

48 Hours 191

Chapter 191: Double Victory

“Are you going to explain what the hell happened on the beach?” Honegg enquired in a displeased manner.

“The beach? What’s going on?” asked Zhang Heng.

Honegg cursed Zhang Heng in his heart for being so shameless. It was no secret that Zhang Heng was the one who had massacred Wilton and his pirates, but nobody could find any substantial evidence to pin this crime on him. Most importantly, Wilton and his pirates were all dead. In other words, there were no witnesses alive to prove that Zhang Heng was guilty of the allegations.

“Attacking a docked ship with cannons and massacring the entire gang?! Aren’t you afraid of the public’s wrath?”

“Who would be angry at me?”

Honegg was speechless again when he heard the question. He was so focused on Zhang Heng’s crime that he’d forgotten to rethink the whole incident carefully. The two events that Honegg mentioned earlier were rather severe. Almost everyone on this island had one or two enemies in their lifetime and nobody wished that their throats were slit while they were fast asleep.

However, the Skeleton and her crew weren’t originally from this island. They were outsiders. Also, the way they made their presence felt had angered many of Nassau’s folks. Judging by the reaction of the crowd this morning, nobody sympathized with Wilton’s death. They were, however, shocked that Zhang Heng would come up with such a dramatic solution. They became more cautious of him, but their feelings weren’t as intense.

“Captain Honegg, I know that you have sacrificed a lot to protect and maintain order on this island. The existence of you and your men have made it possible for Nassau to stay peaceful. Just like others on this island, I’m grateful for that. Please know that I’m not trying to destroy everything that you have built. You have talked to Wilton before, and you know what kind of person he is. Forgive me for being honest; you should know better than anyone that your wish will never come true. Wilton and his pirates are not about to stay here without causing any trouble.”

“Are you saying that I should thank you for solving my problem?”

“Let me ask you a question. Do you wish to see my body lying on the beach or Wilton’s?”

Honegg didn’t know what to answer Zhang Heng, and although he was still mad, he had to admit that Wilton was never going to reason with him like a respectable human. He and his gang were more like wild beasts. Still, he felt troubled that Zhang Heng killed them even after he attempted to bargain with Wilton.

Honegg didn’t seem as angry as before, and he had calmed down a little. After all, Zhang Heng did not go all the way to push the button. Though the entire Nassau knew that he was responsible for the Wilton gang massacre, at least Zhang Heng didn’t admit that he was the one who did it.

Right now, Honegg had weigh the consequences that resulted from this incident. If it was in the old days, he could simply hold Zhang Heng accountable for his actions, or he could exert his influence and exile Zhang Heng from Nassau. With Zhang Heng's current reputation, he surely couldn't pull off something like that. On the other hand, if he took a step back and let it slide, it would show everyone that he was losing his edge. They would then doubt if he still had the capability to hold the fortress. Honegg had gotten used to life on land. He was never going to go back to sea.

Just when he had reached a crossroads, Zhang Heng spoke to him.

"Many on this island do not know how important you are. We can set sail with peace of mind knowing that nothing would happen to Nassau. All these because we know that you are here with your men. Let me tell you this, defending Nassau shouldn't be the responsibility of a single person."

Honegg twitched his eyebrows and waited for Zhang Heng to finish. Thankfully, what he was about to say did not disappoint him.

"I'm willing to make an official announcement that I'm willing to protect Nassau with you. Of course, you and your men still hold absolute authority. I'll only be there when you need me to deal with the utmost of dangerous situations. Anyone messing with you is equivalent to messing with the Jackdaw."

Right after Zhang Heng finished talking, a group of people walked toward him furiously. The man leading the group was Domingo. Through the fog of his drunkenness, he was still shocked when he heard that Honegg had gone ahead to confront Zhang Heng. The news of Zhang Heng's actions had spread throughout Nassau like a raging wildfire. Although the Jackdaw didn't have many pirates, no one dared belittle them anymore. Domingo was worried about Honegg's safety and brought everyone from the fortress as a backup.

They were at the ready to fight with Zhang Heng. Although nowhere as good as their young selves, they possessed undying loyalty towards Honegg. To their surprise, they saw Honegg calmly chatting with Zhang Heng. Domingo couldn't figure out what was going on. However, when he saw that Honegg was alright, he was relieved and stood down.

"I'm old. This is an era for the young now. Yoy and Sam are the future of Nassau. Old men like me with a busted leg can only stay with a pile of useless rocks. But, you guys don't have to worry. As long as I still live in the fortress, I will make sure that I'll protect Nassau with my life. With that, you can always set sail knowing that our home will be safe."

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The reason why Zhang Heng decided to kill Wilton was a straightforward one. The moment they crossed paths, Zhang Heng knew that Wilton would become his arch-enemy. If he didn't kill everyone on the Skeleton, it would have been him who was lying dead on the beach. Wilton definitely wouldn't hesitate to destroy Zhang Heng once he fixed his ship, which was why Zhang Heng chose to attack the Skeleton at a time least when everyone least expected it. At the same time, he intended to send a message through Wilton's body as well. Anyone that dared mess with Carina's ship would end up like Wilton.

Since Zhang Heng was done with the black-market alliance, Carina was essential to the Jackdaw. One might even say that Carina couldn't live without the Jackdaw. The truth was, the Jackdaw couldn't live without Carina either. On the one hand, she was the only one who could help Zhang Heng sell all his

loot. On the other, Zhang Heng had to make sure that his partner would be safe all the time. As for Honegg, Zhang Heng knew that Wilton and his pirates didn't really matter to him. All he cared about was his authority in the fortress. And this wasn't a hard problem to solve. After thinking for a bit, Zhang Heng figured out that partnering up with Honegg was the best solution to the problem.

Amongst the two respectable elders in the world of pirates, Zhang Heng's relationship with Frazer had turned sour. This indicated that Honegg's support was now vital. Honegg's reputation was enough to make everyone obey him, and partnering up with the Jackdaw would only fortify his authority on this island and the fortress. Zhang Heng had no interest in controlling the fortress. At his age, he would never want to sit in a stone wall and do nothing like Honegg. However, it was good to have an ally that had Honegg's authority.

This was a win-win situation. Hence, Honegg decided that he wouldn't go up against Zhang Heng.

Chapter 192: Expansion and Suspicion

"Thank you."

Once Honegg left, and after the pirates of the Jackdaw got their share of gold coins, Carina quietly approached Zhang Heng and thanked him. She couldn't imagine what would happen to her if Zhang Heng did not come back in time.

All the while, she tried her hardest to compete better in the world of business, constantly figuring out how to get more captains to work with her, save Malcolm, of course. Also, she made sure that her prices were always high enough to attract as many prospective sellers as possible. As a result of her efforts, she managed to outdo the black-market alliance by a large margin. After what happened to her father, she also made sure to avoid a few large ports controlled by the Malcolm Family. Little did she expect that they would send a gang of pirates to hunt down the Gentle Breeze.

An incident like that hadn't happened in Nassau for a very long time now. The pirates that Malcolm hired weren't originally from Nassau and hence, weren't worried about breaking the rules of the island. Last night was the first time that Carina brushed with the darker corners of the world. After living in Nassau for some time, she had gone through significant changes. At first, she was too shy to talk to men. Right now, astonished was bold enough to bargain with a group of fierce captains. As she received compliments from Malone and others, she was glad that she'd officially blended into this world to the point that she could face a group of pirates used to killing for a living.

