

48 Hours 111

Chapter 111: Black Sail XVI

“The names of all the appraisers in Nassau are on the list you asked for.”

Marvin presented a piece of paper. “Two of them are on vacation, and one has been in the trade center since morning. So, these two are the ones you should focus on,” said Marvin as he pointed at two circled names on the list.

“Thank you. You’ve done pretty good this time.”

Zhang Heng’s compliment had put a smile on Marvin’s face.

Since time was of the essence, Zhang Heng needed external help. Apart from Marvin, two pirates he had saved also volunteered to help, and before long, all four gathered in front of the tavern.

With a hushed voice, Zhang Heng pulled everyone together.

“Well, so this is the plan. That Jacob guy will definitely find ways to determine how much the bag of pearls can fetch before he charges the buyers. To do that, he will need to find an appraiser...”

“Wait, you said that the pearls have been lost since morning. What if he’s already found someone to appraise them?” asked Marvin while raising his hand.

“The appraisers on the island are very busy. He would need to make an appointment at least half a day in advance. Of course, if you’re willing to pay more and offer them a price they can’t refuse, they would even blow you on the spot. But trust me, someone who has been poor their whole life, getting by on theft, won’t be able to afford such a large sum of money,” one of the pirates named Hilford explained.

Being a descendent of the first wave of immigrants, and spent his entire youth in Nassau, he was very familiar with the place.

“If that’s the case, then anyone on the list could be the one. But there’s only four of us. There’s simply not enough of us to keep an eye on every one of them.”

“Forget about the others. We just need to focus on the two appraisers who are having a holiday at home,” replied Zhang Heng after mulling over the facts.

“If that guy has any brains on him, he probably knows that someone might try to trace him through the appraisers. The best option is not to meet the appraisers at a rendezvous point but to pay them a visit. Even appraisers on holiday would find it difficult to refuse money that delivers itself to their doorstep.”

“I think this idea will work,” another pirate piped up.

Seeing that there were no objections, the four split up into two pairs, each going their way to the residences of the two appraisers.

Zhang Heng paired up with Marvin, and their target was a twenty-nine-year-old named guy called Randall. He was young for an appraiser but had managed to build quite a reputation for himself, being excellent at accurately determining the value of all sorts of things. Each day, there was always an

appointment after appointment. That said, he made sure to spare a day each week for his family. He lived right next to the Nassau market, one of the most prosperous areas in the city.

Zhang Heng and Marvin squatted under a shed with a grass roof opposite his residence, casually laying down conches and pretended to sell them. Marvin peeked out from the shed. He looked at the sun in the sky and tugged on Zhang Heng's shirt. Whispering in a cautious voice, he said, "Err, if a fight breaks out later..."

"Don't worry, if that happens, I will take care of it. You can stay away and watch by the side."

Marvin looked embarrassed. "I was just about to ask how I might be of assistance..."

"That guy is more than likely armed. Going up against him will be your own suicide. Believe me, you staying here is the biggest help you can give me," Zhang Heng answered.

Marvin was indeed aware that his combat skills were terrible, but at the blunt comment, his face had turned a beet red.

Zhang Heng quickly added, "Everyone has their own strengths and weaknesses. Acknowledging your own weakness is nothing to be ashamed of."

Marvin's eyes lit up at the remark, remembering that his cowardly performance during a previous battle turned him into the laughing stock among the ship's crew. Upon hearing Zhang Heng's kind words, he felt as if he had found his confidant.

The two chatted away, and time passed quickly.

At noon, Randall received two guests, both arriving separately. One was the island's black market merchant, and the other was Randall's sister-in-law. Clearly, neither was Jacob and as the sun was beginning to set, the deadline loomed closer. Yet there was no progress. There was no news from Hilford, either.

Soon, Zhang Heng found himself doubting his own judgment.

Could it be that the Jacob guy wasn't as smart as he thought him to be? Did he make an appointment with one of the three appraisers who were working? Or perhaps was he right, but the thief was worried that he would be apprehended, waiting until things settled before selling the pearls? If that was the case, there would be no way he could catch the target before the designated time.

No, that couldn't be right. Based on that guy's financial situation, he could not afford to wait that long. The sooner he got rid of the stolen goods, the sooner he could get away with it. Even if the owner of the missing pearls were to find him, there was nothing he could do.

As Zhang Heng was beginning to be clouded by doubt, he saw Randall's sister-in-law walking out of the house with a basket, cautiously scanning her surroundings like a little mouse before hurriedly heading towards the other side of the road.

At that moment, Zhang Heng knew he had to make a choice. In fact, thinking about the other possibilities now was a senseless act. If he was wrong, he would have no time left to correct his mistake. Rather than cracking his head over whether he made the right call, it would be better to stick to his initial plan and see it through, all the way to the end.

Zhang Heng removed a dagger and a pistol from under the straw mat, telling Marvin, "Take care of the stall. If after I'm gone, and someone suspicious appears, go find the others."

Marvin caught on quickly. "So... you think that the cunning dude is afraid to show himself but instead commissioned Randall's sister-in-law to bring the pearls to her brother-in-law to be appraised?"

"I don't know. So far, that seems like the most plausible deduction. Also, this is the only way I can find the pearls before sunset."

After that, Zhang Heng got up and began tailing the young woman from a distance.

Though unable to ascertain the situation even after following Randall's sister-in-law for some distance, Zhang Heng was convinced he was right. The woman was obviously more vigilant than the average pedestrian, pausing every now and then, turning around and looking out with caution. With his excellent observational skills, Zhang Heng did not have to follow her too closely and keeping a good distance, he kept his cover from being blown.

Meanwhile, Zhang Heng also considered the possibility of attacking the person. However, if he was mistaken, or whatever she carried was not the bag of pearls he was looking for, it would become a massive headache for him.

If his intelligence was right though, then his opponent was probably just a lowlife in the city – there was nothing for him to worry about when it came to combat.

Still, the safest option was to wait until the two met and made the exchange.

Chapter 112: Black Sail XVII

Zhang Heng followed the young lady for about 15 minutes.

Then, without warning, she abruptly turned around and rushed into an alley. Without hesitation, he increased his pace and went after her. But just as he was about to reach the alley, a shadowy figure appeared from it. He was a redhead, as if a raging fire burned atop his head. Zhang Heng noticed a rapier in his hands, with clear stains of blood on it.

Suddenly, Zhang Heng remembered Frazer saying that he had hired another person to help him. Instantly, he felt that something must have gone horribly wrong. Immediately, he broke cover and ran to the alley. The first thing he saw was Randall's wife lying there unconscious, looking as if she had been knocked out by someone.

Looking to be unscathed, she should turn out fine. Right beside her, a man was lying in a pool of his own blood, leaving him to suspect that this must be Jacob. His chest had been penetrated by something sharp. His eyes were wide open, frozen in time as he took his last breath.

Not wasting any time, Zhang Heng went after the man holding the rapier. It seemed like the man noticed that Zhang Heng was after him. His first instinct was to sprint as fast as possible, attempting to lose himself among the crowd. He was a man of small stature. This meant he was extremely agile, choosing always to run head-on in the direction of people.

Unfortunately, his crimson hair shone like a beacon amongst the crowd, and there was no way he was about to go unnoticed just like that. Besides, he had chosen the wrong strategy of shaking off Zhang Heng, assuming that his excellent stamina was sufficient and Zhang Heng would tire out eventually.

