

## 48 Hours 231

### Chapter 231

The pirates were greatly moved when they saw the black flag of Jackdaw flapping in the wind. It had been nine days since they witnessed their bitter defeat right before their very eyes. The navy was happily trampling and burning the black flags they were once so proud of.

The saddest thing of it all was the death of Black Sam, one of the greatest pirates ever known. Swordfish, Quidah, and Warrior had been sunk by the navy-pirate-hunter collaboration, and those still breathing were now screaming and crying out for help. However, the navy had no intention to grant them any mercy. The pirates on the beach were forced to watch as their enemies brutally slaughtered their helpless allies. This whole incident left the pirates a deep scar, a memory that would remain with them till the very ends of their lives.

This was one of the largest defeats that Nassau's pirates ever suffered. For that reason, the atmosphere on the island was one filled with despair and anxiety. Those tough men who braved countless battles had now lost all hope. Whenever they saw anybody wearing red, they would drown in fear, hiding for dear life. Until they saw Jackdaw again, the black flag on her mast was sending the navy a message. The great oceans belonged to no country or person. It would take the side of warriors bold enough to seek freedom.

Worden and his men surrounded the pirates, killing them one by one. Of course, he wouldn't repeat the same mistake, which was why he docked his ship outside the harbor. The spot was sufficient to monitor the pirates' movements and, at the same time, a good one to defend themselves from incoming threats. The moment Jackdaw appeared near Parrot Island, the sailors quickly informed their captain of their sighting.

Chris put down his monocular and found it hard to believe that Jackdaw had the nerve to return to Parrot Island. She just wouldn't quit.

"How... how is this even possible? Why would they come back here?!"

In fact, Chris wasn't supportive of this whole pirate-hunting plan. He didn't mind staying alone on Parrot Island to keep an eye on the pirates, confident that no threat would come to him. Thanks to the awful weather that greeted them, Chris figured that it must have brought Jackdaw down to an underwater grave. However, Worden wanted to make sure that all pirates were dead. This was his stand, and nothing could make him change his mind.

Since they had literally nothing to do during their stay on Parrot Island, they figured that it would have been a better use of time to search for Jackdaw. Even if all they found were the ship's remains, they would still be awarded merits. That was why no one went against the idea in the end.

Chris was baffled, wondering how Jackdaw could actually survive the storm and dodge the ships searching for them. He also noticed that it looked different compared to when it left the island. It appeared that they had it all in for a good fight.

“They got lucky and managed to run the last time. Since they are here now, let’s make sure that they never get to leave this place! Raise the mainsails! It’s time to go and greet them,” growled Worden in a deep voice.

“Yes, sir.”

Chris was ashamed of himself as he felt panic grip him the moment he saw Jackdaw coming for Parrot Island. Being part of the Royal Navy, this wasn’t the time for them to step back. Though Jackdaw was also a battleship with equal firepower, the navy wasn’t supposed to be afraid of a band of pirates. At the same time, Billy kept his eyes glued at the enemy’s movement. He spoke up when he saw that Kent was on the move.

“The Ford guy wasn’t lying. He was right about their commander’s arrogance.”

“Considering the feats he achieved in battle, I would say he has all the right in the world to be haughty. I heard that pirates are almost nonexistent in the places he swore to protect.”

“Why?” asked Harry.

“Because he hung all of them,” replied Zhang Heng.

When Harry heard that, he was frozen in shock and fear. Despite that, he still did his best and squeezed out a smile to show he wasn’t afraid of the commander. Anne knew Harry very well, and no matter how good his acting was, she knew he was almost scared to death. She couldn’t help but roll her eyes at him. Whenever a battle was near, he would pester her to allow him to join. Now that his wish had come true, fear had gotten the better out of him. Anne was annoyed by his immature antics, and she wasn’t bothered to entertain him.

“Let’s prepare for battle. Remember, we don’t have as much ammunition as them. We will only fire our cannons when we are very, very close to the enemy.”

“Understood,” nodded Billy.

“How are the cannoneers? Are they ready to put up a hard fight?”