Last night, Wilton managed to reignite the fear that she once had. The dagger in his hand was only two centimeters away from her neck. It was the very first time she came so close to death.

"I'm responsible for the Skeleton's attack on the Gentle Breeze. I was the one who told you to remain aggressive on this island. To be honest, I underestimated the magnitude of the threat to you. I'm astounded that Malcolm decided to deal with us a lot quicker than expected," said Zhang Heng.

He then took a look at his surroundings. Since that morning, a large crowd of people had already been lining up to sell their stuff to Carina.

“You have done a spectacular job so far. I believe that you’ve managed to pressure the black-market alliance.”

“It might seem that there are many people selling their stuff to me, but honestly, I don’t earn much from it. At the end of the day, I still have to rely on the Jackdaw.”

“How many captains looked for you while I was gone?”

“Four captains were working with me, and there were a few interested in selling their stuff as well. I was trying to negotiate and bargain with them. After that, Malcolm suddenly announced that all captains should only trade with the black-market alliance and not random black-market merchants. In the end, only two captains were still willing to work with me. I think things will get better, now that you’ve eliminated Wilton and his goons. Many will start to think that our business might just survive on this island. Just now, a few captains told me that they are willing to stop trading with the black-market alliance and would trade with me instead. Though they are not from some powerful pirate group, they are definitely more influential than these people lining up to sell their useless stuff to me.”

At the same time, Carina glared at a pirate who demanded that he should have been paid two extra bronze pesos.

“Right now, we have a problem. If we are going to expand, I don’t think one cargo ship is enough.”

“Wilton had two ships. His Skeleton can be entered into service after we fix it, and his second ship is totally fine. Though that ship isn’t as well-armed as the Skeleton, it sure is more spacious. I think it’s the perfect vessel for a cargo ship conversion. The only problem is that it was once a pirate ship. I’m afraid the port’s workers might recognize it.”

“I don’t think that’s going to be a problem. Wilton told us that he never left anyone alive when he plundered their ships. I’m pretty sure that very few had laid their eyes on that ship before. Before I use it, I’ll hire someone to carry out a refit and some modifications. Then, we can be sure that nobody would recognize it even if they have seen it before.”

“As for manpower, I believe that we can source most of that from this island itself. There are a lot of young people here, and since they can’t earn much by becoming a pirate, I don’t think they’d mind working on a cargo ship as long as their pockets are filled. They are also not asking for much. Most importantly, their family members and friends are living here. If last night’s incident were to happen again, I don’t think they’ll just sit still and do nothing.”

“If any emergency were to happen when I’m not around, you can look for Black Prince Sam or Honegg. They will help you. Alternatively, you can hire private security for your protection. I would say four to five people should be enough to help you to tackle any untoward incidents.

Zhang Heng saw that Carina was about to say something, but held back.

“What’s wrong?”

“There’s one thing bothering me. I might be overthinking, but I did work with a couple of pirate ships previously. I never thought that I would be able to keep this a secret from the black-market alliance forever. Still, I did something to make sure that Malcolm wouldn’t find out so soon. Something smells fishy. The moment I started to work with the other captains, I instantly received a warning from him.”

“At first, I thought that perhaps one of the pirate groups had tipped Malcolm off. You know how hard it is for pirates to keep secrets; a glass of rum and a hooker would make them spill all their beans. But, I did notice a problem, though. If they really did tell Malcolm about me, he shouldn’t have known my plans in such great detail. I didn’t expose anything at all when I met up with him, but I felt that he knew every single move that I was about to make.”

“Could there be a mole among us?”

“I don’t know what to think anymore. Everyone who works for me is a trusted ally of mine. I even made sure that only a handful knows about my plan. Most of the sailors on the Gentle Breeze don’t even know what they’re transporting.”

“Do you have any suspects in mind?”

“Jim, for one. He’s young, and he knows how to read. He was initially the records keeper of the Gentle Breeze, and Malone was the one who recommended that I hire him. Right after my father was put in jail, half of the experienced pirates left the ship. They were the ones who my father paid highly. However, Jim chose to stay on. He only joined our ship last year. Technically, he shouldn’t have a strong attachment to it. With his capabilities, it shouldn’t be hard to look for a better job too.”

“I don’t know much about him, but he chose to stick with us during our most trying times. I have to say; he’s helped me a lot for sure. That’s why Malone and I trust him fully. He seems to be serious about his job as well. So, I brought him off the Gentle Breeze and asked him to work with me here. He’s supposed to keep track of all the loot that we buy. He knows where every item comes from. At the same time, he is also one of the few who knows which route the Gentle Breeze takes.”

Chapter 193: Baiting a Mole

Malone was lazing on the bed in a brothel as an attractive prostitute helped him to spread some medicine on his wound.

Previously, when the Skeleton pursued the Gentle Breeze, Malone insisted that they were black-market merchants, but the pirates from the Skeleton ignored the claims. As captain of his ship, Malone tried his hardest to fight off the pirates bravely with his crew. Unfortunately, the Skeleton was way more potent than the Gentle Breeze, and within three minutes, every single one of the Gentle Breeze’s sailors was defeated by the Skeleton’s pirates.

After that, they started to kick and punch Malone. He fell to the ground the moment one of the pirates landed a heavy blow on his stomach. The searing pain from the bludgeoning caused him to drop the dagger in his hand. When the pirates were done bashing him up, Malone was dragged and locked up in the depths of the ship’s hold. When he was finally alone, he quickly checked his body and realized that it was bruised and bleeding from top to bottom. Not one part of him was left unscathed.

Just like the entire crew of the Gentle Breeze, Malone thought that those pirates would surely kill him. While they sailed back to Nassau, the Skeleton took the opportunity and plundered another merchant ship. Malone witnessed first hand on how Wilton gleefully tormented the Gentle Breeze’s sailors for sport. Even after all the experience gained from working at sea for decades, Malone still trembled at the sight of the inhumane pirates that plundered his ship. He became so hopeless to the point where he wanted to kill himself.

Right until when his freedom was granted back to him, he couldn't believe that he had to endure such unspeakable horrors. When he was sure that he was no longer in danger, the first thing he did was run the tavern and drink as much as he could stomach. Having his fill of alcohol, he proceeded to the brothel he visited regularly. Finally, he found some peace and quiet that he craved for so long in a familiar place he was comfortable with. When he woke up the next afternoon, he was met by Carina.

"Hold on. You suspect that Jim is working for Malcolm?"

The prostitute left the room half a minute ago. Malone blinked, shaking his head as he tried to clear the awful hangover that was pounded his mind. Through his daze, he was shocked to hear Carina suspecting that Jim was a mole. He quickly fumbled around, eventually finding his shirt before putting it on.

"To be honest with you, I won't believe such accusations if I don't see solid evidence. Jim is a good kid. I dug around, asking about him when I thought of recruiting him to the Gentle Breeze. Everyone said that he's a terrific kid. He's one hardworking lad, never allowing the slightest bit of laziness to get the better of him. Though he could be boring at times and has no sense of humor whatsoever, that didn't stop me from putting him on my list of favorite persons. Have I told you about his sister?"

"What sister?"

"Jim has an adopted little sister who is two years younger than him. During that time, his family was doing well, and he was taught how to read and write. Unfortunately, the happiness was short-lived. Shortly after that, both his parents were tragically killed in an accident, leaving the two of them alone. Of course, they needed money to support themselves. So, some people suggested that he send his stepsister to an orphanage or a monastery. Jim rejected all of them with a resounding no. In the end, he had to sell off everything valuable in his house. It was then that he started to look around for a job that could support him and his sister. He was only 14 years old."