15 minutes later, the man was already gasping for breath. Zhang Heng, on the other hand, hadn't even broken a sweat. His persistent training for all those long runs had finally paid off. Seeing that the man was willing to use up his energy, Zhang Heng had no intention to stop him. Although he knew there was an opportunity to catch up, he chose to tail him with at least ten steps between them.

The man with crimson hair soon realized that running towards crowded places wasn't the best idea and hence, turned toward more sparse areas. In the end, he stopped at a beach. It appeared to be a good place for confrontation, seeing that was no one else around.

"What is your relationship with that thief? Are you his accomplice?" asked the man when he turned around and looked at Zhang Heng.

To his greatest surprise, Zhang Heng saw that the 'man' he went after was actually a girl. Judging by her appearance, she should be around 16 to 17 years old. She was, however, dressed similarly to teenage boys on the street and even carried a personality to match. In fact, she was actually more decisive than some men. Though it was a simple confrontation, her rapier was tight in her grip – ready to strike. Left with no other option, Zhang Heng had to draw his gun to protect himself.

"I'm really sorry. It's Frazer. He asked me to retrieve a bag of pearls."

"So, that old bastard looked for someone else to help him right after he hired me, huh! What are you going to do now? Snatch them from me?"

The crimson-haired girl suddenly went on high alert.

"Actually, I've figured out how we can both benefit from this."

.....

Frazer was having dinner at the tavern. His lavish meal consisted of a rack of lamb paired with lemon juice. All of a sudden, a blue bag was tossed on the table as he was enjoying his meal. Black pearls scattered all around the table.

"I must be dreaming? Since when the two of you work together?" asked a startled Frazer.

"We have retrieved whatever you've asked us to find. Is there a problem?" furiously asked the girl.

Frazer had entrusted her with completing this task. It came as a shock to her that he would look for Zhang Heng to help him as well. Clearly, this indicated that he did not trust she could retrieve the black pearls successfully. This had her feeling betrayed and extremely angry, where one of her hands was already placed on the rapier. She would not hesitate to attack Frazer if things went south.

"Anger might not be a bad thing, after all. Using anger wisely to fuel yourself will make you stronger and more powerful. If you really want me to help you to become a proper pirate, it's better if you learn how to control your anger first lest you might just get yourself killed someday."

"I would rather die a warrior than to cower under a girl's skirt like a coward."

“That’s a great speech! I might not fully agree with you, but I believe that what you’ve just said deserves a toast!”

“What about our reward?” asked Zhang Heng with a straight face, unwilling to raise the glass in front of him.

Frazer then waved at him and whispered something.

“Did you not tell him about it?”

“It’s for his own good. Look. He’s doing really well now.”

“No. I bet you refused to tell him because you don’t want to lose your boatswain, right?”

“Hmm... well, that was part of the reason, but right now, I don’t have to worry about it anymore.”

Frazer then took out a wooden horse and placed it on the table.

“Show him this wooden horse. He will believe whatever you have to say. However, you have to make sure that you learn everything from him first before telling him the final destination. Sticking to his promise is never his forte. You will never be able to look for someone better than him to teach you how to control mainsail if he manages to run away from you.”

.....

After that, Zhang Heng left the tavern with the crimson-haired girl. She looked to be in an excellent mood, having just received a recommendation from Frazer to become a pirate on the Golden Swallow. Most pirate ships forbode women on their vessels. It was a rare moment that a girl was given the opportunity to join the ranks as an ordinary pirate on the vessel.

As for a band of sultry, female-only pirates, those existed only in movies or manga. Undeniably, although there were women strong enough to do what most men could do, it was also true that most lacked behind men in terms of strength and stamina. The difference was clear if a fight broke out between two ships. Worse, things could get really awkward if their aunties visited them at the wrong time.

Now that everything was settled, Zhang Heng wanted to bid the girl farewell. To his surprise, she spoke to him first.

“Hey! Man from the east. Do you have a place to stay?”

“Huh?”

“As you can see, I just moved here not too long ago. This morning, an argument broke out between a friend and me, and now the friendship is over. I don’t have anywhere to go right now. Initially, I wanted to borrow some money from that old bastard but, everyone told me that he is a blood-sucking vampire. If you are willing to let me stay at your place, I’m willing to give you half my loot when I return from sea. What do you say about this deal? Oh right! I haven’t officially introduced myself to you. Me’ name is Anne. I’m from Cork, Ireland.”

Chapter 113: Black Sail XVIII

“You’re back! I used the unsold sea snails and oysters to make a pot of seafood soup. It’s still hot!”

Marvin heard someone coming from outside. Immediately, he ran out of the kitchen with a leather apron to welcome Zhang Heng. To his surprise, he saw a crimson-haired girl standing beside him.

“Anne, this is Marvin from the Sea Lion. Marvin, this is Anne of the Golden Swallow. She will stay with us for some time until... erm... until she finds her own place to stay on this island.”

“Seafood soup? Can I have a bowl?”

Anne took a deep breath.

“Sure. I made enough for three, but...”

Before Marvin could finish, Anne was already in the kitchen. She looked for the largest bowl and scooped the soup, sieving up as many oysters that she could scoop. It appeared she had been starving for some time.

“But what?” asked Anne.

“I was thinking of adding some salt into the soup,” muttered Marvin softly.

Marvin was startled by Anne’s dominating presence.

“It’s just food. I don’t really care how it tastes as long as my hunger is curbed,” replied Anne as she carried her warm soup to the dining table.

“I... I can’t agree with such a ridiculous saying.”

Marvin finally managed to muster enough courage to express his opinion. However, his voice was still as soft as a mosquito flapping its wings.

According to Anne, she was actually born into a very wealthy family of lawyers, and her dad owned a huge orchard. He also had his hands in other businesses as well. As for her mother, she was simply a servant of the house. Anne was their illegitimate daughter. The moment Anne was born to this world, she and her mother were quickly shuffled into a mansion nearby. Luckily, her father was a responsible man, making sure not to let them suffer. When Anne grew up, he even hired a teacher hoping that she would learn how to behave like a real lady.

Unfortunately, Anne was very different from all the other girls, having no interest in studying or dancing. Instead, she gravitated towards messing with various weapons. Due to everything she went through in her childhood, she desired freedom more than anything else in the world. Her ears would instantly perk up whenever she heard her mother telling pirate stories.

In the end, she eloped with a pirate who passed by the mansion. The moment she was free from her father’s control, she immediately traveled to Nassau with the pirate. There was only one way she could achieve her dream, and that was to get to the legendary pirate kingdom.

Unfortunately, things didn't go well for her, and she was jobless for a long period. Even though she managed to beat all the pirates the tavern recruited, there was still no pirate ship willing to take her in. All this because she was female.

After staying in Nassau for some time, the pirate, Jaime Bonny, told her he wasn't about to feed her and give her free lodging anymore unless she would become his wife. Anne was so angry that she landed a kick on his crotch before leaving him.

But that was all in the past, anyway.

She would join the Golden Swallow really soon. She even found a place to stay, as well. A new dawn for her seemed on the horizon, with a chance for a brighter future.

.....

