

48 Hours 161

Chapter 161: Order

Before the banquet began, Billy introduced some of the captains and businessmen that he knew to Zhang Heng. Pirates usually preferred to keep everything to themselves, but that didn't mean that they weren't social animals. All too often, they would employ the assistance of trusted pirate crews if they encountered targets that they could not handle alone. No harm would be done by getting to know more people.

All the pirates attending the banquet were part of the black-market alliance. They were just trading partners and had nothing against the Jackdaw. As long as Zhang Heng did not stop them from getting rich, they didn't care who he worked with. Half an hour later, almost all the guests had arrived. Still, Malcolm, the host, was not here.

After a while, the butler from the entrance came onto the stage.

"Before the banquet begins, Mr. Malcom has prepared you a simple performance. I hope you will enjoy it."

The butler then rang his bell once again. This time, two men were being sent out to the stage. Instantly, the atmosphere grew tense. Both of them were topless, with only a pair of boxers on them. Their hands and feet were cuffed, and they had bulging muscles as hard as steel. They gave off the impression of wild animals that had just come out of the forest. A few female audiences could not help but let out screams of fear. A group of guards escorted these men and were shoved onto the stage at gunpoint. After that, the guards uncuffed them, with the others closely watching and ready to open fire if something went wrong.

"This is not your first stint. You should know the rules better than anyone else. I'm not going to waste my breath here. Kill your opponents in the given time, and you will live to see tomorrow. Otherwise..."

The butler then drew his gun and shot a black servant that was pouring wine for the audience. Her blood splattered all over the place, and she soon stopped breathing. The butler then calmly kept away his gun as if nothing had happened. Two other black servants trembled in fear when they saw the butler, signaling them to move the body out and clean the blood on the floor.

"I don't wish for that to happen to either of you. After all, Mr. Malcom spent a lot of money to purchase you two. You are warriors; beasts! I don't think your dignity would allow you to be put down by a gun, right? So, I need the two of you to bring some happiness to our guests down there!"

After that, the butler left the stage. The two black muscular men glared at each other before pouncing on each other without hesitation. The guests were lit with excitement, with the pirates noisily clanking the dinnerware to hype up the atmosphere. Even the plump businessmen were eager to watch the fight from the front row with their women. Many centuries had passed, but humans still had a liking for gladiator fights like this. In the modern world, such barbarism had become a rarity. In the 18th century, the blacks were often forced to participate in these brutal genocides to entertain the whites.

In the era, black people were nothing more but commodities. The moment a person's humanity was reduced to such lows, it was evident that people enjoyed such a degree of barbarism, all the more without the pressure of the standards of modern society.

"Order. Isn't that a good thing?"

Suddenly, Zhang heard someone talking behind him.

"Without order, those men on the stage would still be living in some tiny village in Africa. They would be fighting with spears over some worthless women. There would be no audience to witness that. Right now, they can put their muscular bodies and fighting skills to good use by entertaining us."

The person talking Zhang Heng was a slender and lanky middle-aged man wearing a suit. He stared at the stage, serious and unmoving.

"Everything I said applies to other black slaves as well. Before slave traders captured them, they were living in utter chaos. Their only purpose in life was to fight for food and territory. They were no different than wild, senseless beasts from the jungle. One should never let such masculinity go to waste."

"As for now, the slaves are sold to the New World. We have designed a reward and punishment system for them. We even assigned them different jobs based on their capabilities. Some are assigned to the fields and some to the mines. And then some... are assigned to entertain us. We have freed them from the agony of looking for food. We have found a true purpose for their bodies. In return, they help us to earn quite a bit of money. Isn't that the true meaning of order?"

"You are talking about your wealth, right? I think they would prefer to look for food than living like this," scoffed Anne.

As they talked, the fight on the stage had reached its climax. The black slave with a scar on his face was dominating the fight. He jumped up and pushed his opponent to the ground without mercy. After that, he started to punch his head nonstop. The audience had become bored with the sound of cracking bones. However, when blood was finally spilled, the spectators roared into a round of applause.

"They are just items to me. I'm using my property to bring me more wealth. There's nothing wrong with that. But, the black-market alliance is different. It's all about partnership. We need you guys to bring me more loot, and you guys need me to sell them for you. You see. Our relationship is a mutual one.

"Even the pirates that dislike us can't deny this fact as well. The existence of a black-market alliance has created a stable income for many of them. This is what order can bring to Nassau.

"I know what you are about to say. In every situation that has an order, the rules always favor the stronger side. Like in Nassau, for instance, the black-market alliance is willing to offer a higher price to the captains because they are dominant enough to bring home more loot to their flock.

"Before the black-market alliance, the black-market merchants had been doing the same thing. They would offer bigger bonuses to the more powerful captains. This was an unwritten rule. We simply made it official in Nassau. As for our previous negotiation, you must know that we weren't trying to make your life difficult."

Chapter 162: Hole

No one was allowed to surrender in the fight. Though the loser was now unconscious, the scar-faced man had no intention to stop bludgeoning his opponent up, knowing that he had to put on a good show by crushing him to oblivion. He finally stopped when his opponent's face was covered in blood and torn flesh. The cheers from the audience got louder and louder, fueled by the ever-increasing violence and gore.

It seemed like scarface, the winner, was getting tired as well. Seeing that his time was almost up, he stood up, walked to the side of the stage, and lifted a heavy bronze statue, intending to use it to deal a final blow to his opponent. Suddenly, the audience screamed. It was too late when scarface realized that something wasn't right. From the back, his opponent suddenly dealt a massive blow to the end of his head! This caused him to lose all strength and as he dropped the statue in shock. It landed directly on his feet!

The bronze statue weighed around 100 pounds, crushing both his feet under its weight. Before he could even scream in agony, someone grabbed his arm. Nobody expected his opponent to be still strong enough to continue fighting. Without hesitation, he came up with every bit of strength he had and snapped his opponent's arm.

Scarface was now sweating bullets, shuddering in excruciating pain from his crushed arm and feet. The audience cheered even louder in delight as they witnessed the unexpected plot twist. Seeing the opportunity at hand, he instantly grabbed the other arm and broke it as well. Naturally, he wasn't about to let scarface attack him anymore. As a final hurrah, he wrapped his arm around his opponent's neck and attempted to squeeze as hard as he could.

Scarface made some unintelligible grunts as he tried his best to free himself from the choke. Alas, his final struggle was pointless because both his arms were broken. It was apparent that the scarface would soon get to meet his maker.