Suddenly, Malone paused.

"What's wrong?"

"Speaking of his sister, I heard that she had just recovered from a severe illness. Jim spent quite a huge sum of money, looking for a doctor to cure her. I did ask him earlier if he needed my help, but he told me that he had settled his debts. Apparently, he has a distant uncle who sent him some money to deal with his crisis."

"Could this man be Malcolm?"

"I have never thought about it from that angle. I still don't think that Jim will sell us out and let Wilton know which route the Gentle Breeze took."

Malone shook his head, and he had put on his clothes. He then moved his shoulder, and the pain from his wounds caused him to wince and grit his teeth.

"Have you talked to him about it?"

"Not yet. I don't want to be rash and alert the enemy. Right now, we don't have any solid evidence about him selling us out. Once he notices that we are on him, it would be extremely hard for us to catch him red-handed. This matter is of the utmost importance to us. Even though Wilton and his pirates are

dead, our next journey would be perilous if we fail to catch the mole. The worst thing would be that Malcolm will know all of our moves.”

“Whoa, whoa, hang on. Wilton and his pirates are dead?! How is that even possible? Is this supposed to be a joke?”

Malone had no idea about the entire incident on the island since he slept through the day.

“If you didn’t get drunk last night and unleash your inner beast at the brothel, you should have heard of the big news. Right now, you are probably the last person on this island that finds out.”

“Haha... this has to be the best news I’ve heard in a long time.”

Malone pretended that he didn’t hear the undertone of sarcasm in Carina’s voice.

“While I was on my way back to Nassau, I cursed Wilton, hoping that his pirates would be somehow engulfed by the ocean. I didn’t even mind being a casualty alongside them as long as they’re dead. Anyway, I’m cool with this ending as well. How did they die, eh? Who killed them? How did they get killed? How many survivors are left? To be honest, I find it hard to believe that anybody could kill them. Wilton had over 200 pirates with him, and they were bloody good at what they did. How did this person kill him under the protection of his men?”

“You should go look for the answer yourself. Back to our little Jim, then. Is there anything you wish to add?”

“Let me think... well... I think that should be it, I suppose. I have known him for some time now, and he is a good worker, a good brother, and a good neighbor. I reiterate. I don’t think he is the mole.”

“Regarding your last point, we will make sure to get to the bottom of it.”

“What are you planning to do? Send someone to spy on him?”

Malone gulped a mouthful of water and rinsed his mouth. With that, he was done cleaning himself for the day.

“No. I want to give him a reason to sell us out.”

“Huh?”

“Just now, I ‘accidentally’ spilled some top-secret news to him; deliberately of course. I said that two powerful pirate ships are planning to leave the black-market alliance, choosing to work with us instead. If he is indeed the mole, he will surely tell Malcolm about it.”

“After that?”

“Malcolm will surely do something. As compared to the small traders we deal with, he won’t just stand aside and watch us snatch away his powerful clients and will definitely try to stop it from happening. Judging by his personality, he would approach the two captains and convince them not to leave the alliance. All we need to do right now is to watch them closely. Once he meets the captains, we can go ahead and apprehend Jim.”

Chapter 194: Sleeping Position

With that, Zhang Heng tasked Carina with finding the mole. Ever since the Jackdaw returned to Nassau, Zhang Heng hadn't managed to get any sleep. As promised, he made the announcement to Nassau's residents that he would defend the fortress with Honegg. When that was done, he retreated home to get some well-deserved rest.

It was late in the evening when he opened his eyes. Zhang Heng took a look at Anne, who was sleeping next to him. She had a questionable sleeping position, with an arm and a leg placed on Zhang Heng's body. She was drooling like a baby as well. The most ironic part was that Anne had her leg placed on Zhang Heng's chest while her hand was on his thigh.

Zhang Heng had no idea how she managed to turn herself upside down while she was sleeping. The reason why he suddenly woke up suddenly because Anne kicked his chin accidentally. Trying his best not to wake her up, he spent quite a bit of effort to remove her contorted limbs from his body. However, it seemed like he overthought it. Once Anne was asleep, waking her up was a challenge, to say the least.

On the flip side, she had this feral instinct when it came to threats. Even when she was in a deep sleep, she would automatically wake up if something dangerous happened around her. Zhang Heng had no idea how to explain a phenomenon like this. He guessed that it had everything to do with her personality, a beast-like nature that automatically allowed her to detect any incoming threat.

What she told him that night reminded him of the little fox of Little Prince. Due to the little fox taking a liking toward Little Prince and it knew that goodbye was coming, it was willing to be domesticated. The little fox did that because it wanted to remember the color of Little Prince's hair when it gazed upon the wheat field.

Zhang Heng took a jacket from a nearby chair and covered Anne with it. He went proceeded downstairs to his little farm, where he plucked the vegetables that were ripe and dug up a few potatoes. While he was tending to his garden, he saw the little girl living next to him and gave her a barbary fig. Before entering the game, Zhang Heng had never tried Barbary figs before.

It was the fruit of a cactus and was native to the north and south of America. It could typically be found above the cactus plant. Like the main tree, the fruit was also covered in thorns. One had to cut off its tail and remove its skin before it could be eaten. It was essential that the octagonal thorn within the fruit was picked out as well. As for its taste, there was a tinge of sweetness coupled with sour parts. Zhang Heng was weirded out when he first ate this fruit. He had once heard that Indians favored the fruit a lot, regularly using it as medicine.

As usual, the little girl ran away the moment Zhang Heng approached her. He wasn't too bothered by this, knowing that the parents of kids her age would usually advise them to steer clear of strangers. When he was done with the harvest, he brought the Barbary figs and vegetables back in. Instead of eating the fruit just like that, Zhang Heng preferred to scoop out its flesh and add a little honey with it.

When Anne finally woke from her slumber, Zhang Heng was already done preparing dinner for the two of them. He sprinkled some salt on the fishes that he'd just grilled over a flame. The 18th century wasn't as exciting as the modern world where there were no cellphones or computers. Even books were a

rarity. Each time they returned from a voyage, they would be distraught from the harsh life out at sea. Hence, different people had different ways to relieve their stress.

For Anne, she preferred picking fights as a stress relief method. As for Billy, he preferred to spend his time with his family. Zhang Heng, on the other hand, liked to cook and tend to his little farm. It helped him to take his mind off things when he wasn't on the raging oceans. Farming was a hobby he acquired when he entered his very first quest. When he was on the island alone, he needed to survive. Thus, he looked for something to do to keep him going. Not only did farming bring him game points, but it also provided him with satisfaction and joy.

To see the seeds he sowed finally bear fruit was a great healing process. Cooking had the same effects as well. Unfortunately, the pace of life in modern society had gotten a lot faster, and a good amount of devotion would be needed for these things to succeed. It was possible to reap happiness if the person involved managed to calm their heart down. Unfortunately, fewer and fewer individuals from the modern world chose to embark and commit to these kinds of activities.

After becoming a pirate of the Caribbean, Zhang Heng realized that he had more time for activities like this. Now, he was required to stay in the game for an unprecedented amount of time. After reaching LV2 on his saber and sailing skills, Zhang Heng was thinking of learning other skillsets. Learning other languages had become a priority. After completing a few rounds of the game, Zhang Heng realized that it was vital for him to speak various languages. After all, communication was the most important skill a human could master. During the Mannerheim Line quest, many people took advantage of him as he didn't know how to speak their language.