Anne was just a small interlude in Zhang Heng's quest. He stopped bothering her after getting to know her a little better. The best thing about his rented shack was its size, where it remained rather spacious even after Zhang Heng gave her one of the rooms. Strangers would sometimes trespass the house when Zhang Heng and Marvin left for the sea. Instead of letting some rough sleepers mess up the place, Zhang Heng was more than happy to let Anne bunk in instead.

Meanwhile, Zhang Heng focussed on the next most crucial thing. Knowing that he had ample time for this quest, he had no intention to recruit many people in these early stages, having something the other players did not have, and that was time. He could make use of 1 to 2 years to master his skillsets before working on the main goal of this quest.

Anyhow, he was lucky enough to land himself on the Sea Lion, a vessel containing one of the most influential pirate groups around here.

That meant he would be granted with countless opportunities to learn different skills from those around him. For one, mastering the art of taming the mainsail something he really wanted to learn.

Soon, he would need to head out to sea for the fourth time. One night, before setting sail, he looked for Sea Lion's boatswain. Many pirates left their hometown for a few years hoping to make some money for their families. Rothko was different, being previously a captain of a cargo ship.

One fine day, he was pulled over by a Royal Navy warship for no reason. Without so much as a warning or an explanation, they attacked his vessel, sinking it eventually.

Tragically, he lost his wife and five-year-old daughter during the skirmish.

Though Rothko managed to survive, he had lost everything. To make matters worse, no one would believe his story. With shoulders anchored down by debts, he decided to leave the civilized world and join the pirates. As he had no family or property on the island to turn to, the brothel was his venue of choice each time he disembarked his ship. Considering that he was not that old, he managed to be quite an energetic lad on the bed.

That said, he was left with only two desired endings for his tragic life. He either wanted to die at sea or on a bed in a brothel. In order to make sure that nobody would profit from his death, he spent all the money he earned with not a cent left in his savings.

.....

Rothko was role-playing 'king and criminal' with a prostitute when Zhang Heng found him. The moment he saw the rumblings taking place inside, he instantly closed the door and exited the room. Half a minute later, the fuming prostitute ran out of the room with only a blanket for cover. No one would be too happy having somebody interrupting the court that was in 'session.'

"How many times have I told you: you will learn nothing until I retire from the ship. This is non-negotiable! You have until three to leave the room. Otherwise, you will not learn..."

"Rothko... your daughter... she floated on the sea for three days after your cargo ship sank. Luckily a Spanish civilian vessel passed and saved her life. After that, someone from England adopted her. You were no longer a part of that world when it happened. She is married to a mill-owner, and they both have three sons and two daughters. Right now, she is a grandma!"

"That's not possible! You are lying, you despicable liar! Where did you hear such a tall tale? Are you using some cheap lies in an attempt to trick me into teaching you stuff? I can assure you: you will never get what you want!"

Zhang Heng then placed the wooden horse in front of him without saying a word.

"I made this toy for Koror on my ship! Where did you get it?!" asked Rothko with eyes as wide as grapefruits.

Chapter 114: Black Sail XIX

"Waves inbound! Waves hitting our port side!!!" shouted the pirate who was on the lookout. Seconds later, his voice was stopped when a six-meter high wave hit the deck, rudely throwing the pirates down to the floor. Zhang Heng grabbed onto a nearby rope, which saved him from being swept away.

Though Marvin was in the cabin, he wasn't doing too good as well. He was peeling a potato when the giant wave hit the ship, almost costing him his finger. The entire boat rocked violently, and when Marvin looked up, he saw the smoked meat that he hung up earlier was swinging left and right from their hooks, splattering into each other with loud thuds.

Whenever the ship was struck by the restless waves, it sounded like the world was coming to an end. Indeed, one would start to doubt if this wooden ship could withstand the wrath of mother nature.

Immediately, Marvin jumped to the nearest corner and started to pray with all his might. These were the true colors of the ocean. They could be gentle and balmy, but temperamental and merciless as well – much like a teenage girl. One moment, the sea could be smiling a sweet tune, and another, it could be wrathful enough to destroy an entire ship.

As compared to others on board, Rothko was exceptionally calm. Having weathered countless storms throughout his entire life, a small splatter like that was not enough to shake him.

"Hmm. I want you to feel her. This as fast as the Sea Lion goes. If the winds get any wilder, I'm afraid her mainsail will be destroyed. You'll have to loosen the rope that is tied around the truss and tuck away the mainsail and headsail. Otherwise, the mast will break in half in no time!"

Rothko's treatment of Zhang Heng had changed completely. So, instead of threatening him, Zhang Heng took a different approach and went against Frazer's advice. Of course, by threatening Rothko, Zhang Heng could easily force him to stay on the ship.

However, it was worth noting that when one decided to impart his skills to another, there was a big difference between giving his all and halfheartedly imparting knowledge.

No doubt, although Rothko was one of the best boatswains amongst his peers, Zhang Heng could still learn how to maneuver the mainsail even if he lost him. And if Rothko was forced, he might as well just look for another teacher. What was the point when he wasn't doing it willingly but rather, driven to teach under duress.

That was why Zhang Heng was prepared to make a bet. On the night he confronted Rothko, he decided to tell him the location of his daughter. Immediately, Rothko left the brothel to look for her. At first, Zhang Heng thought that it was all but wasted effort. To his greatest surprise, Rothko returned to the Sea Lion the next morning.

"I told the captain that I want you to work under me. To be honest with you, I will only stay in Nassau for another three months, no longer. In these three months, you must learn everything I have to teach you. If you fail, you have no one to blame but yourself."

At first, Zhang Heng thought that conscience had made him return to the Sea Lion. One night, Zhang Heng found out the truth from a very drunk Rothko. He apparently spent everything he earned so far, and without any savings, it was impossible for him to travel to England. Besides, he had not seen his daughter for many years. It would be embarrassing for him to visit her empty-handed. That was why he came back here, attempting to earn a more before leaving for England.

Regardless, Zhang Heng now gained another mentor. Rothko changed the way he treated him after the two of them spent some time together. Whether a captain of a cargo ship or a pirate, Rothko had never seen someone as disciplined as Zhang Heng. Every day, Zhang Heng would wake up two hours earlier than others, starting his day with some movement training. An hour later, Owen would join him, and both of them would spar with each other.

When the rest of the crew had just woken up and were having their breakfast, Zhang Heng was already with Rothko, observing the weather and maneuvering the mainsail. Other than that, he would work with Marvin, employing the help of good food and some money to build solid relationships with the other pirates. Through them, Zhang Heng quickly learned how to maneuver a ship, shoot a cannon, and read a nautical chart.

"I heard that your only daughter is still alive! Congratulations! What do you think? Do you think he will become a threat to us?"

Out of nowhere, Orff appeared behind Rothko. He stared at Zhang Heng, who was high above the mast, attempting to fold away the mainsail.

"I don't think so. Aren't you supposed to be worried about Goodwin? I heard he has more than half the crew on his side. Soon, he will start challenging your authority."

“He’s just a clown. Let’s talk about something else. Do you know that a disciple of yours is kind of close to Frazer? I heard he was his debt collector.”

“So?”

“Did you really think that Frazer quit the pirate’s life and simply retired? If I remember correctly, you were the one who suggested that he should be killed.”

“And I remember that you were the one who defended him.”