Instead of watching the brutal fight, the middle-aged man chose to focus his gaze on Zhang Heng, seeming as if he could read his mind and peek into his soul. After a short pause, he continued,

"I have to admit that I had made a mistake when I negotiated with you earlier. We have underestimated your capabilities. My employee has also been rude to you without my consent. I'm sorry that you've encountered so many problems during your first voyage. I actually invited you here to apologize to you personally. I hope that you can reconsider partnering with the black-market alliance again."

"Be partners with your lot?"

"You have proven your capabilities to all of Nassau. I'm willing to talk to the alliance to adjust the initial price that we proposed. We might even offer you the highest price that we could, as long as you stop working with the woman called Carina."

"Do you really think that a new merchant like her is powerful enough to go against the entire alliance? Carina's father used to be a black-market merchant in Nassau, and many from the alliance knew him personally. It was only because of her father that we decided not to make her life difficult. I have to compliment her for keeping the secret so well. We were only informed that she was working with you

when the Jackdaw returned from her first voyage. Our grace was the only reason why she could complete her tasks without facing any obstacles. If the alliance did decide to do something about her, I promise you that there would be no way that she could survive in Nassau.”

“If that’s the case, Mr. Malcom, why the rush to renegotiate with us then?”

“Although I believe that order makes this a beautiful world for us to stay in, I know that things are always difficult in the beginning. Three months ago, the alliance set up a new set of purchasing rules for Nassau’s captains. We spent a great deal of effort in coming up with a system for the trades occurring on this island. It’s no easy task to keep it going, but I believe we will eventually conquer all challenges. It’s always a good thing if the whole process can be sped up.”

Malcolm grabbed a glass of wine from a passing butler.

“Recently, there have been many small-time pirates who consider you their anti-alliance leader. They have all been motivated by your brazenness, and this is a problem for us. By the way, have you played poker before, Captain Zhang Heng?”

“Of course.”

“To me, good timing is needed to win a poker game. The moment you have a good hand, you should instantly place your bet. If you miss the golden opportunity, you’ll be unable to win any money. Now would be your golden opportunity to win the game. Once Carine is out of the picture, the black-market alliance will regain its stability, and the small-time pirates will be left with no other option but to accept the new reality. By that time, whatever ace up your sleeve would become useless. You will regret it if you don’t accept my offer today.”

“Is that a threat?”

“No. It’s just a friendly reminder. I admire everything that you’ve achieved thus far. The last person managing to make his name known in the entire Nassau was William Kidd. You should know that you have a bright future ahead of you, but you need to select your trading partners with the utmost care. I don’t wish to become your enemy someday.”

On the stage, scarface finally stopped struggling as he breathed his last. One of his legs still twitched and convulsed. On the other hand, his opponent had finally used up all his strength and had collapsed to the ground. The back of his head was still bleeding profusely, covering the stage in blotches of red. As the gruesome battle came to an end, the audience cheered loudly and clapped for them.

The butler then ordered the servants to clean up the stage.

“Please. Excuse me for now,” said Malcolm.

Holding the glass of wine in his hands, he walked onto the stage as he trampled over the blood. Clearing his throat, Malcolm then gave a short opening speech. He thanked everyone who had supported the black-market alliance. The end of his speech marked the official beginning of the banquet. There was a violinist who had waited backstage for some time to begin his performance. Then, in a long line of servants, the food was finally served.

As for the scarface and his opponent, they were carried out of the ballroom. Malcolm did not stay at the banquet for too long though seeming as if he had something urgent to deal with. He left right after he finished his speech.

Zhang Heng, Anne, and Billy had no intention to stay overnight at the mansion as well. They were ready to leave once they finished their food. As they were leaving, Zhang Heng suddenly stopped walking when he arrived at the gate. He saw two people who were under an apple tree digging the ground with shovels.

Chapter 163: Conflict

The two black slaves had been digging the ground for some time and were completely drenched in sweat. Zhang Heng noticed that they had dug a very deep hole. Quickly, they tossed in two bodies into it. Immediately, Zhang Heng recognized the two bodies were the fighters that performed on the stage earlier. One had a scar on his left face and was dead, and the other, his opponent, was still breathing.

After tossing the bodies into the pit, they filled it up again with dirt. Suddenly, a man seeming to be their supervisor noticed Zhang Heng watching his men. So, he decided to approach him.

“Can I help you?”

“I think that man is still breathing.”

“Oh. His nose is broken, and he’s blind in one eye. He can no longer perform on stage. Keeping him alive is a waste of energy and food. Considering his severe injuries, we would have to spend a great deal of money treating him. So, Mr. Malcom has ordered me to bury him alive with the other dead slave.”

“Can I have him since you guys don’t want him anymore?”

Seeing the supervisor hesitating for a moment, Zhang Heng tossed him a small bag of coins. He opened it up, counted, and found out that there were 20 silver coins inside it.

“He now belongs to you, mister!”

Turning to his workers, he snapped, “Why are you still standing there?! Move the injured man to this gentleman’s carriage.”

This time, the two slaves looked at each other and refused to follow the order. In the act of intimidation, the supervisor lifted the whip in his hand. Left with no options, they quickly carried the slave who was alive from the hole and moved him to the horse carriage that Billy rented.

Anne and Billy did not think too much about it, believing that Zhang Heng rescued the black man out of kindness. Billy, however, was worried about what Malcolm told them earlier.

“I think the black-market alliance is about to do something to Carina. What should we do?”

“What do you think?”

“I don’t like them at all. I guess his theories about ‘order’ and all might make him famous in other colonies, but this is Nassau, the city of freedom! He can’t be ordering us around like his slaves in his mansion.”

“You are right about that, but the black-market alliance has grown really powerful in Nassau. All the great pirate crews have joined forces with them. The ones supporting us are just small-time pirates. I know them quite well. Though there are many of them, they can’t provide us with much help during critical moments. Once Carina loses her foothold in Nassau, we will lose the channel to sell our loot as well. When that time comes, we would be forced to partner up with the black-market alliance.”

“This is the very reason why we can’t ditch her and partner up with the black-market alliance. Malcolm has bigger ambitions than you think, and he’s not that simple. Setting up an alliance to increase his wealth is just one of his goals. He wanted to make use of the alliance to take control of the Nassau’s pirates. If he succeeds, he would be powerful enough to assign captains that he likes for every pirate crew. And no one will be able to go against him.”

Then, Zhang Heng finally voiced out his opinion.

“Actually, the black-market alliance has a weakness as well. They are formidable when we look at them as an alliance but the truth is, their inner structure is not as tough as we think it is. The core members of the alliance are Redmond and Malcolm. Redmond is the wealthiest and most experienced black-market merchant in Nassau.