Though he now spoke two foreign languages (plus a couple of Finnish words), he was better than most around him. However, every quest was unpredictable, and knowing only two languages wasn't quite enough. Zhang Heng quickly realized the advantage of the formation of teams, where each member could choose to learn a different language. If there were six people in a team, they would be able to communicate in six languages.

However, a single-player like Zhang Heng could only rely on himself. Fortunately, he had ample time to learn other languages. Now, he planned to learn French, Spanish, Italian, Polish, and Latin throughout the ten-year tenure in this game. He wanted to be able to understand basic speech at the very least.

If his memory served him right, Zhang Heng remembered that Latin was only used up until the early 18th century. As the official language of Rome, Latin was widely spoken throughout Europe during the 1st century BC. French, Italian, and Spanish were considered as local dialects. Along with the fall of the Roman Empire and the rise of the Renaissance Era, Latin started to lose its place as the essential language of Europe. In the end, the Vatican was the only country that remained using Latin in their day-to-day business. Although languages of this era and languages of the modern world varied slightly, Zhang Heng figured it shouldn't be a problem for him to master some simple ways of communication.

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Zhang Heng was still waiting for Black Prince Sam to vouch for him so he could join the meeting that was to be on this island. The next morning, he received an unexpected notification telling him that his main quest of the game had been completed. After eliminating a few possibilities, Zhang Heng figured that Billy must have recruited a new batch of pirates. There were at least 70 pirates on the Jackdaw right

now. Thus, when the game instructed him to build his own force, it meant that he had to recruit a certain number of people to work under him.

It seemed that his quest was complete. After living in this world for one year, it was only logical that his main quest was completed. Zhang Heng had no intention to give up on anything after achieving so much in this game. After all, he had to stay here for another ten years. Everything that he did right now was preparation for a bigger goal. Be it joining the meeting, helping Carina fight the black-market alliance, becoming Honneg's ally, or helping Laeli, Zhang Heng was building a strong foundation for himself.

Chapter 195: Monster From the Depths of the Sea

"You said someone intruded into your place last night. What did you mean by that?"

Vincent was sitting across Zhang Heng, and seemed to be very uncomfortable and nervous.

"To be honest, I don't know what happened as well. I slept early last night, and I was half-asleep when I woke up in the middle of the night all of a sudden. I saw that the windows were open, and a shadowy figure was standing beside it. His back faced me, and it appeared that he was searching for something in my drawer."

"What made you think that he was looking for something?" asked Zhang Heng while pointing at the poetry book that he found on the carrack.

"That's because he turned my bedroom upside down! Strangely, he didn't lay a finger on the 33 gold coins that I hid inside my drawer. There was some change on the table as well, and the amount was intact when I checked on them. All he took were the supply records and the list of goods that we acquired from the carrack. As for this poetry book, I placed it under my pillow, so it was untouched."

"Hang on. Now, why would you place a poetry book under your pillow?" asked Anne with a cocked eyebrow.

The young doctor's face began to flush, and he was left speechless. Zhang Heng could feel how embarrassed and awkward he became, and hence, quickly changed the topic.

"Did you manage to see his face?"

"I'm sure he's not human. His shirt was wet, looking as if he just emerged from the sea. I could smell an overpowering stench of fish and a saltiness in the air when he was in my room. Water dripped down from his sleeves and pants. Apart from that, I noticed corals and seashells hanging on his shirt and hair."

Vincent trembled in fear as he tried to remember the details of what happened last night.

"I remember that I pretended to sleep. Out of curiosity, I cracked open my eyes. That was when I saw his hand and the side of his face. It was covered in scales! Then, he somehow discovered that I was peeking at him, and he turned around and smiled. I was so terrified that I fainted! It was early in the morning when I opened up my eyes again. Immediately, I ran outside the house."

Once Vincent was done talking, he took out three notebooks.

"I am almost done translating these three notebooks. I didn't manage to translate the last few pages of the supply records, though. I would like to apologize for not being able to protect them."

"It's fine. You have done a good job. Thank you so much for your service. I have another favor to ask of you. Would you mind if I took a look around your place?"

"Of course not! Both of you are always welcome at my house."

After that, Zhang Heng and Anne followed Vincent back to where he stayed. He lived in a small wooden house, large enough for a single person. There were various types of plants around his home. Amongst them were rare species of plants that only grew on the island of Nassau. Zhang Heng remembered Billy saying that Vincent fancied botany when they were introduced to each other. His house was covered in lush vines and looked gorgeous from the outside. Billy lived right next to Vincent, as well.

During that time, Billy was holding his two-year-old daughter and was taking a slow walk in his garden. He quickly waved he saw the three. Passing his daughter to his wife, he strolled towards them.

"You guys are here for the bizarre incident, right?" asked Billy.

"Can you give me a moment?"

Vincent opened the door and looked at Anne in an embarrassed manner.

"This is your house. You can do whatever you want to," said Zhang Heng.

Vincent was grateful that Zhang Heng allowed him to do as he wished. Immediately, he ran into his house and closed the door after him as fast as he could. Soon, they heard a curious clanking coming from inside the house.

While Vincent was at it, Zhang Heng took the opportunity to ask Billy some questions.

"Did you notice anything strange last night considering you live right next to him?"

"I fell asleep immediately when I returned home last night. This morning, he knocked at my door in his pajamas and told me what happened to him last night. I could see that he was scared to death. It was my first time seeing him so afraid."

"Do you think this incident has something to do with the mysterious ship that we found?"

"Hmm... I'm not sure."

Zhang Heng suddenly remembered that a bizarre storm hit them when they were returning to Nassau. Every unexplainable thing that occurred to them indicated that they had indeed encountered something supernatural. It seemed the owner of the carrack was trying to retrieve the items that belonged to him. Still, Zhang Heng felt that things didn't quite add up, which was why he wanted to check out Vincent's house.

After a while, Vincent opened the door and invited the three of them to come in. He had hurriedly tidied up his messy place when he entered earlier and had even made a pot of tea for them. However, Zhang Heng wasn't interested to have any tea.

The first thing the three did was to check out Vincent's bedroom. Upon entering, they saw a series of herbariums and sketches on the wall. They also noticed shoes and clothes scattered all over the floor. Vincent became embarrassed when he saw that the three were looking around his messy room. He had

no time to tidy it up after cleaning the common area. As a single man, though, his room's condition was actually not too bad. Zhang Heng had seen way worse than this when he was in his hostel.

Ignoring the unkempt mess, Zhang Heng squatted and used his finger to touch the floor. There were a few wet spots, and it seemed that the mysterious person must have been standing there for some time. The wet spots led to where the drawer and bed were.

Besides that, he also picked up two pieces of small seashells and a scale on the floor. The story that Vincent told them must be true. As for the fishy stench that he mentioned, it was gone, perhaps because the windows were open. After that, Zhang Heng walked towards the window. This was the spot where the mysterious man apparently entered and left the room. There were supposed to be two potted plants placed on the window sill, but one of them had been knocked down. Outside of the window, Vincent's small garden could be seen.

"May I?"

Zhang Heng glanced at a nodding Vincent before climbing on the window sill and jumping into the garden.

"How often do you water your plants?" asked Zhang Heng after he deliberately stepped on the soil twice.

"Erm. Once a week. I usually ask for Netti's help to water my plants when I go on a voyage. It should have been five days since she last watered them."