“You know I was left with no other options. You have to admit that he was a great influence during that time. Though we forged an immunity letter from the queen, a large number of pirates were still on his side. Our safety would be greatly threatened if we killed him in front of everyone.”

“It doesn’t matter anymore. The past is the past. I’m getting ready to retire as well.”

“We will miss you. I will tell my kids when they grow up, that I was granted the opportunity to sail alongside the best boatswain of the fleet!”

“I will also tell my granddaughter that I used to sail with the most boring helmsman. All he did was talk bullshit beside me.”

“Oh, and send my regards to Koror.”

After that, Orff gave Rothko a pat on the back and left him alone.

....

Three months passed.

The raids were longer this time, and so was their voyage, and when they finally returned to Nassau, Rothko had been teaching Zhang Heng everything he knew for a good four months. Rothko saved up enough to travel to England and buy a gift for his daughter. Before leaving the grounds of Nassau, he informed the captain that he wished to retire.

Zhang Heng checked on his character panel and found that the skill, maneuvering sails, was not listed. Everything that he learned so far was all categorized under sailing. It was now LV 1. Other than that, his knife skills had also increased to LV 1. At this rate, he was most definitely better than most of the pirates on his vessel. Although beating Owen was still out of the question, he was good enough to have a sparing session with him if he was willing to shave some points.

Nevertheless, Zhang Heng was content with everything that he achieved so far. On the other hand, the same couldn’t be said for Anne.

Chapter 115: Black Sail XX

“Can you imagine that? Ten versus seven. I ran to the upper deck and killed two enemies! I turned around and saw three of my allies getting beaten up. Six of my allies ran back to the ship without offering any help to those in need! This is not the first time it’s happened! I’m about to go crazy soon! The Golden Swallow might sound powerful, but the truth is, this god-forsaken ship is no different than a

fishing trawler! I'm afraid we'll all drown soon if a terrible storm hits us! Our captain didn't dare to stray too far from the harbor. In fact, the first thing he does when he sees a merchant ship bigger than ours is to run away! A coward is what he is! I won't be surprised if people think we are the ones being robbed by the merchant ship instead," seethed an unamused Anne.

Zhang Heng was at a loss for words after hearing Anne's rant. There were a large number of pirates in Nassau, but most of them were only small-time thugs. They would set sail as long as they had a dozen people with them. Whenever a merchant ship was ready for plunder, they would raise the black flag. Of course, the bunch would return to Nassau with a great haul if their target happened to be afraid of them. If a real fight broke, however, they would also be the first to run away. Technically, these were no pirates but a bunch of opportunists flying the black flag.

"I'm really jealous of your ship. She has around 30 cannons, right? And you have an awesome captain as well. I heard that he constantly targets merchant ships with valuable cargo. He even dares to fight with a navy vessel. This is the definition of a real pirate, and this is the life that I want! Damn it; I would have been able to get myself on a better ship if I'm a man. I even saw some fattsos joining a great crew. With my current abilities, it's impossible that I can't join a decent pirate group."

The more Anne thought about it, the angrier she became. In a moment of rage, she slapped the chair beside her as hard as possible. Her abrupt action caused her wound to reopen, with the shirt covering her body flying off as well. She seemed unbothered by the fact that she was now topless.

"Oi! Fatty, you once told me that you have many friends on the Sea Lion, right? Can you recommend me to your captain?" asked Anne while looking at Marvin.

"How many times have I told you that the Sea Lion has no intention to recruit any female pirate. No one can change the captain's mind. You are also not allowed to take off your shirt in my house! You have to follow my rules since you are staying in my house!" snapped Zhang Heng while picking up the shirt on the floor before tossing it to Anne.

"What are you afraid of? Why can men go topless, but women can't?!"

Due to the rampant discrimination she experienced while attempting to join a pirate ship, she had now turned into an avid feminist.

"What are you guys talking about?" asked Marvin.

He was holding a bowl of crushed herbs, which he had collected earlier.

"We are talking about how easy it is for all the men on the island to get whatever f*cking job they like. Then, women are forced to stay at home to take care of the house and children. Women can only become housewives or prostitutes on this damn island! The three of us can actually form a pirate group and venture out into the oceans. Just the three of us! If we encounter any fights, well... I can fight three enemies at the same time! Zhang Heng can fight two, and fatty can at least take on an enemy and a half, right? Our combined force is way better than that stupid Golden Swallow pirate group!"

"What the hell is one and a half enemies?" asked Marvin.

“Why not just go back to where you’ve come from? I don’t think you should become a pirate. Though you don’t like your father, your mother must worry about you. I can provide you with some travel funds if you need some,” Zhang Heng barged in.

“No way! I will not go back! I swore to myself before I left my house that I will not return unless I become richer than that man! Besides, I prefer the pirate’s life because I get to enjoy all the freedom in this world. There is something in my blood that will never change, which is my love for this island. Every mouthful of air that I breathe in is filled with freedom!”

.....

Zhang Heng knew that changing her mind required a lot more than that. Then, someone knocked at the door. Marvin placed the bowl of crushed medicine on Anne’s table and went downstairs to open the door with Zhang Heng. They were greeted by someone they knew.

The person turned out to be the friendly Goodwin.

“Nice place but it’s kind of far from the town. I like the serenity here, and it looks like the two of you have settled down nicely. How is it going, y’all? Encountered any problems so far?”

Zhang Heng and Marvin ushered Goodwin into their house and made some tea. As they sat down, Goodwin started the conversation. “Rothko has retired. He wants to travel to England to visit his daughter. I think you already know that, right? The boatswain’s position is currently empty. Are you interested in filling it up?”

“Me?!”

Zhang Heng was surprised that Goodwin would offer him this position, one that was usually not offered to young men. For the past four months, Rothko thought everything that he knew to Zhang Heng. Despite that, knowing all the theories did not mean Zhang Heng could execute them flawlessly. If one wanted to master this job, the person would need to accumulate years of experience. With Rothko leaving, Zhang Heng wasn’t the best boatswain on the Sea Lion by a long shot. Rothko’s men were more qualified to take the position.

“Be confident. We all trust you. You are the only disciple of Rothko. Logically, you should take over his place once he is gone. Trust me, more than one person on this ship thinks that you are more than qualified for this position.”

“Is that right?!”

Marvin became the most excited person in the house. Considering that he fully relied on Zhang Heng now, he sincerely hoped that he would become an influential pirate on the ship. Boatswain was an important position on any vessel. As the two of them had just joined the crew for seven months, this job offer was definitely a giant leap for Zhang Heng.

Zhang Heng did not respond to Goodwin, patiently waiting for him to finish what he wanted to say.

“It’s time for a change. What do you think about our helmsman, Orff? Many on the ship think he’s too weak when he talks to our captain. He has failed to cater to the welfare of every single pirate on the ship. This is especially true for new ones like you and Marvin. I think you guys didn’t receive the

appreciation you deserve. In every battle, we always charge at our enemies first. On a normal day, we do most of the work as well. And what do we get for that? The privilege to choose our reward first? All the important positions on the ship have been taken up by a bunch of old men. It's hard for newbies to shine in an environment like that."

"I'm not saying that they're not doing a good job. As it stands, our demand is straightforward. We just want to work in a fairer environment. New people should be given more rights on the ship. What do you think?"

"Who should represent the new people then?"