“For his sake, all the black-market merchants of Nassau gathered and came up with a proposal that everyone could agree on. Sadly, Redmond is getting older. Even though he’s the leader of the alliance, his job is limited to stabilizing the structure of the alliance and resolving conflicts. Malcolm is the real guy running the whole thing. He rose to power too quickly in Nassau, and in his quest for ultimate control, he’s offended many people. This is why he needs Redmond’s good reputation to help him set up the black-market alliance.

“Are there any conflicts between the two of them?”

“I have no idea.”

“Huh?”

“Both of them are powerful individuals in the alliance. I know that they would have to put on a show that they are good partners. However, I don’t think outsiders know the true nature of their relationship. A few days ago, I got to know that Redmond already knew Malcolm before Malcolm came to Nassau.”

“That should mean that they are in good terms, right?” replied Billy.

“No. I don’t think so. Malcolm and Redmond are both successful businessmen, and I believe that they are professional enough not to allow emotions to ruin their work. Meeting Malcolm tonight confirmed my speculations. He is very confident. Though he dislikes us and knew that we have potential to bring massive trouble to the black-market alliance, he remained calm and put only said positive things. To eliminate any future problems, he’s willing to put the past behind him. Likewise, he’s not one to allow friendship to determine his decisions. After working with Redmond for so many years, it’s impossible that there are no problems between them. We just need to dig them out.”

“You’re talking about driving a wedge between Malcolm and Redmond?”

“It’s hard to go up against a huge alliance like this from the outside. Like I said earlier, their inner workings aren’t as stable as we think it is. Once the relationship between Redmond and Malcolm becomes sour,

the black-market alliance will lose its stability. But even that's not enough. We need to make sure that we can attack them from the outside as well, and speeding up the process of destroying them is essential. I will talk to Carina about this once she returns to Nassau. Right now, we need to figure out how to ruin their relationship."

"If there are conflicts between them, I don't think outsiders would know anyway since the top is very secretive. Perhaps we can create some friction between them."

"That's a good idea as well. However, I will only do that as a last resort. Redmond and Malcolm are sharp enough to spot any engineered conflicts. Things might become worse for us if they find out."

Chapter 164: Escape Plan

The horse carriage entered Nassau at night, eventually stopping in front of Zhang Heng's house. Zhang Heng and Billy then carried the slave into the house and placed him in Marvin's empty room. As for Anne, she quickly went to look for a doctor.

Billy chatted with Zhang Heng for a while before he took his leave as it was getting late. After that, Zhang Heng went back to Marvin's room. The slave's eyes remained closed, and he was as still as a glass lake on a windless night. If not for his shallow breathing, most would have thought that he was dead. The blood smeared over his face had caked up, making him look even scarier than before.

"I have to say. You sure are good at pretending to be unconscious," said Zhang Heng as he moved a chair to the side of the bed.

Unsurprisingly, he got no response. The man was still lying on the bed in the same position, unconscious.

"Aren't you curious about how I knew you were still alive? When we were in the ballroom earlier, everyone had their attention focused on your fight. I was the only one looking around and observing the others. In the end, I noticed something really interesting. Whenever your opponent attacked you, I could see some of the female slaves cringing in fear. At first, I thought that they were worried about you. I also saw that they were relieved when you attacked your opponent.

"So, I figured that their concern for you must have been genuine. One interesting point, though. I noticed how happy they were when you managed to beat Scarface. At the same time, it seemed as if they were expecting something as well. This reaction puzzled me. Until the very end, just when everyone thought that you were done for, you stood up and delivered a heavy blow to your opponent. To my surprise, they didn't seem too shocked by your epic victory. This made me think of one thing. Maybe, just maybe, they knew exactly what would happen on the stage.

"Everything that happened tonight was directed by you. You wanted to escape the mansion, and so, you concealed your true ability on the stage. After suffering such severe injuries, you knew all too well that they would never hire a doctor to treat you. Instead, they were going to bury you alive. And the two slaves digging your grave were your people as well. That was why they panicked when I offered to buy you. They never expected this to happen."

When Zhang Heng was done talking, the slave suddenly sprung from the bed and attempted to strangle him! All too soon, he stopped in his tracks as he saw a Zhang Heng pointing a gun at him.

“I have no ill intention towards you. On the contrary, you should feel lucky that you met me tonight. If you followed your original plan, you might be able to get away without your supervisor noticing you. However, you still can’t bypass the guards that are at the front entrance. Say you somehow managed to evade the guards without notice, you would still be surrounded by acres of plantations. You can’t possibly escape the area.”

“Is this what you mean by harboring no ill intention toward me? Here you are, pointing your gun.”

Zhang Heng was relieved when the slave talked to him in English. Compared to their female counterparts who were maids, black male fighters were not required to know too many English words. The less they knew, the better as all their masters needed them to do was to fight like wild beasts on the stage.

Almost every tribe in Africa had their own specific language. Most of the time, it was hard for one tribe to communicate with another due to the language barrier.

“I have seen what your arms can do. I don’t want to be strangled to death. Whether you believe it or not, me saving you tonight was just a coincidence. I don’t want anything from you. I’m planning to hire a doctor to treat your wounds, and you are allowed to leave whenever you want after you recover. I’m only worried that you might try to break the doctor’s neck. That’s why I thought of talking to you first.”

“Our country might be poor, but we are no beasts.”

The slave appeared to relax a little and was no longer hostile towards Zhang Heng.

“I’m sorry. Anyway, you have been freed. You can choose to let the doctor treat your wounds, or you can leave right now. My door is always open.”

Zhang Heng wasn’t lying when he said that it was merely a coincidence that he rescued the slave tonight. Though he knew that the slave was plotting to leave the mansion, this incident had nothing to do with him. Initially, he had no intention to interrupt his plan and only decided to act on it when he saw that a man was about to be buried alive.

Somehow, the slave was still doubtful of Zhang Heng. He stood up and walked to the doors. Naturally, Zhang Heng didn’t say a word and just watched him leave. A few minutes later, however, the black man returned to Zhang Heng’s house.

“Rakutua.”

“Oh? Is that your name?”

“No. That’s the name of the man that I killed today. He is the bravest warrior in my tribe, and he is my best friend as well.”

1“Was he supposed to escape with you?”

Zhang Heng was bewildered.

“Yes. The hardest part of the plan is to control your strength. He has to make sure that my injuries are severe but not to the point that it would kill me. It’s tough to achieve that. If my opponent were not Rakutua, I would have surely died tonight. There’s no way that I can turn the tide around just like that.”

“Just who the heck are you?”

Zhang Heng was curious about his background. He had managed to make the slaves worry about him and even convinced a warrior from his tribe to die for him. Every black slave around him was practically helping him to escape.