Netti was Billy's wife. She helped Vincent a lot after he moved into the neighborhood, a reason why Vincent was willing to become a doctor on the Jackdaw after Billy persuaded him. Zhang Heng then walked around the garden and saw that there were a few houses around. So, he proceeded to visit them one by one with Anne. Unfortunately, they didn't manage to acquire any useful information from the residents. It was late at night when the mysterious thing broke into Vincent's house. Hence, there were no witnesses.

That afternoon, all of them stopped at Billy's house for lunch. Vincent was still shaken by last night's bizarre incident. He was extremely grateful after getting Billy's permission to stay at his house for a couple of days; his spirits slightly lifted.

Chapter 196: Something Left Behind

"Do you really think that a monster broke into Vincent's house?" asked Anne the moment they left Billy's house.

"At first, I thought some supernatural entity from the carrack came for him after hearing what he described. However, I changed my mind after I checked out of his house."

At that, Zhang Heng passed the seashell to Anne.

"What's wrong with this?"

Anne took a look at it but saw nothing out of the ordinary.

“This shell is a foreigner, in the sense that it came from outside of Nassau. You won’t normally find this type of shell here.”

“Hmm... that reminds me of something. Harry picked a bunch of seashells exactly like this one. I don’t think I can ever understand his hobby.”

“And the scale. This a scale of a great barracuda, one of the most common fish often caught by the fishermen around this area.”

“How on earth do you know stuff like this?”

Anne was shocked and slightly impressed by Zhang Heng’s broad knowledge.

“I have done extensive studies on fishes. Anyway, that’s not important.”

In his first round of the game, Bell taught Zhang Heng how to tell apart edible sea fishes. Upon returning to the real world, he had also looked up about fishes online. Now, he could recognize more than 200 types of ocean fish.

“But, that carrack sailed around oceans of the world, right? It’s entirely possible that it ended up around the waters of Nassau at some point.”

“You are right, which is why I investigated Vincent’s garden earlier. He told me that he watered his plants once a week, and Netti helped him to water them five days ago. She also told me that the island hadn’t received any rain lately. The dry, dusty soil in his garden verified her claims. However, I found an exception in one of the spots of the garden.”

“Huh?”

“After I checked out Vincent’s house, I’ve been thinking about what he told me earlier. He mentioned that the mysterious man looked as if he just came out of the water. His shirt was dripping all the time. However, the problem here is that Vincent’s house is quite far from the sea. If that creature came from the ocean, he would have had to take a huge risk by walking all the way to Vincent’s house even under cover of the dark. Most importantly, most of the seawater on him should have dried up after taking such a long walk.”

“I don’t think common sense can be used to solve this matter. Perhaps the mysterious man is cursed and is always drenched in seawater? I’ve heard a similar story when I was a kid.”

“I did think about that possibility. If that’s the case, then the water dripping from his clothes should have been constant. However, I found a spot in the garden that was way wetter than all the other spots.”

“Are you suspecting that someone deliberately wet himself and stuck seashells and scales all over his body? Why would he make himself look like a monster if all he wanted was to break into Vincent’s room to look for the three notebooks?”

“Are you asking about the purpose of him acquiring the three notebooks or the purpose of making himself look like a monster? I can’t figure out why he wanted the three notebooks as well. As for making himself look like a monster, I believe he did that so others couldn’t recognize him. I should’ve thought about it earlier. I’ve checked everything that we removed from the carrack, and I can assure you that

there's nothing wrong with them. We did, however, come across a storm on our way home, though. Now, I finally remember the items that I forgot to take."

"What are they?"

"It appears that crate of silverware, ring, and the necklace isn't everything that we brought back. There were seven people on the carrack, including you and me. Someone must have gone behind our backs and secretly took something else from the ship. He should be the same person that broke into Vincent's room."

"Is that why you didn't share your theory when we were at Billy's house?"

Zhang Heng nodded in reply.

"We were all together last night, so that proves our alibi. That leaves us with five people. I don't doubt their loyalty, but I do think that the notebook thief didn't realize the severity of this matter. Not a single person was on the carrack, and there's a good chance that it has something to do with this. Alright. Since the area is small enough for us to conduct a proper investigation, all we need to do right now is to investigate them one by one."

"I don't think we need to do that. I think I know who the person is."

"Eh?"

"Basically, two in a group when we were tasked to check out the carrack. It's not easy to hide something when your partner is watching you. I remember that I was checking the cargo hold with Seth. When I heard you kicking down the door, I thought that you came across something dangerous, and I quickly ran to you. Seth was left there alone. If there's anyone who had an opportunity to hide something from us, it has to be him. He was already on the deck when we regrouped. At that time, I remember that he looked as if he was in a trance. I didn't think much about it because all of us didn't look too well, either."

"What was he doing when the storm hit us?"

"I didn't see him. He was supposed to be resting at that time. I didn't see him on the deck as well. Now that you've mentioned it, I remember something. I saw a bruise on his face when we met during dinner. He simply told me that he fell somewhere when I asked about it."

Anne continued,

"Fighting on the ship is strictly prohibited. Still, I heard that some had broken this rule. After all, they are new recruits on our ship, and a few of them already know each other on the island. I wouldn't be surprised that they had unresolved issues while they were still on the island. Seth... Seth is one of the new pirates from our first batch of recruits. He married not too long ago, and his wife was one of the prostitutes from a brothel. He spent a great deal of money to set her free from her pimp. I heard that they both share an intimate relationship. Still, it's hard to stop people from gossiping about them."

"Do you know where he lives?"

"No idea. But, I know someone who knows where he stays."

Anne looked for a pirate called Sean, one of the cannoneers on the Jackdaw. He and Seth were close friends and had been working on the same ship before the two joined the Jackdaw. They would usually hang out together when they were back in Nassau. Of course, Sean would know where Seth lived. Upon the request of Zhang Heng and Anne, he led them to Seth's house. The moment they arrived at his place, they saw a large amount of furniture placed at the front of his house.

Seth peeked out from behind a closet he was rummaging through and was caught off-guard when he saw the three of them. However, he became extra nervous when he saw Zhang Heng, swiftly concealing his emotions after that.

"I'm sorry. I'm just about to move," said Seth.

"Not bad. You just got married, and now, you're moving. Why didn't you ask for my help?" asked Sean.

"I don't have many things, and anyway, I didn't want to trouble you."

Seth then glanced at Zhang Heng and Anne.

"I'm afraid that this might be a bad time, captain. Can you come again tomorrow?"

Chapter 197: Betty

"It's okay. We've got nothing to do anyway. Let us help you," said Zhang Heng.

Seth forced a smile when he heard Zhang Heng had offered to help.

"What's going on? Seth, do we have guests?"

"It's Sean and... erm... two more friends."

"Aren't you going to invite them in?"

"Oh... I almost forgot! My house is kind of messy now, and I hope you guys won't mind."

Seeing that he was about to have visitors, Seth moved the chairs back into the house. Zhang Heng, Anne, and Sean followed him from behind.

"Tracy, go make our guests some coffee, will you?"

Seth was talking to a voluptuous lady. This should be the woman that Seth married not too long ago. Tracy nodded and headed into the kitchen. After a short while, she talked to Seth again.

"Seth, where are the coffee beans that Beth gave us?"

"Ah! I know where they are. Let me go get them."

As he talked to Tracy, Seth went upstairs. Half a minute later, Tracy emerged from the kitchen with a plate of fruit in her hands.