"I'm not an ambitious man, but I'm willing to take up the responsibility since everyone believes in me."

Goodwin stood up and smiled at them.

Chapter 116: Black Sail XXI

"I'm ready to challenge Orff once we set sail again. By that time, many would have taken my side. To be honest, I have more than half the ship supporting me. In other words, that would make me the most likely winner. That said, I don't want to claim I'm the winner because the final results are not here yet. You might think that I'm arrogant, but you have to know that the Orff era is over. Join us. The future belongs to us!"

Marvin was greatly elated after listening to Goodwin's little motivational speech. He wanted to run to him badly and shake his hands. On the other hand, Zhang Heng was still sitting on his chair, not uttering a single word. As Goodwin left his hand hanging in the air for a few seconds, the look on his face changed.

"I'm good. I don't think I will change my mind," replied Zhang Heng politely.

"I can understand that. You are still new on the ship, and you don't want to offend the older generation. You are afraid that they might do something bad to you, right? You should also know that nobody likes indecisive individuals amid a war."

Goodwin attempted to convince Zhang Heng one last time. Those words might have been spoken tactfully, but he was also implying that he too could make them pay the price if they chose to side with Orff. It was a threat.

At that moment, Marvin wished he could take Zhang Heng's place and just shake Goodwin's hand. After a moment of silence, Zhang Heng finally extended his hand. Goodwin put on a smile, thinking that Zhang Heng must have had finally come to his senses and join him.

"I'm so sorry to disappoint you. I'm sticking to my guns. I don't want to get involved in this."

Goodwin's smile instantly disappeared from his face.

"You are going to regret your choice today."

He then turned around to look at Marvin.

“What about you?”

Marvin was afraid, but considering the ample time he had around Zhang Heng, an empty threat like that was not enough to persuade him to betray his benefactor. One thing he could not figure out was why Zhang Heng rejected Goodwin’s goodwill. If Goodwin was not lying, that should mean that he could beat Orff to become the new helmsman.

Goodwin was displeased by their rejection, and this instantly took a toll on their friendship. Goodwin was no longer friendly to them. According to his plan, Zhang Heng and Marvin were supposed to side and vote for him. When they first got on the ship, Goodwin had made sure to treat them well. From his perspective, he could not understand why the two would so blatantly reject him after he promised them a great future.

This was surely not the result that Goodwin desired. Seeing that Zhang Heng and Marvin were not going to take his side, Goodwin left the house without saying a word. The moment he left, Marvin started to worry about their future. Meanwhile, Anne was elated by their exchange of words.

“Come and form a team with me if you think you don’t belong to the Sea Lion!”

“.....”

“Apply this medicine to your wounds right now. Make sure you protect it from getting infected,” said Zhang Heng.

“Do... do you think that he will fail?” asked Marvin.

“What are you afraid of? Just make sure that you always do your job well. Win or lose, it wouldn’t affect you. Do you really think they will fire the only cook on board?”

“It’s not about me. I just feel sorry for you. If Goodwin can replace Mr. Orff, you will be assigned as the boatswain of this ship. Your dream shattered the moment you rejected him. No matter who the winner is, you will not be able to lay your hands on this position anymore.

The truth was, Zhang Heng did not mind it at all. He knew that he wouldn’t sail with the Sea Lion forever, and positions meant nothing to him. All he ever cared about was to learn as much as he could. Even if Frazer did not warn him beforehand, he would never choose to side with Goodwin. He would rather stick with the older generation and, in turn, learn more skills from them.

Of course, he would never expose these thoughts to anyone. This time, the Sea Lion’s crew had a brief downtime as in less than three days, she was to set sail again. Goodwin wasn’t nervous at all. On the contrary, he was rather confident about beating Orff.

There could be only one possibility. Orff was in a panic, desperately hoping he could stop Goodwin and convince the others to side with him. However, Goodwin wasn’t even slightly bothered. Though Zhang Heng and Marvin were not going to take his side, he knew that he should have enough pirates supporting him as the new helmsman.

That very night, Goodwin summoned everyone to the upper deck, ready to give a speech.

“My brothers! Have you noticed that we had fought long and hard during previous battles, but our yield has dropped. Now that is a fact! Aren’t you curious about why something so terrible could happen to us?”

The record keeper, Griffin, barged into the storeroom to look for Orff who was counting the supplies and drinking water for the current trip.

“Something bad is going on, Mr. Orff! Goodwin is trying to convince everyone to replace you with him!”

“So?”

Orff seemed unbothered once again, continuing with his inventory checking.

“So... aren’t you supposed to do something? He might just replace you as the new helmsman if you don’t stop him now.”

“Why would you say that?”

“I have reason to believe that Goodwin is well prepared this time. I heard that he has visited many people. The newcomers on the ships would become his primary target. In the span of five years, newcomers outnumber the veterans by a ratio of 2:1. This means he can get at least two-thirds of the votes.”

“Excellent work. The numbers add up. Well done,” replied Orff with a nod while passing the account ledger to the Griffin.

Griffin was left speechless.

“Okay. My work here is done. It’s time to end the clown show!”

Goodwin’s speech was coming to an end when Orff suddenly walked out of the cabin.

“Having those reasons in mind, we believe that Mr. Orff is no longer suitable as our helmsman. He has failed to look out for our well-being.”

There were no cheers when Goodwin finished his speech. All the pirates silently opened up a way to let Orff through when they saw him. Though rivals, Goodwin still decided to greet him politely.

“Mr. Orff.”

Orff ignored him, continuing his gaze toward the other pirates. He was surprised that the person he expected to be here was, in fact, not here. This, however, did not affect what he was about to do.

“I have to admit that I have neglected many of you recently. I have heard complaints about me; about the rewards getting lesser. Some of you even suspect that I’ve banded with the captain to take your share. I can understand why you all feel this way. It’s completely normal. Some of you here might think that I’m too old to handle this position well. I must admit that I don’t fight as well as our Mr. Goodwin here. As for the conflict between the newcomers and veterans on the ship, it’s a common thing on every vessel. No matter what I do, one party would always feel that they have been taken advantage of. I saw the problem, but I didn’t deal with it in time. This is all my fault.”

Everyone thought that Orff would defend himself from Goodwin's accusation. Nobody expected him to admit all his mistakes.

Chapter 117: Black Sail XXII

The air on the deck grew uncomfortable. The contentious scene everyone expected to happen when Orff showed up did not come to pass. Instead, like an apathetic old man, Orff kept retreating as the gunman advanced towards him, as if he was about to fall off the cliff.

Even though Goodwin believed that he was going to win since the beginning, he had not expected things to go so smoothly, and it was making him feel uneasy.

Orff turned to the crew and said, "That's right. All of you have reasons to feel disgruntled. It has been a really difficult time, both for all of you and for me. But what I want to say is that from today onwards, these difficult days will be behind us. You've been wondering what I'm up to recently, and I think it's time I tell you."

The gunner shifted uneasily. That uncomfortable feeling was growing stronger. Logic told him that he should not let Orff continue his speech, but right now, he could not find a reason good enough to interrupt the old helmsman. Orff had the right and freewill to deliver a speech before the votes were cast. It could not just be one-sided whereby the old man was not allowed to defend and explain himself after being denounced by Goodman. Goodman took comfort in the fact that the situation was already set in stone—he had won over each and every one of those people. Many among them were benefiting mutually with him. He was confident that none of them would betray him.