“My name is Laeli. I come from a big tribe, and my father is the chief. Those evil slave traders invaded my hometown and turned our lives upside down!”

Chapter 165: Argument

“The slave traders sold weapons to an enemy tribe which started a war against us. The surprise attack from the enemy tribe had caused many of us to be captured by the slave traders. Almost half of our tribe was eliminated. To survive, we had to keep on moving. But, no matter where we ran, the traders would always locate us. They even met my father as well, telling him that they were willing to arm him in exchange for the prisoners that we captured. Of course, my father was resolute and strongly rejected their offer.”

“After that, our living conditions worsened. A few of our neighboring tribes attacked us after incitement by the slave traders. The conflict had unfortunately caused the lives of my father and brother. They killed all the tribe’s elderly and sold the younger ones to the slave traders. I happen to be one of them.”

“So, all the female servants and Lakutua came from your tribe? Do they know who you are? How is that even possible? According to what I know, slave traders would usually sell slaves from different tribes to buyers. This is to prevent the slaves from working together and retaliate against their master.”

“The master of the mansion bought six slaves from my tribe, including me. One of them fell ill and died not too long after working there. Another one was killed by a whip for attempting to escape the mansion. Now, there are only four of us left. Honestly, I never thought that I would be able to meet up with Nevasa and the rest of them here. They were among the first batch of black slaves that were captured by the slave traders. Most of them were women. Perhaps they thought that women wouldn’t pose a threat to them, and thus, the slave trader didn’t separate them. As for Rakutua and me, we were both captured at the same time, but sold to different buyers. Malcolm has always loved to watch a good fight. He’s been collecting gladiators from different people. After hearing about Rakutua’s great fighting skills, he instantly bought him up. That was about a month ago.”

“I heard just now that you guys were planning to go up against Malcolm?”

“There have been some conflicts between my Jackdaw and the black-market alliance that he’s in. This is no secret. The entire Nassau knows about it. He invited me to attend his banquet for the reason of making peace with me.”

“And you won’t accept his proposal? Why?”

"I dislike having to place my fate in the hands of others. Malcolm and I don't hold a grudge against each other. However, I have a problem with the black-market alliance that he's set up. Once the alliance becomes stable, it's not going to be good news to the people of Nassau that enjoy freedom."

Laeli could not understand Zhang Heng's last sentence, but he knew that he was telling the truth. At least, no matter what his reason was, Zhang Heng was against Malcolm. After a short pause, Laeli continued,

"After my father and brother were killed in the war, we had to elect a new chief per the tribe's law. It's my responsibility to rescue my tribe members. I have to return them the freedom that they once had. That's why I had to escape from the mansion no matter what."

"I admire your zeal, but unfortunately, I don't think I can help you with that."

Being a decent human being in the future, Zhang Heng was disgusted by the prospect of slavery. It was one of the worst things that a human could ever do to another human being. He was fine with rescuing Laeli from the mansion, but setting free every slave from the place would be a matter that needed extensive planning. This was a critical moment in time for the Jackdaw and Carina. Zhang Heng had to focus solely on Malcolm and his black-market alliance. He was indisposed to help Laeli even if he wanted to.

"I'm not asking for your help. I simply want to work with you," said Laeli as he shook his head.

"Work with me?"

"Yes. You want to know the problems between Malcolm and Redmond, right? I think I can help you with that. It's heartbreaking to know that so many black men were sold here and turned into gladiators. We were forced to fight and kill each other for the sake of our master's entertainment. Now, let's talk about the servants, who are always close to their masters. There are times when they will be able to eavesdrop on their secrets."

"To the white people, we are merely goods and a means of labor. They see us as their property, and they do not care about what we think and feel. Without their permission, there's no way that we can leave the mansion. Many a time, they would discuss many sensitive topics in front of us. From the first day that I was sold to the Terrance mansion, I've been planning my escape. Other than learning more than a few words, I actually collected lots of information as well."

"Around eight months ago, Malcolm and Redmond had a meeting with each other. Malcolm ordered me to fight another black man in front of him. However, I could see that they were not watching the fight. They even had an argument about whatever they were discussing."

Upon hearing that, Zhang Heng was becoming more and more interested in Laeli's story.

"They were arguing about some merchant. Since it had nothing to do with my escape plan, I don't quite remember his name. All I know is that he is one of the merchants from the black market. He is doing the same thing with Malcolm and Redmond, and is quite famous as well. There was this once when Redmond tried to talk about setting up the black-market alliance with him, but, the person rejected his idea without even thinking twice."

“He told Redmond that the black-market alliance would bring him a lot of trouble, adding that Redmond’s ambition is getting out of hand. After that, Redmond talked to Malcolm about it. Both of them agreed that it would be a problem if the person refused to work with them. Although he wasn’t the wealthiest merchant on the island, he had lots of experience and a good reputation. Redmond suggested that they should take their time to convince him. Not too long after that, the person was captured at a colony. Redmond suspected that Malcolm was behind it. However, Malcolm said that it had nothing to do with him. They both then broke into an argument about this.

Immediately, Zhang Heng thought of Carina’s father. It would seem that the person in the story referred to him. Zhang Heng did not expect that the capturing of Carina’s father in New Jersey had something to do with the black-market alliance. This incident wasn’t as simple as he thought it was.

Chapter 166: Carina’s Yield

“What do you think about my intel? Did it help?”

“What would it cost me?”

Laeli did not rush to answer the question.

“Even though I’ve left Terrance’s mansion, there are still quite a few of my people stuck there. You want to kick Malcolm out of the game and know more of his secrets, right? I can contact my people to help you.”

“You should know that even if the black-market alliance is dismissed and Malcolm chased out of Nassau, you still can’t change the fate of the slaves inside that mansion.”

“I will change my fate with my own hands.”

Laeli looked determined. Different individuals acted differently when faced with critical situations like this. Some would simply give up all hope and let despair rule their lives while some would choose to embrace hardship and accept their fate. Once the predicament was over, the person in question would usually become stronger than before.

Laeli definitely belonged to the latter. He had endured the deaths of his brother, father, and his tribe. The marks of a slave had already been engraved onto his body. To escape the mansion, he broke his nose and lost an eye. He was also forced to kill his best friend. Not only did Laeli not allow despair to run him down, but he was also grooming himself to become a worthy chief of his tribe.

“We didn’t get to enjoy freedom from where we came from. We didn’t get to enjoy freedom in the colonies. And we don’t get freedom in this city as well. So, we must leave this place. I heard there are several uninhabited islands around this area. Some of them are located along the shipping lines. There is freshwater for drinking and empty land where we can fish, hunt, and cultivate crops. It might be difficult in the beginning, but I believe that we will survive just like how our ancestors did.”