"I'm so sorry. Seth kept away all the utensils and there are only some fruits left in the kitchen," said Tracy.

Zhang Heng took the plate of fruit and thanked Tracy and started a conversation with her. Talkative by nature, she answered every question he asked with no misgivings. Obviously, she wasn't the cautious

type. When he was done talking, he knew then that Seth didn't tell her anything about the carrack. It also seemed that she knew nothing about what happened last night.

Zhang Heng looked at Anne. Both of them knew that Seth was the person that they were looking for. They decided that it was time to confront him once he came down.

"What's taking him so long? All he needs to do is to get the coffee beans," said Sean while looking at the stairs.

"Let me go get him," replied an embarrassed Tracy.

She proceeded to the storeroom beside them.

"Ahem... Seth is upstairs," Sean reminded Tracy.

"Huh? But the first floor is empty. There's nobody there."

Immediately, Zhang Heng ran upstairs and found out that there was indeed no one there. All he saw was an open window. Through the window, he spotted Seth running away from his house as fast as his legs could carry him. He even looked back a few times!

"Let's spread out and go after him!"

Zhang Heng wasn't to be blamed for not being more cautious. After all, he came with the sole intention of talking to Seth and had no plans to rough him up to extract information out from him. Other than breaking into Vincent's house and almost scaring him to death, Seth didn't do anything that harmed anyone. Logically, there was no reason for him to be running from them.

Anne quickly ran out of the house. As for Zhang Heng, he exited through the window and climbed onto the roof. That said, he was in no way trying to be like Ezio Auditore from Assassin's Creed. The area Seth lived in was similar to the Smoked Fish Alley and was one of the more famous slums in Nassau. The only difference was that it was a lot more crowded, with squatters literally stacked on each other. The entire area was also extremely disorganized.

Seth had an advantage here since he had stayed here for a long time. To make sure that he could keep track of him, Zhang Heng had to continually find high vantage points. As for Anne, her job was simple. All she needed to do was trail Zhang Heng.

It was at that moment when Seth noticed that someone was coming after him. Not only did he continue running, but he ran even faster than before. At the same time, he kept switching directions erratically, hoping to take advantage of the familiar terrain to lose Anne. Unfortunately, he didn't manage to shake off Zhang Heng, and that made him more nervous by the second.

Running along the rooftops allowed Zhang Heng to disregard the slum's haphazardness. All he needed to do was to move in a straight line. His balance had gotten a lot better after living at sea for almost a year. Though the rooftops of each house were at different heights, he still managed to maintain an excellent balance.

Seeing that he was getting closer to Seth, Zhang Heng estimated that he could jump off from the roof after another ten steps. Unfortunately, all his calculations and effort went to waste during the most critical moment. The roof that he just jumped on caved in all of a sudden due to its dilapidated condition. Immediately, he grabbed on to a wooden support pillar, but even that broke into half as well.

Seth was delighted when he saw Zhang Heng falling into one of the houses. Suddenly, a shadowy figure appeared from the left of the alley. Before Seth could react, the person landed a kick on his chest, sending him flying to a wooden rack beside him. Seth ignored the pain on his back. He hurriedly got up and started to limp away. However, before he could make any headway, he found a sharp dagger on his neck.

After a while, Zhang Heng came out of the house he fell into with a dust-covered face. He compensated the owner with two gold coins, an old man that was sunbathing at that time, before heading to Seth.

“Why did you run from us?”

Seth merely remained silent.

“Give it all up now. We already know. You were the ‘monster’ that broke into Vincent’s room, right?” asked Zhang Heng. “How did you pull it off when the storm hit us back then? Did it have something do with the thing that you found on the carrack?”

This time, Seth finally lost his calm. He was hoping that Zhang Heng was here for some other issue. After all, he was all alone when it happened. No one should have seen what he did. Any ordinary person would definitely not connect the matter to the storm. Hence, Seth had no idea how Zhang Heng could grow suspicious of him. After two successful voyages, Zhang Heng’s reputation had skyrocketed amongst his pirates.

After a short moment of hesitation, Seth finally spilled everything out.

“I’m sorry, captain. I... it wasn’t me who found the thing. She was the one who found me.”

“Her?” asked Anne.

“Right after we separated, I heard a woman’s voice. She called herself Betty. I searched the entire cargo hold, but I couldn’t find her.”

“Betty?”

It was a familiar name to Zhang Heng, having being mentioned numerous times in the poetry book that he read. At first, Zhang Heng thought that Betty must have been the captain’s wife or lover. Now, it seemed that the identity of this Betty was more complicated than he initially thought.

“Why didn’t you tell us about it?” asked Anne.

“I thought there was something wrong with me. The woman, Betty, gave me a warning. She said if I told anyone about this, they would consider me a lunatic and maroon me on that carrack!”

Chapter 198: Ancient Celtic God

“We went to the cargo hold after that, but we didn’t see you there until everyone gathered on the deck. What were you doing when you were alone?” asked Anne.

“Betty brought me to the stern. She told me that she had something to show me.”

“And what would that be?” asked Zhang Heng.

“A gift.”

“A gift?”

“She told me that she’s an ancient Celtic god. She also told me that she has the power to control the weather on the ocean! Apparently, I would be granted a portion of her divine powers if I chose to worship her!”

Seth hesitated and took out a seashell from his pocket. Zhang Heng took it from Seth and started to examine it. Judging by its exterior, it was no different than the white shell that he saw on the beach. Suddenly, he received a notification from the system. Zhang Heng instantly knew then that he must be holding a supernatural game item.

[Betty’s Shell (Unidentified)]

After knowing the item’s name, Zhang Heng still couldn’t figure out what its effect was. Seth had mentioned about an ancient Celtic god. Celtic mythology was one of the three major European mythological systems, juxtaposed to Greek and Northern European mythology. In the ancient days, the Celts were not a single race but rather, a band made up of different ethnicities. According to history, these various groups were brought together by similar cultures and languages. They were also one of the earlier civilizations that had expertise in the use of iron tools. Other than that, most were equipped with the knowledge to build their own houses.

The Seine in eastern France, the upper streams of Loire, the Rhine in southeastern Germany, and the upper stream of the Danube River were the birthplaces of the Celts. They penetrated Europe and expanded swiftly, forming a tribe. They could be even found across the Alps. During that period, they were known as warriors, merchants, blacksmiths, poets, and artists. It was said that they could be seen modern France, Spain, Portugal, and other European countries.

When the Roman Empire rose, Caesar seized Gaul, the Celtic’s cultural center, and in the process, killed over a million of them. That was the reason why Celtic culture started to disappear across entire Europe. Many of their legendary tales were lost, explaining why Celtic mythology wasn’t as popular as Greek and Northern European mythology.

The only legendary tale of the Celts that was passed from generation to generation was the story of Arthur, the king, and his sword that was stuck in a stone. Zhang Heng wasn’t familiar with Celtic mythology as well. His father had studied Greek and Northern European mythologies in college, and his mother studied Christian mythology. When he was still a kid, his parents had told him many tales of Greek, Northern European, and Christian mythologies. Hence, Zhang Heng was unfamiliar with the name, Betty, that was mentioned in the poetry book.

“She told you to worship her, right? How are you supposed to do that?”

"I... I have no idea. Supposedly, I would first need to pass a test. She told me to look for the three notebooks before letting me know the next step."

"Hmph! Are you still trying to lie to us?!"

Anne was extremely displeased about Seth's attempt to tell them another tall tale. In frustration, she pushed her dagger closer to his throat.