When he saw that he finally had everyone's attention, Orff continued, "Most of you and I have known each other for a long time. You should know what kind of person I am. My past is not kept hidden from you. Yes, before I joined Sea Lion, I sailed with the greatest captain in the Caribbean, Captain Kidd until he was captured, and then hung in London. His house was searched from top to bottom, but all they found was a little bit of gold and silver.

"I know you must have heard rumors that he had hidden his loot in a secret place—I can tell you, right now, that the rumor is true."

Immediately, the crew erupted in chatter. Practically everyone knew about Kidd's story. He was the most powerful pirate in the entire Caribbean from 1695 to 1699. His ship, the *Quedagh Merchant* had fifty cannons on board. That magnitude of firepower was enough to make many seaport colonies cower in fear. Legend has it that in a short five-year period, he managed to pillage a shocking fortune.

After his death, the whereabouts of his treasures remained a mystery and the *Quedagh Merchant* vanished.

"I've been searching for that treasure ever since Kidd had cashed in his chips. Now, there's finally some headway, and I have reason to believe that we're very close to that treasure."

Orff had to wait until his audience's chatter quieten down before continuing, "Forgive me for keeping this from you. It's not that I don't trust you—I was just worried that the other pirates might hear of it. But now, I have no choice but to be honest with you."

When he was done, Orff glanced at Goodwin. The latter was drenched in nervous sweat and his face was as pale as a sheet. Just three minutes ago, he thought that he had everything done and dusted. He had not anticipated that Orff would employ such an unreasonable method to turn the tables. As a pirate himself, he understood just how tempting Kidd's treasure was.

In fact, even he could not suppress the feeling of excitement at that prospect. What more the others, and all his allies? How many more of them would be willing to stand by him, and take the risk of deposing Orff and miss out on such a big treasure?

He had planned this for so long, and even played the good guy for such a long time just for this—always greeting the new crews warmly, putting up with his allies' peculiar characteristics and habits. Now all of that had gone down the toilet. Goodwin felt like a drowning man grasping at straws. He reminded his rival, "Vote. They still haven't voted... I haven't lost yet."

But Orff's final sentence shattered whatever last trace of hope Goodwin had left.

"Now, who is willing to sail with me, to go after that legendary treasure?!"

All of the pirates on board were silent for a minute and then they exploded into a loud, enraptured cheer. "Treasure! Treasure! Treasure!"

The look on every single one of their faces were one of zeal and anticipation. None of them bothered to even look at the despondent gunman who felt as if the whole world had abandoned him.

...

"It's out!" Marvin rushed down from the deck, calling out to Zhang Heng who was doing push-ups in the cabin. "The result is out! Goodwin was winning but Mr. Orff turned the whole situation around with just a few words. You should've seen Goodwin's face. I feel a little bad for him."

Marvin paused and then continued, excited again, "Also, we are going to be rich! Do you know that Kidd guy? That big pirate? I heard that when he was sentenced to death by hanging, nearly half of London went to watch his execution—and now we're going to search for the treasures he left behind!"

Marvin looked around and then lowered his voice, "To be honest, ever since I was tied up by that group of pirates, the days have been feeling like years. But now, I'm starting to feel like perhaps it was not such a bad thing after all. It's destiny that we boarded this ship."

"Heh."

Marvin's eyes widened. "What does 'heh' mean? Think about it. The treasure left behind by the legendary pirate king! Aren't you even the least bit excited? Just now on the deck, I was already thinking about how I'm going to spend the money. I'm going to buy two plantations in Boston, and a group of black slaves, and then I will spend the rest of the money drinking all day long. Do you know that there's a woman called Daisy at the whorehouse who always look down on me? She wouldn't even pay attention to me on the bed. When I get the money..."

"Marvin." Zhang Heng finished his last push up and dried the sweat on his neck. Then he opened his mouth to put a break on Marvin's dream. "You haven't even seen the treasure yet. It's not too late to think about what you're going to do with it when you actually see it."

“Sorry.” The farmer’s son realized that he forgotten himself. He had caught onto all that fiery excitement on the deck—everyone was stirred by the words ‘Kidd’s treasure’, and they were all in high spirits.

Zhang Heng, however, was weary at this. Although he did not support Goodwin, it did not mean that he thought that Goodwin’s concern was ungrounded—Orff was indeed too close to the Captain, and this was not a good thing for the rest of the crew, especially after this time, Zhang Heng finally saw just how the experienced helmsman manipulated the crew’s emotions.

A powerful captain and an experienced helmsman—their combined control over the ship was far greater than most people could imagine.

Compared to them, Goodwin was like a toddler who had just learn to walk. Both sides were not on the same level. From the moment Goodwin decided to challenge Orff’s position, his fate was already decided.

Chapter 118: Black Sail XXIII

Zhang Heng transferred the saber from his injured right hand to his left, and then blocked his opponent’s two consecutive lances while taking two steps backwards. When the sailor fighting Zhang Heng saw that his enemy was weary from the prolonged scrimmage, he was very pleased. He stopped advancing and plunged his sword towards Zhang Heng’s chest. It was straightforward attack, without any chicanery, purely relying on strength as an advantage.

Now, instead of dodging the sword, Zhang Heng welcomed it. Both weapons clashed, and the sailor of the navy ship felt a massive force come at him, forcing his arm to swing open. As shock registered on the man’s face, Zhang Heng’s saber found the sailor’s neck.

Zhang Heng muttered under his breath, “It’s over.”

The terrified sailor dropped his weapon and surrendered.

Zhang Heng looked around him and saw that the battle on the deck was coming to an end. A few stubborn guards who were still putting up a fight were forced into a corner—their defeat was only a matter of time. Only the captain of the ship was holding fort in the captain’s cabin. However, his subduing was only a matter of time as well.

This was already their third battle over a short period of two months. While they had won each of them, they had also suffered serious losses. Owen had even started to replenish the workforce with prisoners.

During this era, naval sailors were treated poorly. Take the Royal Navy for example, whose one month’s salary was only around one pound, which was also equivalent to half of the pay of river gate guards, and only about a quarter of that of a carpenter’s wages. To boot, before the money even reached the sailors’ pocket, the paymaster general and navy officer of the ship would take a portion from it. To make matters worse, the salaries were not paid out on a regular basis. One of the most bizarre incidents was of a cruiser in the Far East waters—the crew was only paid once in twenty-two years. In the end, the navy even refused to pay the sum that was owed.

Even when they were ashore, these sailors had it hard. When the warship returned to the port for repairs, the officers were only paid half their salary whereas the lower level sailors were not paid at all, leaving them high and dry. But that was not the worst part. Sometimes, worried that their men would run away, the navy would even forbid the sailors from getting back to shore. Before arriving at the port, the sailors would be transferred to other battleships, and their wages would put on hold.

Compared to them, the treatment that the pirates received was heaven. When there was money, they 'earned' it together, and when there was meat, they ate together. There were rarely any incidents of the captain deducting the crew members' income.

Zhang Heng had been in this game for almost nine months now. In the beginning, he had joined Sea Lion for the sole reason of survival. Later on, however, because of the main mission, he was forced to join the pirate world. Now he had a deeper understanding of the Nassau and the pirates living above. Many of the things had to be perceived through the historical background of that time. It was not for no reason that the pirates in the 17th and 18th century were rampant.