“They are in position. We can begin our attack any time now.”

Through Ford’s descriptions of his Worden, Zhang Heng understood the commander better now. He wanted to learn the man’s routines and tactics.

Worden was considered one of the most hardened navy officers in the fleet; his strategies just as ruthless as his character was. He enjoyed engaging his enemies at close quarters, where according to him, was the rawest method to test someone’s courage in battle. No fancy outmaneuvering here; only one true warrior would prevail at the end, with the other meeting their demise.

This was precisely what Zhang Heng planned to do. Right now, Kent had more ammunition than Jackdaw. If Worden decided to test them with a few rounds, Zhang Heng would be at a disadvantage since they couldn’t fire in return. Nevertheless, his problem seemed to have sorted itself with Worden wanting to get up close and personal.

Worden had his reasons for would choosing such a risky tactic. Other than his skillful brigade of cannoneers, his gunmen were all well-trained marksmen as well. They would join the battle once their adversary was around forty meters away. With the overwhelming firepower, he would usually be able to pressure their enemies into submission or submersion. After dealing enough damage and taking charge of the situation, he would then declare victory. That explained his extremely high win rate.

Throughout his long and eventful navy career, Worden had only lost two battles before. One was to a French battleship that had almost double the number of his cannons. The other was because of an enemy ambush. This time, he knew that Jackdaw was once a corvette that belonged to the navy. He also knew that it was all alone. Accordingly, both ships held on from firing until they were fifty meters from each other. Then, they turned at the same time and took aim with their side cannons.

Zhang Heng was the first to act. He instantly found the right window and ordered his cannoneers to fire. The swift and powerful assault dealt some good damage to Kent. In times like these, the exceptional quality of Kent's sailors was on display. Not only did they remain calm, but the first thing they did was to get their wounded to sickbay. The rest continued working the cannons without so much as a flinch. Like a well-oiled machine, the crew ticked like clockwork.

At the same time, Worden's trusted gunmen could finally be put to good use. Along with Chris's order, the gunmen in red fired at Jackdaw! To their surprise, the pirates were ready for them. Having brought a shipment of planks salvaged from Miranda, they used it as a makeshift armor to repel the bullets.

Once the gunfire died down, the pirates emerged from their shield and started to fire back. It didn't matter who took the helm right now. Zhang Heng relieved himself as helmsman and passed the position to one of the pirates. Then, he pulled out his weapon and jumped into battle! This was the best time to showcase his Lv.2 shooting skill. For this fight, he had prepared a total of six guns for himself. There were also three people standing behind him, helping him to reload those guns.

Within a matter of three minutes, Zhang Heng managed to exterminate all the gunmen on the watchtower. Apart from that, he killed two officers as well. Unfortunately, Worden was cautious enough not to show up after noticing that his men were getting picked off, one after the other.

### **Chapter 232 Follow My Order**

"Stay calm! Hold your ground! Where's the ammunition? When is the next batch going to be here?" shouted Billy as he shuffled around the deck.

"It's on the way. It will be here soon, Mr. Billy."

A short-looking sailor dragged two crates of ammunition while trying his fastest to get to Billy.

"Mr. Billy. Two of our cannons were destroyed, and three of our cannoneers are wounded."

"Quickly! Get someone to replace them."

Just as Billy turned around, a cannonball suddenly landed half a meter away from him, penetrating the ship's hull! The short sailor had taken most of the brunt of the attack. His arm was completely shattered, crushed beyond redemption. The pain he was in caused him to fall to the ground, screaming hysterically for help.

“Quickly send him to Vincent. The rest of us continue with the attack!”

Instantly, two men came over and carried the injured pirate to the doctor. The crew had seen an incident like this far too many times, and thus, none were distracted by it. After all, most of Jackdaw’s recruits were experienced pirates. All that was in addition to the recent violent skirmishes they went through. Even if there was someone new onboard, they should be all grown up by now.

“Damn it! These guys outgun us by a large margin. It would be nice if we had our twenty-four-pound cannons here,” gasped one of the cannons while wiping the blood off his face.

