

He shook his head and turned left towards the count's house. He wanted to change out of these clothes as quickly as possible. A musty smell started to vibrate from them as if they were stored in a dusty warehouse all this time. The lack of silk made Ed even more uncomfortable. Because of that, he fastened his pace.

"Sir!"

Ed was already halfway down the road to the mansion when he recognized the Innkeeper's voice. He didn't bother to look back.

"You told me the upfront payment was enough for the clothes."

"That's not it."

Only then did Ed turn his head, welcomed by a piece of paper dangling in front of his face.

"What's this?"

"I found it near the bed, and something is written on it."

"Oh, thank you."

Out of habit, Ed wanted to throw some coins, completely forgetting he had no money on him. There was even a big hole in his pocket, making his hand go straight through it. He was surprised when his fingers touched his thigh. After pondering for a while, he took out his hand. The innkeeper glanced at the empty hand, grumbled, and went back the way he'd come.

Ed cursed at the back of the man's head.

'He found me naked, robbed, and tied with a piece of cloth, what did he expect?'

Ed raised his hand and looked at the paper. Two letters were signed on the outside, written in beautiful handwriting.

[Ed]

Ed thought about the meaning because it was a name no one ever called him. Suddenly he remembered his introduction to Liloa from yesterday. He smiled and turned over the letter to see if there was more written on it. Meanwhile, he passed the main gate of the count's residence without being stopped. He flattened the paper, it seemed to be written and folded in a hurry.

[Ed, or whatever your name is. I'm writing to tell you that, I, Lil, have punished you with grace and respect in accordance with the Sesbron custom. You lunatic, did you really think I'd comply with your wishes? Why in the world would I lay with a pervert? As a way of showing some mercy for the efforts you've made, I chose not to strip you naked. I've thrown out everything that's of any value. Feel free to search for those items out on the street if you so wish.]

The corners of his mouth lifted up.

'She could have left at any moment, but instead, she lured me into the inn to have her revenge. It was worthwhile to take those sleeping pills.'

"I'm quite fond of this one."

'In the beginning, I just wanted to see if she was actually planning to sleep with me. Like our first encounter, I tried to check if she was a real prostitute or not. Of course, I'd broke things off if it went too far, but after she ordered the Qanyon and obediently went to the room, I could guess what was about to happen. My speculations were confirmed when the scent of sleeping herbs

entered the room. She probably didn't smell it herself because of her runny nose.'

Ed stood in the middle of the hallway and laughed out loud.

'I hadn't had so much fun in years.'

"Oh, no! When did you come in, Admiral!"

The count suddenly appeared from the second floor and ran down the stairs towards Ed. Because of the thick layers of fat, no one could tell where his chin ended or his neck began. Ed walked past the count, who was coming down, and strode up the stairs, still chuckling. The chubby body of the count turned around and followed him up again.

Ed spoke without looking back.

"Count. If you were to lie on the stairs naked, I won't be able to spot you."

"What?"

"Do that when the pirates come next time. Your fat will protect you."

"Huh?"

"Never mind."

Even though the count wasn't able to understand Ed, he seemed happy. It was probably because he thought they became close, seeing that Ed had spoken to him longer than normal. He fastened his steps and started to walk alongside Ed, in response Ed raised an eyebrow and doubled his stride.

"But what happened to your lip, Admiral? And the wound on your neck..."

"Don't worry about it."

"It was those pirates, wasn't it?"

"Don't mind it."

“Oh no, this can’t be! Some bastards dared to touch the Admiral of the Peninsula!”

“Stop it.”

“No, no, you should see a doctor right now!”

“I said stop it.”

“Hey! Where are you going?”

– *Bang!* –

Startled, the count of Amiaeng looked at the slammed door in front of him. Luckily for him, he delayed his last step. Otherwise, he would’ve had a broken nose by now.

“...Oh, my. What an eccentric fellow...”

He mumbled and took a step back. Suddenly, the door opened again and Ed’s face popped out. The count freaked out, worried that Ed may have heard him, but Ed only showed interest in the bunch of papers in his chubby hands.

“What’s that you’re holding?”

“Oh, here’s the additional report on the Amiaeng pirates. It’s about a pirate named ‘Lil Schweiz’ who raided a Garni merchant ship a few weeks ago...”

Ed snatched the report and swiftly closed the door, leaving merely a small gap behind.

“I’m tired of people calling me eccentric. Next time, you should come up with something new.”

– *Bang* –

Once more, the heavy door shut in his face.

The sound of the count's sullen footsteps faded away. Ed took off his clothes and put on a robe. He grabbed a glass of wine and sat across the count's desk, using it as if it were his, to begin with.

'Lil is neither living in Amiaeng nor working as a prostitute... She said it was not her first time coming here, but she didn't even know where the Count's house was. Even if the Count's mansion is quite a distance from downtown... also it's absurd to think that with her level of skills she had to turn to prostitution. No, even so, Liloa's pride wouldn't allow that... And even if she said her clients are in the Navy, it didn't seem that she had much intel on hand. It's as if she just arrived and heard the news.

If I'm right, we need to investigate the ships that just entered the port, for a woman with black hair...No. Her appearance is too noticeable, she would've been in disguise upon stepping off the ship. When I first saw her, she grabbed me by the collar violently and raised her fist... From that threat...'

[A short and skinny man.]

Ed happily wrote down the order to find a short and skinny man with black hair among the sailors that just landed.

The thought of being tied up on the bed made him laugh again.

"It's not a normal bet, but I look forward to seeing you again."

'She was quite determined about entering the Count's mansion, so she'll come here eventually. She said she wanted to serve the Count, but it was obviously a lie. Her interest seemed to be with the Mondovi fleet... It's way easier for her to mingle in conversations as a prostitute than as a short and skinny man, that's for sure.'

"It's been a long time since I last saw you."

He sealed the order with wax and glanced at the pile of reports set aside on the desk. While having auditory hallucinations about the emperor, nagging

him about Amiaeng, he extended his arms to pull the papers he received from the count but paused halfway.

“There is something much more pleasant to do, I don’t want to waste my time on the pirates of Amiaeng.”

Ed got up, stretched and grabbed the terrace’s door knobs. The hot southern wind blew in through the wide-open double doors. Due to the sudden wind, the reports fluttered like birds spreading their wings.

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