At the beginning of the age of exploration, it was difficult to distinguish between explorers, colonists, and pirates, and as Europe became entangled in war in a bid to compete for sea power, the notorious looting permit was born—which also opened Pandora's box. All these things—a modern-day person would find inconceivable.

Suppose, in this era, you were a businessman transporting goods to be sold in the colonies and was robbed during the journey by people from another country. There would be no legal, diplomatic means for you to return to your country. Generally, most countries would issue you a looting permit, encouraging you to take back what you had lost from others.

On top of that, many wealthy businessmen and nobles would also sponsor skilled captains by helping them get private looting permits which allowed them to loot on the sea, so that they could have a share of the stolen goods. The advantage of doing this was that they were able to severely damage the sea power of other countries. At the same time, they could have an unofficial navy added to their fleet without having to increase their national budget. Should the war start, these private looting ships would also join the battle.

If you plundered enough, you may even be summoned to the palace, or be knighted, accredited as the country's hero. Henry Morgan was the best example. He was the Pirate King of the Caribbean from 1665 to 1670, and later on moved on to become the governor of Jamaica.

In fact, it was not just the common folks. In order to earn extra money, to make up for the wages they were not paid, sailors of the royal fleet would often go out looting. There were even managers in charge of cashing out spoils at the port. Of course, at the end of the day, most of the money they made would, eventually, still end up in the officer's pocket. The low-ranked sailors would only get a meager portion of it.

Frazer once told Zhang Heng, back in the tavern: "Do you know what's the difference between us and those guys? They have looting permits and we don't. That's why we are pirates who are despised and they are the heroes. This is how the world works."

...

Zhang Heng put away his saber. A loud explosion rippled under his feet, signaling that the final territory of the ship had been breached. The captain of the navy supply ship was dead, and the remaining sailors surrendered their weapons and themselves. The doctor on board busied himself tending to injured men, while the record keeper made an inventory of the cargo in the cabin.

The pirates had also suffered many casualties, which was also why no one wanted to lock horns with the navy. Even though it was just a supply ship, her firepower was impressive. The price they had paid to rob a navy supply ship was far greater than the profit they gained. In fact, it was pitiful.

The Sea Lion lost a total of seventeen men in that battle, and many were wounded. Miraculously, however, that did not thwart the crew's morale—especially when the helmsman Orff presented a piece of blood-stained map before them. The pirates responded in excitement and cheer.

“Gentlemen, there is no doubt that we are finally another step closer to our ultimate goal!” The helmsman shouted triumphantly.

According to him, Kidd's treasure was hidden on a no man's island in the Caribbean. He had supposedly drawn a treasure map before he died, which was eventually divided into six parts and had fallen into the hands of those who participated in the arrest and trial. Now, the Sea Lion was on a mission to collect all the pieces of the treasure map. Counting today's piece, they had already gotten four of them.

Owen walked up to the helmsman and said, “Mr. Orff, may I speak with you for a moment?”

The latter nodded and the both of them walked to the back of the ship.

The pirate leader had a worried look on his face. “I don't know if you've noticed, but we've lost quite a few men.”

Orff nodded. “So, how did the recruitment go?”

“You know we can't keep using these guys to fill up the vacancies, right? They are the navy, after all. If we recruit too many of them at one time, they might slit our throats when we're sleeping.”

“What do you suggest then?”

“We're been out here for two and a half months. I suggest that we go back to Nassau to replenish our supplies,” Owen answered.

Orff looked at Owen in the eyes, and then after a while, said, “I don't want to keep this from you. But if word gets out about us finding the treasure, it'll stir up a lot of unnecessary troubles. But I will make sure to relay your suggestion to the captain.”

Chapter 119: Black Sail XXIV

One month later, Sea Lion had eventually decided to head back to Nassau. Other than the lack of pirates and supplies on board, they need to fix the damaged mast. The ship would travel in extremely slow speed as long as the mast was not fixed. Initially, Orff did not want to allow the pirates to get down from the ship. Everyone on the ship was really mad when they received the order. Asking all these men to stay on the ship after they spent three months travelling on the ship was basically impossible.

In the end Orff had to take back what he had said and let everyone leave the ship temporary. Orff made sure to let everyone know that it was crucial to not tell anyone that they were looking for Kidd's treasure. Just as expected, one hour after the first batch of pirates left the ship, the news of them looking for Kidd's treasure was spread to the entire island.

Every single person in Nassau was talking about this matter. This did not necessarily have to be a bad thing. The recruitment process went way smoother than they expected. Usually, when a pirate ship loses more than 40% of the people in one trip, people would tend to think about the odds of them not being killed by the enemies if they were asked to join the particular pirate ship.

Things were different this time. There were many who wanted to join the Sea Lion. Some of the smaller pirate groups were even proposing to join forces with Sea Lion. In the end, Owen had to summon a dozen pirates to maintain the order of people that were applying to join Sea Lion. Anne was elated when she heard that Sea Lion was recruiting. She even blamed Zhang Heng and Marvin for not telling her about it.

Immediately, she ran to apply to join Sea Lion. In the evening, she returned home in a saddened state. She did not even manage to put down her name on paper, let alone taking the test. As usual, she came into conflict with others when she was lining up. Undeniably, she was exceptionally brave even though she had four pirates going against her. Instead of running away, Anne used both her fists to fight with them. In the end, two of them were knocked unconscious and the other two quickly fled the scene while carrying their injured friends.

Zhang Heng saw Anne with bruises all over her face and arm when he opened the door. He could sense that she was different than usual.

"Dinner is ready. Come and eat with us," said Zhang Heng.

Anne's appetite was not as good as usual. She used her hand to pick up a potato and held it in her hand for some time. It seemed like she was deep in thought.

"What if I tell you that I want to become your wife?" asked Anne.

Marvin almost swallowed his spoon while drinking soup after he heard Anne's proposal.

"Don't misunderstand my intention. I'm not defeated by the fact that I can't join Sea Lion. And, I don't want to become a housewife as well. I feel bad for letting you provide a place for me to stay and food to eat for free. Initially, I thought that I could earn enough money to pay for the accommodation and food. It seems like I have overestimated myself."

She felt really embarrassed. Earlier, she promised Zhang Heng that she would give half of the loot that she received to Zhang Heng. Unfortunately, all she got during her very first raid was only a pot. It was worthless. Hence, she did not give it to Zhang Heng. She was now jobless again after she got into a huge argument with Golden Swallow. All she did right now was eat, sleep, and fight with someone every day.

She did not know how to cook or do simple housework. Fighting with others had always been her forte. Every time when Zhang Heng and Marvin set sail for raiding other ships, they would always leave some food and pocket money for her. Every time when they came home, they would find out that the house was turned upside down. Zhang Heng had found her bra under his bed more than once. Her dream was

to get rich as soon as possible. That was why she felt so excited when she heard that the Sea Lion was looking for Kidd's treasure. She thought that this was her golden opportunity to make her dream come true. Sadly, things did not go her way.

Though Zhang Heng had never stopped convincing her to go home and enjoyed what she had, he had to admit that Anne had invested her entire life to improve her fighting skills. Technically speaking, she was born to become a pirate. Judging from her personality, it was impossible to ask her to stay in one place for too long. The problem was no pirate group in Nassau would accept a female to join their crew.