“Everyone! Hang in there! We will defeat them and take back our gold!”

The busiest person on Jackdaw right now had to be Vincent. He had once dreamt of becoming a botanist. Right now, he played an essential role on the ship. There were injured lying everywhere in the sickbay. Due to the lack of beds, some had to make do with the tables and the floor. Blood could be seen on every surface of the infirmary, only to be made worse by the screams and howls of decapitated men.

Luckily, Vincent was well-prepared for such a situation. Before they departed to Parrot Island, he had collected some fine sand from the beach and scattered them all over the floor. By doing that, he solved the problem of the bloody, slippery floor. Right after he was done extracting a bullet from a pirate’s arm, the short pirate was carried into the infirmary. Vincent quickly examined his wounds and discovered that the bones in his arm had been completely shattered. Not to mention the flesh hanging off it, the mangled mess was a lost cause. It would have to be amputated right away.

He took out a wooden stick and asked the short pirate to bite on it. Then, he instructed his assistants to hold the man’s limbs down. Vincent then brought out a hacksaw and prepared himself to sever the poor pirate’s arm. Suddenly, he remembered what Zhang Heng told him earlier. It was crucial for him to apply heat to the tools that he used on his patients. Before he carried on, he retrieved the stick from the man’s mouth and fed him some rum.

“Are you ready? I will begin if you are ready.”

On another note, the plan that Zhang Heng, Billy, and the senior officers coined was finally working. The strategy Worden was so proud of was ineffective against Jackdaw. Instead, Jackdaw was the one constantly putting them under the limelight. Until now, Worden still didn’t dare show his face. However, despite the chaos, he remained very calm. Though half of his men were either injured or had died in battle, he had no intention to retreat. That was because Kent’s cannons still had the upper hand in this battle.

This had nothing to do with the courage and skill of his cannons. It was simply because Kent had greater firepower than Jackdaw. Jackdaw and Kent were battleships of the same type. Technically, they should be equal in firepower as well. However, Jackdaw now sorely lacked ammunition. Left with no other options, Zhang Heng had to replace all the twenty-four-pound cannons with the twelve-pounders. Thanks to that, they were now significantly weaker than Kent.

In reality, Jackdaw’s cannons actually exceeded Worden’s expectations. It wasn’t an exaggeration to say that they were equally as potent as the formally-trained Royal Navy.

“If this goes on, we won’t be able to hold up for much longer,” said Billy who sounded very worried.

Zhang Heng managed to kill another red-uniformed gunner before he replied.

“Time to use our backup plan,” Zhang Heng replied while looking at Anne.

“Is... is that doable?” asked Billy.

“We have killed two-thirds of the enemy’s gunmen. I would say our success rate has gone up, but I will need someone to cover me,” Zhang Heng said.

“Are six men enough?”

“Two is more than enough. It’s pointless to have so many cover me.”

While he talked, Zhang Heng sent his men to the captain’s quarters to get his weapons bag. There were four rifles in it. Ever since Zhang Heng bought them from Baal, he realized that they were of great help when taking over Scarborough. From that day onwards, Zhang Heng realized that rifles were an invaluable piece of weaponry in any battle. However, he was still under Blackbeard at that time and hence, wasn’t allowed to get three more rifles for himself. Right until he set sail to plunder the Spanish treasure ship, did he purchase three more of it from Baal.

This was their moment to shine. Zhang Heng crouched and crept to the gunwale. He then lifted one of his rifles. At such close proximity, the smoothbore gun would be an excellent choice as well. However, a rifle was definitely more reliable since it allowed the shooter to administer a lethal shot to his enemy. He then took aim at Kent’s helmsman.

“Follow my orders. Get Jackdaw closer to Kent.”

Jackdaw’s maneuvers couldn’t fool Worden’s eyes. Though he was ready to fight if the pirates boarded his ship, he had no reason to give up the advantage he had right now. So, he quickly ordered his helmsman to stay as far as possible from Jackdaw. Before Worden could even finish explaining, Kent’s helmsman suddenly dropped to the ground, dead as a doornail.