“I have a ship and a crew. I can help you to look out for a suitable island when we set sail the next time. We are capable of bringing you and your people over to the island as well. The problem is, how are you going to rescue your people from the mansion? I deeply sympathize with your current situation. You can’t just barge into the mansion and release them. That would surely anger many powerful people on this island. Currently, the Jackdaw is proliferating in Nassau. Most of our crew’s families are living here.

It's my responsibility to take care of them. I hope you can understand my decision. The most I can do is to bring you and your people to the island that you wish to settle down on."

"I will solve the problem of rescuing my people out of the mansion, but I will need some weapons. I don't need much. In order to bring those weapons into the mansion without detection, they would have to be small. I'd say daggers would be perfect. Besides that, I'll need at least five blunderbusses. One thing, though. I don't need them right now. You can pass them to me after you settle your problem."

"I have no problem with supplying you with the weapons that you need. Let's work together, and I hope that your plan will be a success."

At that, Zhang Heng then extended his hand as a gesture of goodwill. Laeli was surprised that Zhang Heng was willing to shake his hand. It was his first time encountering such a polite act. It was at that moment when he knew that Zhang Heng did not look at him as if he was property or a wild beast. He was treating him like a fellow human with equal rights. Half a second later, Laeli took Zhang Heng's hand and shook it. Suddenly, the two of them heard someone coming into the house. It was Anne and the doctor.

"You take a few days of rest to allow your wounds to recover. My partner will return here in a while. I need you to tell him everything that you have just told me."

....

A week later, Carina returned to Nassau after leading a ship full of nutmegs all the way to New York. New York harbor was one of the best ports that Carina's father managed, where he had continuously bribed all the officers there. Hence, no one gave her a hard time when she passed their customs. They did not even check the goods that she'd brought into New York. This saved her a tremendous amount of time, enabling her to look for more potential buyers.

Currently, New York did not require nutmeg, and though they were valuable spices, Carina figured she might have to sell them all in Europe instead. There were a couple of merchants interested in buying them, but Carina wasn't pleased with the price that they offered. After looking for around ten days, a merchant that specialized in the spice trade came for Carina. Both of them spent a long while haggling, trying to come with a price that could please both parties.

That was the very first deal that Carina made ever since she became a black-market merchant. After paying off the Jackdaw, her loans, and her transportation fare, she was left with 500 gold coins. Getting such large amounts of money greatly motivated her to work harder and rescue her father from prison. Unfortunately, coming across such valuable targets was a one in a million occurrence. Otherwise, her father could be released from jail within two years.

The first thing that Carina did was to send 100 gold coins to her mother. All the family's savings had gone to bailing her father out of jail. With the 100 gold coins, her family could at least breathe right now. Left with 400 gold coins, Carina was going to use a portion of it to maintain a good relationship with the officers at various ports. The rest of the gold coins would be saved for her next job. With the savings, she could at least reduce some of the interest. Without taking any breaks, Carina returned to Nassau immediately after everything was settled.

Carina, however, was most concerned right now about her relationship with the Jackdaw while she was not in Nassau. She would have never left if she was not tasked to sell all those spices. Carina thought that Zhang Heng had only agreed to work with her due to pressure from the black-market alliance. There was a possibility that Zhang Heng would kick her away once the deal was sealed. Right now, she had no right to ask him to continue trading with her in the future. Although understanding the risks, she still chose to partner up with Zhang Heng. At least she could earn some money from this deal.

She didn't know why, but somehow, she had faith that Zhang Heng would not just kick her away like that. Whenever she talked to him, she tended to forget that she was talking to the captain of the Jackdaw. Zhang Heng was different from the pirates that she'd encountered before.

As she returned to Nassau, she was relieved when she found out that the Jackdaw hadn't yet partnered up with the black-market alliance. Also. The small-time pirates still considered the Jackdaw the symbol of the anti-black-market alliance.

When she finally caught up to Zhang Heng, she heard something unbelievable.

Chapter 167: A Well-Protected Flower

"Malcolm's the reason my father is in prison?"

Carina was left in a complete shock, not knowing what to do when she heard the news for the first time. She also felt uncomfortable when she saw a half-blind and broken nosed black man standing in front of her.

"For now, we don't have any solid evidence."

Zhang Heng then poured a cup of wine for Carina to calm her down.

"I have to say, the timing of your father getting captured and put in jail was just too much of a coincidence. Redmond's suspicion makes perfect sense. Your father was one of the black-market alliance's biggest obstacles when they were being set up. Once your father is out of the game, Malcolm will benefit the most. Billy asked a couple of black-market merchants about your father and discovered that a large number of them believe that somebody must have gotten your father in jail through means of foul play. You must have visited him at least once, right? Did he say anything about this?"

"Before we were allowed to visit him, we had to pay a huge sum of money to the prison guards. To make things worse, we were only allowed to see him for a tiny amount of time, so my mother and sister used up most of it. I only had a few minutes to talk to him. At that time, I told him that I would take over his business. We didn't discuss anything else apart from business. Even though my father handed me his ship and his connections, he didn't agree on me coming to Nassau. In the end, he told me that the most dangerous people in Nassau are not pirates and asked me not to trust anyone just like that."

Carina paused for a moment before continuing.

"Actually, Malcolm treated me well when I first arrived in Nassau. He told me that the black merchants not working on any pirate ships were not allowed to join the black-market alliance and get their share of profit. He also said that he couldn't convince the other black-market merchants to give up on dealing with my father's ex-pirate partners. During that time, there were a couple of powerful pirate groups

who had still not join the black-market alliance. Malcolm gave me a list and asked me to convince them.”

“The fact that I’m a woman didn’t make this task easier. I only knew a few people when I came to Nassau, and there was nothing I could offer when I tried to convince them to join the black-market alliance. Of course, I didn’t have enough money to bribe the important personnel on their ships. In the end, I failed to convince them to join the black-market alliance. At that time, I was truly grateful for Malcolm helping me to settle down in Nassau. He was one of the few people willing to help me. I won’t go against the black-market alliance if I have other options to solve my problem. I simply couldn’t have ever imagined that he had something to do with my father being sent to jail.”

Carina took a sip of the wine, but it did little to calm her down. Suddenly, she stood up and said, “No way. I have to confront him right now and ask him to release my father!”

“Are you planning to make him admit that he was the one who got your father in jail?”

“If he doesn’t set my father free, I will let this matter be known to everyone in the alliance. He could easily pull off the same stunt to others if he could this to my father.”

“What you are about to do may get him into some small problems. But, as I said, we have no solid evidence to prove that Malcolm is responsible for putting your father in jail. Besides...”