"What do you plan to do after I marry you?" asked Zhang Heng.

"Hmm... I don't know... At least I will not stay and eat for free at your place," Anne replied in a disappointed manner.

"I have a proposal. If you can control your anger and not fight with others, I will let you come aboard my ship."

"Your ship? Hold on. Since when do you own a ship? Are you planning to leave Sea Lion soon?"

"Yes."

This was the very first time Zhang Heng had told others about his plan. He wanted to form his pirate crew. Marvin was left in great shock as well.

"Are you planning to do it after we get our share of Kidd' treasure? With that kind of money, you can easily recruit potential pirates to join you. But, why would you become a pirate if you are super rich?"

"I don't plan to do it after we find the treasure. I have asked Owen about the rights of new recruits like us. He told me that we can choose to leave after a year if we want to. I will apply to leave the ship once time is up."

"What if we fail to locate the Kidd's treasure by then? You should know that there are still two more parts of the treasure map waiting to be found, right? Didn't you see what happened at the beach this afternoon? Everyone from Nassau is trying to join the Sea Lion. Why would leave them right now?"

"Though I really want to become a pirate, there's no need to rush. I have waited for a long time. I don't mind waiting for a little longer," said Anne.

Zhang Heng did not reply to them. The reason why he wanted to leave Sea Lion had nothing to do with the treasure. He had a hunch that thing would go terribly wrong for him if he chose to stay with the Sea Lion. Recently, he could feel that the way Orff treated him had changed. They had not talked much ever since Zhang Heng joined Sea Lion. Until recently, Zhang Heng could feel that someone was staring at him all the time. Especially during the previous few fights. Not a lot of people could pull something like this. Orff was one of them.

Chapter 120: Black Sail XXV

To say that Zhang Heng was not interested in Kidd's treasure was simply not true. Just like what Marvin said just now, it would be easy for Zhang Heng to form his own private crew if he got his share of Kidd's

treasure. Pirates were not a scarcity in Nassau. However, pirates with a specific set of skills were something that every pirate ships were looking for. And the most important thing that Zhang Heng need to acquire before forming his own pirate crew was a ship with sufficient firepower.

Most of the pirates at Nassau were using ordinary fisherman boat with no weapons being mounted on them. When a fight happened, they would not be able to fight back. All they could do was to pray that they could get on the enemies' ship before the enemies sunk their boats.

The first thing that Zhang Heng wanted to do right now was to look for a ship. Ever since he joined the Sea Lion to raid and loot other merchant ships, he had managed to save up quite a bit of money. In addition to that, he was helping Frazer to collect debt as well and Frazer would give him a good amount of commission every time. Still, there was a long way to go for him to purchase a decent ship. With the money that he had right now, he could not even afford to purchase an ordinary sloop.

It was no doubt that Kidd's treasure could help him to solve the problem that he had right now. However, the problem he had right now was such a scary coincidence. It happened right when Goodwin wanted to challenge Orff and Orff somehow managed to win the trust of all the pirates on board again. The thing that was going to happen next was what Zhang Heng worried right now.

Everyone on the ship was so excited when Orff had announced that they were going to look for Kidd's treasure. Without putting in any effort, Orff had managed to defeat Goodwin and fortify his position as helmsman. And the weird part was Orff did not stop right here. He had gone and promoted Kidd's treasure to everyone to keep their fire burning.

Recently, Zhang Heng noticed that Goodwin was never Orff's threat. It seemed like he had his own agenda. Kidd's treasure was just a tool for him to deal with the tiny problem that he had. Right now, everyone on the Sea Lion was hyped about the treasure and they were not going to stop until they located the treasure. The previous raids that they had were the best example to explain the whole thing. Usually, the pirates on ship would refuse to do raids that give them small amount of loot. After Orff told them about Kidd's treasure, none of them said no Orff anymore. They would say yes to Orff even if he wanted to set sail to hell.

In other words, if Orff did not like one of the crew, the person would be placed in a very dangerous circumstance. That was why Zhang Heng had chosen to lay low ever since he found out that Orff was watching him from the dark. In order to prevent to make unnecessary mistake, Zhang Heng had purposely avoided contact with others.

Sometimes, trouble would come looking for you even if you avoid it.

It was past midnight. Zhang Heng was woken up by the noise that came from outside. He saw a horse carriage parked outside his house.

"Who is that?" asked Anne while yawning.

"It has nothing to do with you. Go back to sleep."

Zhang Heng recognized that horse carriage. Immediately, he put on his shirt, went downstairs, and opened the door. On the other hand, Marvin was in deep slumber. Usually, he would be able to sleep

well and snore even if he was in a noisy environment. Instead of bringing the saber with him, Zhang Heng took his gun with him. The coachman then opened the door for him.

“I don’t wish you disturb you at a time like this. I think you wouldn’t want me to come during the day time, right?”

Zhang Heng sat opposite Frazer. The horse carriage was on move again when the door was closed.

“I’m sorry to disappoint you if you are here for Kidd’s treasure. Orff is being really cautious. No one knows when he hid the treasure map. As long as I still work for Sea Lion, I will never tell you the location of the treasure map even if I know about it.”

“Kidd’s treasure? No. No. No. That’s just a fairy tale for dumbasses. I don’t think you believe in it right? You have to admit that Orff has a talent at lying to others. I had fallen for his lie last time. I will not make the same mistake twice.”

“Why are you here tonight?”

“I come bearing gifts and news.”

Frazer then tossed a coin bag to Zhang Heng. There were some coins, leather ring, and some worthless small items.

“I want to thank you for what you have done for me so far. This is my gratitude. We should give our mutual friend Victor some final peace. This is the thing that he has left in this world. You and your friends don’t have to worry that someone might come and threaten you again.”

“Why would you do that for us?”

“I think there’s some misunderstanding between you and me. I was never your enemy. You have known me for quite some time now and I have never forced you to do something that you don’t want to do right? Even when I ask you to collect debt for me, I would always make sure to pay you a 10% commission after that. When you want to ask Rothko to teach you how to maneuver the mainsail, I told you his secret as well, right? You can never find someone as kind as me here in Nassau.”

Zhang Heng was left speechless. This was the question that he had all this time. For the past nine months, Frazer could actually use Victor to threaten him. When he saw the horse carriage parked in front of his house, Zhang Heng thought that he was going to use Victor to coerce him into something against his will. To his surprise, Frazer handed Victor’s personal belongings to him. In other words, he did not have to worry about others knowing that he was the one that killed Victor.

“I know how others talk about me. I’m pretty sure you heard the history between me and Orff. The reason why you are cautious of me is because you worry that I might use you to mess with Orff. To be frank I’ve not retired. Whatever that happened in the past, I have chosen to let it slide. Throughout history, there are very few pirates who get to enjoy the life of retirement. I’m pretty happy with what I have right now. Unfortunately, I know there are still some people on the ship who can’t let the past slide.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I’m so sorry for what happened to you. Orff doesn’t like me. That’s why he’s watching your every move. And I have just received bad news. Orff is planning to eliminate everyone that gets in his way. Anyway, I’m the reason why you are in this mess. I can’t just watch you suffer. I have little to no power on the ship right now. If you really need help on the ship, you can look for a carpenter named Kent.