Worden frowned in frustration. Accidents like this happened all the time during a battle. Although unsettling, he was used to it. Immediately, Chris looked for someone to replace the dead helmsman. Right after the new helmsman took over the wheel, Zhang Heng killed him as well.

“Captain, someone is targeting our helmsmen!” shouted Chris.

“What are you afraid of?! They are just aiming for one person. Use whoever we have to block him from the bullets. Our human wall should suffice for now. Just hang in there. Soon, we will sink them indefinitely.”

Right after Chris received the order, he ordered some men to form up and block all incoming bullets. Of course, all those chosen were extremely unhappy with the decision. However, they had worked for Worden for some time now and knew about the consequences they would suffer if they disobeyed him. They might just be able to live if they followed the order. However, if they left right now, they would be ensured an ending worse than a crumbling wall.

Leaving with no other choice, they were forced to barricade the new helmsman to protect him. With no qualms whatsoever, Zhang Heng killed all who formed the human shield first before again taking out the helmsman. Faced by Zhang Heng’s masterful marksmanship, everyone was soon too afraid to step

up again. Chris had to keep on repeating himself, screaming for sailors to step up, and man up. However, no matter how desperate his orders were, no sailor would budge from where they were.

Unfortunately, Zhang Heng's position was exposed. Due to the overwhelming firepower of the enemy, the pirates that covered him and reloaded his guns were hit. No thanks to that, they managed to buy Jackdaw enough time to get closer to Kent. They were now only ten meters from each other.

In the chaos of raining bullets and thunderous cannons, Zhang Heng took the opportunity to change position. He then continued to reload his rifles and kept firing at his enemy nonstop. Once both ships were side by side, Anne and the rest of the pirates launched their signature grappling hooks over Kent's gunwale, bridging the two vessels together. Then, under heavy fire, she led a group of pirates to board Kent, the flagship of the Royal Navy.

### **Chapter 233 End of The Ken**

The entire battle lasted around twenty minutes. Zhang Heng managed to deal a massive blow to the enemy by taking out their entire gunmen brigade. As it was, Jackdaw's pirates were determined to avenge their dead. Still, invading another ship had its costs. A bullet grazed Billy amid the battle, hitting his arm and causing a chunk of flesh to tear off. Thankfully, he was alive.

Once both ships were connected, Zhang Heng instantly joined the fight. The first thing he did after boarding Kent was to look for their commander. However, Worden was hidden securely behind an army of heavily armed navy sailors. At the same time, the men were looking for Zhang Heng as well, intending to kill Jackdaw's captain and demoralize their crew.

As the two sides clashed, everyone began treading lightly. Zhang Heng relied on his masterful marksmanship to open a path for himself. Worden, on the other hand, had more men than Jackdaw, not to mention that they were extremely well-trained as well. It soon appeared that neither side was gaining the upper hand in the battle.

However, little by little, Jackdaw's men managed to overwhelm Kent's crew. It would seem that the navy had lost their edge, and was actually losing to the pirates. Worden had no other choice. He got a few men and hastily retreated to the lower decks. Both sides exchanged fire on the stairs, where a heavy gunfight ensued. In the end, after a good ten minutes, Anne and her team managed to take control of Kent, most of it anyway.

Worden and his men retreated to the ship's belly, where the captain's quarters were. Knowing that they had no place to hide, they became like mice in a trap and were extremely sharp at the moment. Naturally, Billy and his men would go after the remaining sailors. However, they were no match for the desperate navy and some were instantly gunned down. Having lost a few good men today, Billy felt dejected and sorrowful.

Nevertheless, Jackdaw managed to take over Kent. In raising the white flag, all their sailors had put down their weapons and began surrendering to the pirates. All that was left was Worden and his merry men, still hiding out in the captain's quarters.

Billy shouted at them from the outside and urged them to surrender, telling them that it was all over. Unironically, the navy replied in kind by shooting at him. Billy ducked as bullets whizzed past his head.