Zhang Heng then turned around to look at Laeli.

“Your only witness was a slave. Technically speaking, all I did was overhear the conversation between Redmond and Malcolm,” said Laeli.

“I have another piece of bad news. Your very existence has brought a negative impact on the black-market alliance. Malcolm is about to do something about you,” said Zhang Heng to Carina.

Carina was shocked. She somehow expected that the black-market alliance would eliminate her the moment she decided to work with the Jackdaw. Still, there was a lot for her to swallow as she tried digesting what Zhang Heng said. If her father could be sent to jail because he went against Malcolm, she wondered what the black-market alliance would do to her since she followed in her father’s footsteps.

From the first day she arrived in Nassau, she knew that this was a path of no return. At first, her only intention was to earn enough money to free her father from jail. After making a tremendous amount of money from selling the spices, Carina found out that she actually loved being a black-market merchant. Indeed, this sounded crazy. Only a few months ago, she was a rich lady frequenting salons and balls, mingling with the upper-class society. She had no inkling on what the other part of the world looked like.

Until she came to Nassau, wanting to take over her father’s business, she had face a lot of obstacles along her path. She had tasted hardship that she never experienced before in the past 20 years. To join the black-market alliance, she chose to give up her dignity. She went around the island, looking for her father’s friends for help. She even negotiated with the pirates that she despise, reluctantly giving in to their demands as she did her best to convince them to work with her.

Entering a man’s house in the middle of the night was something that the old her would never do. Carina was wondering how was managed to keep her sanity. She used to be a well-protected flower that grew up in a safe environment. Now that she had thrown herself in the wilderness, she finally matured

up after going through all those hardships. This was the kind of life that she would never get to experience if she still lived in an upper-class society. The wilderness was filled with countless threats, betrayal, and challenges.

Carina could feel a surge of passion bursting through her heart, something that she never experienced before. Before all this, the thought of returning to where she came from after her father's rescue constantly plagued her mind. However, after tasting the satisfying reward of surviving the hardship, she decided that she would never return to her comfortable life.

"I will be ready. I will not be trampled on no matter who my enemy is."

"I'm afraid that it's not enough. After this, I hope that you will work even harder. You need to exert more pressure on the black-market alliance. At the same time, I will make use of your father's incident to divide Malcolm and Redmond. However, I must tell you that you may face more threats in the future if we do this. Right now, the conflict that we have with the black-market alliance is minimal, but if we decide to treat them as our enemy, I'm afraid that Malcolm might employ some despicable methods to deal with you. You have to remember that we are racing against time. Between you and Malcolm, let's see who will win the race."

"I have no other options, right? No point dwelling on it then."

Chapter 168: Marine Product and Loot

A month had passed. After the Jackdaw's pirates had more than enough fun in Nassau, most had spent off a large portion of their earnings. Some were even in debt. It baffled Zhang Heng as to how they managed to spend all their money, considering that they were each given at least 40 gold coins before they left the ship. That amount was enough for an ordinary person to live comfortably for two to three years. On the bright side, though, they were starting to miss life out at sea.

Coincidentally, Carina provided Zhang Heng with some valuable intel. After getting a minor refit and going through a recruitment drive, the Jackdaw was ready to set sail again. At the same time, Carina and Laeli started to work on their Nassau operation as well. Before the black-market alliance began to deal with Carina, she had decided that she would do whatever it would take for her plan to succeed. First, she rented a storage facility near the pier. Then, she spread the news to Nassau's small-time pirates, telling them that she was willing to offer them a higher price than the black-market alliance.

Upon hearing the news, a large number of pirates on the island started to pay attention. Though Carina was a woman, the fact that she managed to help the Jackdaw earn a huge amount of money had spread around the entire Nassau. Her reputation soon skyrocketed. It was great news to the small-time pirates that someone was willing to buy their loot at a higher price. If that was so, they wouldn't need to rely on the black-market alliance anymore. After all, the alliance wasn't as friendly to them as they were to the powerful pirate crews because it was hard for them to value loot. The alliance would only offer them a meager price for whatever they had.

Since they did not sign any contracts with the alliance, they could choose to stop selling to them anytime they wished. With the opportunity for better prospects, they would naturally choose to sell

their plunder to Carina. The captain of the Gentle Breeze was left speechless when he saw a group of pirate-wannabes lining up in front of the storeroom that Carina rented.

Their clothes were in tatters and they wielded all sorts of non-lethal weapons, which made them look more like beggars and thugs instead of pirates. One could only imagine the quality of the items sold to Carina.

An elderly pirate slowly approached the table. Malone suspected that he must be older than his great grandfather that he buried some time ago. The old pirate then put a basket of crabs on the table as Jim, the records keeper stared at him in a confused manner. Immediately, he pointed at the signboard behind him.

"I'm sorry, sir. We do not accept any marine products here," said the records keeper politely.

"Watch what you say to me, kid. Everyone knew me when I was your age. Even Henry Morgan had to pay his respects to me when he came to Nassau. This is what I acquired when I sailed out earlier."

"Still.... it does not change the fact that your loot is a marine product, sir."

Malone had personally recruited Jim last year. It was not easy hiring someone who knew how to count and read in this era. Not too long ago, almost half of the sailors from the Gentle Breeze left the ship when they heard that Mr. Fegan had been sent to jail. To Malone's surprise, Jim had chosen to stay with the ship. A better job would have awaited him if he'd left.

After selling off all the spices, Malone suggested to Carina that she should increase the pay of the kid hailing from North Carolina. There was nothing Malone could do when he saw Jim trying to explain the difference between marine products and loot to the old pirate.

"I robbed this basket of crabs from a fisherman. So it's considered loot, not a marine product. Your boss told us that you are buying the loot that we got, right? This is my loot. What's your problem?!"

"Sir, I think there's been a misunderstanding."

Carina could not bear to see them argue anymore. The pirates that were waiting in line were starting to get impatient as well.

"Pay him five copper coins to buy off his loot. We need to serve the next seller," Carine informed Jim.

Jim was instantly relieved when he was told to pay off the old pirate. Surprisingly, the old pirate was still unhappy even after Jim paid him the five copper coins. The pirate after him took out two marbles from his pocket and attempted to sell it to them.

"This is a disaster. You know that we won't be able to sell all these useless stuff that we bought from these wannabes, right? We talked about this when you first arrived in Nassau. It's impossible to earn a single dime from them. I thought we've agreed on not buying anything from these people. Why are you wasting your time and money on them right now?" asked an irritated Malone. He then continued,

"Forgive my candor, but I feel that whatever we are doing right now is a complete waste of time. I would rather spend the money to let a hardworking boy like him to enjoy himself at a brothel in town. Look at the poor guy. I bet he's still a virgin."