"The storm that we faced earlier had something to do with you, right?" asked Anne.

"As the captain of the Jackdaw, I'm willing to put aside all everything that you have done but I need you to be honest with me. You have to tell me what you have done to our ship. You saw what happened to the carrack, right? I don't think you want to see every single pirate from the Jackdaw disappearing without a trace, right?"

Seth could feel chills running down his spine. This time, he didn't dare mess with Zhang Heng and Anne anymore.

"According to her instructions, I'm supposed to engrave her Celtic name above the Jackdaw's mast. Once it is done, the ship will be under her protection. I did ask her about the carrack, and she told me that it was an accident."

"An accident?"

"The carrack's crew was too greedy. All those years, they used her power to summon storms that enabled their ship to sail faster than any other merchant ships. By utilizing the supernatural force, they managed to amass an obscene amount of wealth. However, there was a price to pay for doing something like that. These storms were fueled by their rage. The angrier they were, the more powerful the storms were. In the end, they were lost in a storm that wouldn't seem to blow away. After knowing that they would be stuck for eternity in a storm of their own making, the sailors sealed all the windows and doors. However, although the entire ship was boarded up, the sound of wind and thunder haunted their ship, and slowly drove the crew to insanity. Having lost all hope, they had were left with no option but to jump overboard."

"Last question. How did you contact her? Have you seen her true form?"

"I have no way to contact her. All I can do is to pray to her. It's up to her if she wants to respond to me or not. She answered my prayers once after we left the carrack. As usual, I only heard her voice, but I have never seen her true form."

Sean and Tracy caught up to them once Seth was done explaining. Seeing Seth leaving the house in a mighty rush and being chased down by Zhang Heng and Anne had baffled them. When they saw that Seth was being forced into a corner, they began feeling uncomfortable and worried. Immediately, Zhang Heng glared at Anne, who promptly kept away her dagger.

"Don't you ever gamble on by ship anymore. I'm willing to forgive you since this is the first time you're doing this. Your share of the loot will be reduced by half the next time."

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To avoid spreading unnecessary panic amongst the crew, Zhang Heng had no intention of telling them about this supernatural incident. He was also not worried that Seth would tell others about it. Not only did he hide Betty's seashell from them, but he even engraved her Celtic name on the mast of the Jackdaw. He could have brought grave danger to the pirates on Jackdaw. If he were smart enough, he would never tell a living soul about this. Just like Zhang Heng expected, he admitted to Tracy and Sean that had indeed put the ship and the lives of her crew on the guillotine.

"You look like you don't completely trust him. Do you think that he lied to you?" asked Anne after the three of them left.

"In this case, the possibility of him lying is slim. However, this doesn't apply to that deity whatsoever."

"Are you talking about Betty?"

"Clearly, she lied to Seth about what happened to the carrack. All those sailors that disappeared did not jump overboard and commit suicide. At least not all of them. The captain quarters that were locked from the inside and the claw marks in the cargo hold make her story a little more than doubtful."

"Even ancient gods lie?"

"It all depends on which tribe the ancient god belongs to."

Zhang Heng wasn't familiar with Celtic mythology, but he knew Greek and Northern European mythologies well. Instead of calling them gods, Zhang Heng saw them as regular humans who possessed supernatural powers. Just take a look at Zeus, for instance. A supposed 'god,' he used his private parts more than his brain. All these gods did whatever they fancied on Earth and its residents with little care of its consequences.

However, Betty was an exception. It appeared that she was very cautious. Seven people boarded the carrack, but she only chose to whisper to Seth. It could have simply been her nature, or was she, perhaps, trying to hide something from the rest of them?

Chapter 199: Confrontation

Zhang Heng and Anne finally figured out the reason behind the storm that battered them. As for the tragic incident that happened on the Jackdaw, only Betty, the ancient goddess, had the answer to that.

After Zhang Heng acquired the seashell from Seth, Betty did not attempt to contact him. He figured that it probably had something to do with him being on land. However, he did not underestimate her. The first thing that he did was to return to the Jackdaw and scrape away her name that was engraved on top of the mast with his dagger. After that, he looked for Carina, instructing her to get someone to look for a Tule tree among other colonies.

According to the bartender, a box made from the wood of a Tule tree could be used to ward off all kinds of supernatural forces. Tule trees were typically found in the Mexican state of Oaxaca. If memory served him right, Zhang Heng remembered that Oaxaca was a colony of Spain.

If everything went smoothly on his next voyage, he would be ever closer to acquiring a box made out of Tulewood. Unfortunately, this thing wasn't a game item. Otherwise, Zhang Heng would have loved to

bring a box like that to the real world, where he wouldn't have to worry about where to store his game items.

To prevent others from being tempted by Betty, Zhang Heng decided that he would keep the shell close to him before he got his hands on the box. At the same time, Carina's investigation of pinpointing the mole had come to an end as well. The person she assigned to watch Malcolm told her that he had just quietly left his mansion with the intention of visiting Captain Baal.

Now, Captain Baal was part of a disinformation campaign coined up by Carina. That said, Malcolm remained cautious, leaving Baal's house ten minutes later. Instead of looking for the next person on his list, he went to visit an irrelevant person, an attempt to misdirect and confuse whoever that was targeting him.

However, Carina had locked on her target. Surprisingly, Malone wasn't lazing at the brothel when Carina found him, and this time, he was all prepared. He took out a military sword and a gun that he kept inside a box for a long time. Carina took a deep breath as she took the gun from Malone.

"Are you sure the two of us are enough? Should we get a couple of sailors to come with us?" asked Carina as she loaded the pistol with gunpowder and bullets.

"If you are right about him doing all these for his sister, I don't want others on the ship to know. We will let him walk free after I've asked him whatever I want to ask. Jim is simply a records keeper, and he doesn't know how to fight. The two of us are more than enough to handle him."

"That would be the best-case scenario. Don't you worry, I'm not that old yet. I'm confident that I wouldn't lose a one-to-one fight."

"You would sound more convincing if you could make that belly smaller."

Once Carine was done loading the weapon, she tucked it in a concealed holster on her back. No one could see that she was carrying a gun from the front.

"How do I look now, eh?" asked Carina.

"You look like you are going for a walk in the park."

"Let's go. Malcolm might send someone to warn him if we are slow."

Carina took the lead and proceeded down the stairs, not wasting a single second once they received the news. Jim was tasked with checking their new storage location. Ever since Carina's business bloomed, her old warehouse had run out of space. It was filled to the brim with all the items she bought. As a result, she had been scouting around for potential new storage spaces to keep her business going. When she asked for Jim's assistance, he did not suspect a single thing.

The storage space that she found wasn't too far away from the port. It consisted of two buildings with a vast and empty land between them. It was perfect as her new storeroom. Be that as it may, Malone's and Carina's faces changed the moment they arrived at the place.

They saw a pool of fresh blood on the ground between the two buildings. A series of bloody footprints led to the building at the back.

“Shit! Did Malcolm and his men arrive here before us?” asked Malone.

Immediately, he drew his sword and ran to the building. Using his body to ram the door, he managed to open it but found no one inside the building. The floor was covered with a thick layer of dust, and there were no visible footprints. Suddenly, Malone’s eye twitched. He could sense that something terrible was about to happen to him.

When he turned around, Carina was pointing her gun at him!

“What are you trying to do?” asked Malone with a smile on his face.

“You tell me, Uncle Malone. You’ve known my father for 20 years. You’ve been around since I was a kid. You are like family to me. I never thought you would betray me just like that.”