“Thank you for your reminder. I know how the value of those items. If you can find me a second Jackdaw on this island, I’m more than happy to chase all of them away. If you can’t do it, you’d better shut your mouth. If you are bored, go find a hooker and let her f*ck you. Alternatively, you can just come and help me.”

“I think I will choose the first option.”

Malone folded his arms and stormed away. After taking a few steps, however, he stopped.

“Did you just ask a hooker to f*ck me? Or, is there something wrong with my hearing?”

“What’s wrong with that?”

“I remember when Mr. Fegan brought you on the Gentle Breeze for the first time. You were only eight or nine. Like a porcelain doll, you held up your dress so high; it would not touch the ship’s deck. You were so unhappy that your father brought you aboard the ship. I can’t imagine that the demure lady that you once were became a boss that has taken over the ship. Ms. Carina, you’ve done it. You blended in with this place faster than anyone could have imagined. Your father would be so proud of you.”

“It’s still too early to say that. It’s not easy to survive in this place. Considering that we are facing a powerful enemy, we have to figure out a way to catch a breath from time to time.”

“Uncle Malone, I have to thank you for not leaving us even after my father was put in jail.”

“Mr. Fegan was the one who offered me this job when I was lost. I will never forget what he’s done for me. For now, I’m not going to waste my energy on pointless matters. So, I’m going to the brothel right now to look for a prostitute, and ask her to f*ck me.”

1

Chapter 169: Rubbish

Two weeks had passed since the Jackdaw set out to the oceans. At the same time, the farce in front of the warehouse also continued for two whole weeks.

Unable to cope with the vast number of people lining up, Carina went on to spend around forty gold coins in exchange for what Malone called ‘a pile of rubbish.’

The only thing in the entire heap that had any value at all was probably the twelve boxes of potatoes. Even these were not going to yield much in the colonies. The Gentle Breeze making a trip for those items was clearly more of a loss than gain.

No one understood what the tradeswoman intended to achieve by doing this. Even so, the black-market alliance immediately responded by issuing a statement. It said that all pirates found working with Carina would forever get the lowest price from them.

This meant that the black-market alliance was stonewalling Carina on a large scale. Malcolm’s counterattack was simple and straightforward. As soon as the statement was out, the quality of the items that the tradeswoman received worsened. Now, Carina had to inspect the loot twice when dealing with those pirate-wannabes.

Of course, those who were desperate were unaffected by this. Never having the habit of thinking ahead, they would just go wherever the money was. These, however, were never the black-market alliance's target group anyway. Malcolm felt that he would ultimately be at an advantage, having these guys eventually wearing out and discouraging Carina to go on.

The people on the island gave the tradeswoman's secondhand business the undesirable moniker of a 'rubbish collection station,' and many merchants from the black-market alliance were simply waiting for her to make a fool of herself.

During this period, Malone had also become very dispirited. Whenever he met anyone on the island he knew, they would always ask him when he was going to sell off all the Colony's trash. Eventually, under the pressure of the constant mocking, he hid within the brothel, refusing to emerge until Carina sent a messenger to look for him.

"Set sail tonight?" chuckled Malone bitterly as he rolled out of bed and put on his clothes. "Stop joking. Are you really going to listen to those guys and transport all that stuff to Boston, New York? To whom should we sell them to? How much would the journey cost us? How much profit are we going to make?"

"I've already arranged for workers in advance. You'll just need to ferry the goods to their destination, and someone over there will handle it. Then you can return to Nassau," the messenger replied.

Just then, Carina walked into the room, catching the Gentle Breeze's captain completely off-guard. Thank goodness his pants were already on.

Carina glared at the stark-naked prostitute and said, "Can you please excuse us?"

The girl smiled, blowing a kiss at her before picking up her garments on the bench. She sultrily walked out of the room, swaying her hips.

Carina asked the messenger she sent for Malone to guard the door. Then, she poured herself a glass of whiskey. "Can you load everything on the ship in one afternoon?"

Malone shrugged. "I have to gather the crew, buy supplies for the trip, replenish water on board, check the sails... so, I guess... it should be alright. If you insist, we can leave this place before sundown."

"Very good. There's no need to rush. We leave after dark."

Malone frowned, "Leaving in such a mighty rush? Ah... you're worried that your potatoes would start sprouting, eh?"

Sensing sarcasm in the captain's tone, Carina leaned back and rubbed her temples wearily. "Do you know how much money we've lost during this period?"

"I know you may not want to hear this, but I've already told you earlier on that if we could actually make any money off of those guys, you wouldn't have had to beg the captains who worked with your father to deal with you."

"I never expected to earn any money off them. Not now, at least," groaned Carina. "I just needed them to help me spread the word, to let all the pirates on the island know that working with me is more profitable than working with the black-market alliance."

“I’m very sure Malcolm received your message too. That’s why he had the black-market alliance issue a statement. Now, the powerful pirate gangs on the island are even more disinclined to seek us.”

“No, on the surface, they won’t come to us.”

“What do you mean?”

“When I was tiny, my father told me stories about this place, about how brave and fearless the people are. They would chase after riches completely unrestricted by rules whatsoever. Many people thought that the pirate captains sided with the black-market alliance because of a contract with them, but that wasn’t the case. In fact, most of them couldn’t care less about what’s written on a contract. They only chose the black-market alliance because it provided them with a higher income. All they care is feeding their men, avoiding a mutiny, and securing their positions as captain.”

“That may be true, but because of this, they would surely never leave the black-market alliance to work with us,” Malone sighed. “Do you know what I’ve been hearing... what other people have been saying about us?”

The tradeswoman raised a brow.

“Those bastards think that we won’t last. They believe that the Jackdaw continues to work with us only because...” The captain paused for a moment.

“I’ve discovered a woman’s talents?”

“Something like that. Everyone here thinks that, sooner or later, Malcolm and his black-market alliance will be chased out of Nassau. Forgive me for being blunt, but under such circumstances, no one would want to work with us.”

“Right now, I’m not trying to strive for a long-term partnership with anyone,” said Carina. “I’m just providing them with a means for some extra income.”

“Extra income?” Malone couldn’t understand what the tradeswoman was saying.

“My target is not the few top-tier pirate groups. The black-market alliance has been feeding them well. To be honest, there’s not much hope working with the guys from the third and fourth categories, either. But some of the first and second category pirates are actually not bad. It’s just that they were established a little late, just like the Jackdaw. The black-market alliance lowered their prices, but I can offer them nearly 20% more, which should be pretty attractive to them—on the premise that the black-market alliance doesn’t know about the transactions between us.”

“How is that possible? Once the Gentle Breeze sets sail, everyone will know...” Malone began but suddenly stopped. Then, his eyes widened. “The rubbish that you’ve been buying for the past two weeks—you’ve actually been preparing for this?”

Carina nodded. “About five days ago, a helmsman from one of the ships contacted me in secret. He wanted to sell a bolt of cotton fabric—very high-quality stuff. They have always been rather unhappy with the price that the black-market alliance offered them, so they came looking for me. Right now, that bolt is in our warehouse. I need you to help me move it to Boston. Jim is already there and will liaise with a local merchant.”

Chapter 170: Target: The Goddess' Spear

Following a piece of intel given by Carina, the Jackdaw was chasing down a ship called the Goddess' Spear, a whaling vessel plying the waters around this area. Their patience finally paid off this time, after being at sea for over a year. Recently, some ships which returned to Nassau told everyone that the Goddess' Spear had managed to hunt down a 70-foot giant sperm whale. It was so smart that the Goddess' Spear circled the same spot for three months just to capture it.

It was time for them to reap the rewards of their hard work. Getting a sperm whale was a giant treasure in itself. Its fat could be refined into blubber. The oil from its brain could be used to make whale-wax. And then, the most valuable treasure, ambergris, lay within the whale's intestines.

Ambergris either came in a hue of black or grey. When first extracted from the whale's stomach, it would be in wax form, not to mention that it smelled terrible. Once dried, it would turn amber, and the foul smell would be replaced by a unique fragrance. It was typically used as a fixative for very premium perfumes. As a result of its rarity, ambergris was more expensive than gold. This was undoubtedly the reason why Zhang Heng set his sights on the Goddess' Spear.

The previous pirate ship that attempted to plunder the Goddess' Spear did not end up well. In this era, whale hunting was to be considered a job with extremely high-risks, and only true men dared to venture in this field. Having such brazenness, they didn't even flinch when they saw a pirate ship. At that time, they did not have enough firepower to take on it. Nevertheless, their captain instructed them to take on the pirates the moment they boarded the ship. At the end of the day, they used tridents and fishing nets to defeat the pirates that came with guns and sabers.

The entire ship of pirates ended up being prisoners of the Goddess' Spear. The sailors took possession of their weapons and ammunition. Once the situation was under control, the sailors were instructed to slit the throats of the pirates and toss their bodies over the deck. It was a clear warning to any other potential pirates that this would happen to them too.

Their brutal method worked way better than expected. Whenever the weaker pirate vessels saw a pile of bodies on the deck, lying on their own blood, they would turn around and leave the Goddess' Spear alone. As for the more powerful pirate groups, the sight of the bodies only got them more excited. This could only mean that the ship must be hauling some precious cargo.

The Jackdaw did not retreat as well. After his first victory, Zhang Heng managed to recruit even more pirates to join him. Right now, he had a total of 62 pirates on board. The newly hired pirates were of better quality than the first group of pirates who joined them. This was especially true for the cannoneer. Billy managed to convince the most skillful cannoneer from another experienced pirate group to join the Jackdaw.

Dufresne, too, had managed to recruit a very talented chef. Initially, the chef worked for a hotel on the island. After joining the Jackdaw for about half a month, every single pirate on board took turns to complement his food. It seemed that life on the high seas wasn't as bad as it was anymore.

Most importantly were the newly recruited pirates. The old pirates had their absolute faith in Zhang Heng. Due to their previous success, Zhang Heng did not need to give them another morale-boosting

speech. No one on the Jackdaw feared the piles of bodies on the Goddess' Spear, which gave Zhang Heng the confidence to continue pursuing them. The fierce battle that they were about to face would only increase the combat experience of his pirates.

Previously, the fight between the Happiness and the Jackdaw proved too easy for them. It was evident that the Happiness was a lot weaker than the Jackdaw in terms of firepower. In fact, it did not even look like a battle at all, being more like target practice. In the beginning, the Jackdaw took a few hits from them, but soon after that, the Jackdaw dominated the rest of the battle. The only dangerous thing that happened on the Happiness was Anne getting ambushed by the navies that hid in the cargo hold.

This time, taking down the Goddess' Spear wasn't going to be that easy. Although the whaling vessel proved a formidable foe, Zhang Heng was more worried about his competitors. One week after they left port, they crossed paths with a pirate ship. Not too long after that, they met another one. Both ships raised their black flags at almost the same time. Thankfully, after a short conversation and exchange of information, the Jackdaw and the other pirate ship came to an agreement that they would leave each other alone.

They were actually not being friendly but were simply afraid of the Jackdaw's overwhelming firepower. As nobody had any loot on their ships during that time, they chose to settle the matter peacefully.

Zhang Heng's mind drifted elsewhere as he had his gaze fixed on the pirate ship that slowly sailed away from them. He was wondering how Carina was managing her situation back in Nassau. Before he left, she discussed her plan with him, and Zhang Heng decided to invest 100 gold coins in her. The money could be used to solve some of her problems besides fortifying the partnership between Zhang Heng and her.

Zhang Heng also promised that he would invest another 800 gold coins in the future. Carina would no longer need to worry that Zhang Heng would kick her out of the game. By becoming her partner, he would be entitled to 20% of her yield. If Carina did manage to convince more pirate ships to partner up with her, and if they returned to Nassau with a ship full of loot, Zhang Heng would also be able to profit from that as well.

Billy was tempted to invest in this venture as well but was forced to reconsider as he needed to provide for his family. In the end, he invested only 30 gold coins. As for Anne, she spent a total of 40 gold coins since there was no more need to purchase a house. And just like that, the two of them became small shareholders of the business.

At the same time, Laeli began to contact his people at the mansion.

After a short moment of distraction, Zhang Heng snapped back to reality. He realized that it was pointless for him to worry about Carina. It was entirely out of his control since he was out at sea. All he could do was to have faith in his partner. As captain of a pirate ship, he should focus more on the sea. If not for the conundrum of the black-market alliance, there would be no need for him to care about what happened on the island.

The Jackdaw needed to grow a lot stronger. Once his vessel was categorized as a top-tier pirate crew, it would be easier for him to control his fate. That was why every voyage was important to Zhang Heng. This time, he was confident that he would be able to bring something valuable back to Nassau.

As compared to other pirates, he had his Hunter's Blessing and Lucky Rabbit Foot with him. If everything went right, these two items should help him in pursuing the Goddess' Spear. Besides that, he received a notification from the game to inform him that his sailing skills had increased to LV 2.

With everything set in stone, it was time for the Jackdaw to shine.