“What are you talking about?! Wasn’t Jim the one who spread the news to Malcolm?”

As he spoke, Malone attempted to inch forward slowly. When Carina noticed that he was approaching, she placed her finger on the trigger. That made Malone stop in his steps.

“You know, I actually told him a different name. In fact, I told different names to all the people that I suspected. Little did I think that you were the one who betrayed me.”

“How dare you... how dare you set me up?!”

“I just... I had to consider every possibility. This is what you taught me, Uncle Malone.”

“Should I be relieved? You’ve grown at an incredible rate during your tenure in Nassau. No wonder Malcolm saw you as a threat. I’m afraid your own father won’t be able to recognize you if he were to be here.”

The moment Malone was done talking, a few men came down the stairs. That included a very confused Jim, four pirates from the Jackdaw, and a man with both hands tied. This man was an assassin sent by Malcolm to kill Jim. If Jim had indeed been murdered here, Carina would have thought that Jim was the mole. No one would ever suspect Malone anymore. Fortunately, the assassin was promptly apprehended by the pirates.

“I have lots of questions to ask you, but there’s only one thing I care about. Did you have anything to do with my father being jailed, Uncle Malone?”

“I will never betray Fegan matter what, as long as he’s still around. Once we came to Nassau, Malcolm’s men approached me. At that time, I got cheated and lost a huge amount of money in the casino. They told me that they were willing to help pay off my debts. In return, I would have to deliver useful information to them from time to time. It was already too late when I realized how wrong that was. Betraying you was never my intention. I thought that you’d leave this island after a short while, just like the others. That’s why I couldn’t find a valid reason to say no to him.”

Chapter 200: Carina’s Determination

Malone's betrayal hit Carina real hard. In all of Nassau, he was the person she trusted the most. In fact, it wasn't too much to say that he was the only person she trusted. He was the last person she would expect to be bought over. According to Malone, although he had only sent Malcolm a total of three messages, she felt a wave of nausea wash over her whenever she thought about how someone close to her had been watching her the entire time.

Perhaps the only fortunate thing was that the information Malone had access to were mostly trade-related. However, she was always on her own when she met with the black gladiator. Malone had asked to go with her several times in the name of safety, but he had always been turned down. Of course, at that time, she never suspected Malone's intention, refusing simply because she feared that bringing an escort along might offend Laeli. Had that not been the case, Malcolm would have found out that his study had been invaded.

Carina did her best to keep her emotions under control. She questioned Malone a little bit more before handing him over to the four Jackdaw sailors. She would let them investigate the authenticity of his statement, then transfer him to a ship heading back to England. Malone mentioned before that he had a sister in Kent, so this was actually the best outcome for him. Even if he wanted to return, he could only do it next year. By that time, the strife between Carina and Malcolm should have been settled.

When it was all over, a drained and exhausted Carina tossed her short musket to the side of the road. Today, she finally understood what her father meant by never trusting anyone on the island.

The relationship she shared with Malone went beyond friendship. He was more like family and a mentor. To her, losing him meant far more than just losing a seasoned captain who could get through port authorities. If Wilton's blatant threat on the beach made her feel fear for the first time, then Malone's betrayal caused her to experience another kind of pain.

There was even a moment when she considered giving up. She was no longer sure what waited for her on the other side if she continued down this path. How high of a price would she have to pay to win this fight against the black-market alliance?

Carina stopped in front of the horse carriage sporting a blank look in her eyes, wondering where she was supposed to be going. She stood there for some time until suddenly, the driver coughed, "Ahem. Ms. Carina?"

"I'm sorry. Head to Captain Zhang Heng's residence."

Carina opened the door and climbed into the carriage, not bothered to look back. She had made a decision—let the past remain where it was. From the time her father was sent to prison until now, there would be no turning back for her. As that was the case, she could only continue walking down this path.

About half an hour later, the carriage came to a stop. Carina had also regained her composure.

Zhang Heng was in the living room, taking Dutch lessons from Vincent. When he looked up and saw Carina outside the door, he nodded to the young doctor and said, "That will be all for today."

Vincent immediately collected the books and left. Anne had gone to meet Harry that afternoon, so when Vincent left, Zhang Heng and Carina were alone.

Zhang Heng picked up the teapot on the table and poured his visitor a cup of tea. Perhaps it was because of his Oriental lineage that he preferred tea over coffee.

“How are things on your side?”

“We found the spy—it was Malone.” Carina paused for a moment, her expressions stoic as if it was something insignificant. “The problem wasn’t that serious. I suppose we can call it solved. It shouldn’t affect us any further. However, the Gentle Breeze is devoid of a captain, and once the other cargo ship is repaired, she’ll need a captain too.”

“Do you have anyone in mind?”

“For the Gentle Breeze, I plan to let the first officer take over the role of captain. To prevent something like this from happening again, I will test him regularly. As for the other ship... it’s going to be difficult, as I plan to recruit sailors from Nassau on the spot. Thus, I will need someone who has the authority to control them. At the same time, this person cannot be a pirate. It will be a great advantage if he’s familiar with the authorities of the colonial ports, as well.”

“Hmm. These requirements won’t be easy to meet.”

“I know. Good captains are a scarcity everywhere. On top of that, practically all the outstanding captains of this place have now become pirates. Of course, I’ll be generous with the wages—I can pay twice the average captain’s salary to our prospective captain.”

Zhang Heng thought about what the tradeswoman was saying before he answered, “A few cargo captains lost their vessels and goods to robbers. Out of desperation, they had no choice but to come to Nassau to look for wealth here. There should be someone among them who meets your criteria. That said, all the other pirate ships that lack captains also have their eyes on them. How about this? I’ll find Billy tomorrow and see if he can recommend me anyone suitable.”

Carina nodded. “I thought about what you said before—we are competing against the black-market alliance, and it won’t be enough just having the support of small and medium pirate gangs. I’ve decided to approach the biggest landowner of the island to see if we can offer to ship their yield without charge, all these in exchange for their support, of course. Also, everything we got from the exchange of the secondhand goods are just bits and pieces of miscellaneous trinkets. No one in the colony will buy them. It’ll be treated like garbage. But it would be a pity to throw them away too. After all, there’s still some value in them, I’m sure.”

“What do you want to do with them?”

“I plan to open a grocery store here and another in the colony where the knick-knacks can be sold. It doesn’t have to make a profit. I simply want to recoup my losses. That would be enough. Then we won’t have to keep bleeding money by holding on to these things,” Carina explained.

Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows.

“What is it?”

“I thought that your debacle with Malone would be a big blow to you, but from the way you talk, it seems that I have misplaced my worries.

“In the beginning, I was furious and disappointed, but on the way here, I thought through many things, and my angst dissipated. I haven’t done well in many aspects as well. I was so used to asking for his help, and it has always been one-sided—on my part, I never paid attention to the difficulties he faced. Although he owed the gambling den a large sum of money and has borrowed from many people, he never wanted to trouble me, and would rather accept Malcolm’s offer. He probably didn’t think I could help him anyway,” Carina chuckled to herself before quickly moving to another topic.

She looked squarely into Zhang Heng’s eyes and seriously told him, “I want to defeat Malcolm, not just to keep the secondhand business going, but to completely destroy him! I will drive him out of Nassau and take his place as the most powerful black-market merchant on the island. No matter the cost, no matter what danger awaits me, I will not falter. I won’t stop until it’s done.”