He had already been shot once. Luckily, he wasn't too close to the entrance. This deadlock had the pirates very impatient. Thankfully, not too long after that, Zhang Heng appeared.

"So. What's the situation?"

"Initially, I wanted to deplete their ammunition and rush into the quarters. However, it seems like they are holding up real good in there," said Billy.

Zhang Heng waved his hand, and a young and terrified navy officer was brought to him.

"I want you to talk to him."

"Captain Worden asked me to drag twelve barrels of gunpowder to the captain's quarters when they went in just now. He told me that the gunpowder is only to be used for the worst-case scenario," stuttered the young man, obviously scared out of his living daylight.

"Why does he need so much gunpowder?!" asked Billy.

"Isn't it obvious? Although he lost the battle, he has no intention to give us the ship!" said a frowning Zhang Heng.

"Worden is waiting for the rest of our men from Jackdaw. Once everyone is here, he will blow everyone to hell. It appears he is about to destroy his Kent and kill most of our men. I think we should give up on taking their ship. Call all of our men to retreat! Only leave a few here to deal with them. Before all of you get off, go to the cargo hold and take everything they have, especially the food and water.

"Once we rescue the pirates from Parrot Island, all these will be essential on the ship. We need to move everything back before this ship sinks. Don't leave behind their gunpowder and ammunition as well. These are the things we need most right now. We have fifteen minutes to do it.

"Once the fifteen minutes are up, I want everyone back on Jackdaw, even if we fail to move everything. Drop whatever you have in your hands and return to our ship. I also want all our cannons aimed at the captain's quarters. Once everybody is back on Jackdaw, we will fire at them immediately. Since Worden wants to go down with his ship, we shall grant him some assistance!"

The pirates followed Zhang Heng's orders by the dot, returning to Jackdaw once the fifteen minutes were up. The moment everyone on board, they swiftly retrieved the grappling hooks and started pulling away from Kent.

Once they were far enough, Jackdaw fired all their cannons at them. The captain's quarters exploded with a massive boom, breaking Kent into half. The blast instantly disintegrated Worden and his men, with nothing left of them except burnt flesh and cinders. Putting aside the fact that they were enemies, Zhang Heng was actually impressed by Worden's spirit. Both sides knew that this was the battle that would determine their fate. From the start till the end, Worden had brilliantly strategized his attacks, barely making any mistakes as he went along.

He was simply unfortunate that Zhang Heng knew him well enough to win this fight. Earlier, Zhang Heng squeezed out every last drop of information he could about Worden. Armed with new knowledge about his adversary, Zhang Heng came up with an effective plan to defeat him. As for Worden, he never expected that to fight Jackdaw again. Hence, he spent no effort whatsoever to delve into Zhang Heng.

Other than that, his previous victories and vast combat experience had turned him arrogant. Such costly errors eventually drove him to lose the battle, eventually paying the ultimate price with his life.

.....

Though the battle was over, Zhang Heng and his men had a shipload of things to deal with, no pun intended. Doctor Vincent faithfully treated the wounded in the infirmary. Gale, the carpenter, was scurrying about the decks with his other carpenters trying to fix all the damage they could find. As for Dufresne, he was counting the goods that they plundered from Kent, and, at the same time, figuring out a way to move all the gold bars from the bottom of the ocean. As the crew busied themselves with their seemingly neverending tasks, Zhang Heng brought some food and drinking water to the Parrot Island survivors.

While Jackdaw was fighting Kent, Erik and Brook had gathered the remaining pirates on the beach. Unfortunately, their guns wouldn't shoot that far, and they could only stand ashore and watch the battle unfold before them.

They burst into loud cheers the moment they saw Jackdaw claiming the final victory. Zhang Heng figured there would be a handful of survivors on the island but didn't expect to see so few actually survived. As he passed the rations to the famished pirates, he got to know that Black Prince Sam was killed in action.

"My deepest condolences. So, what's your plan after this, Eric?"

"Initially, I wanted to destroy Kent to avenge him. Destroying Kent... this is what kept me alive on this island. But then again, I didn't expect you guys to solve my problem so quickly. Luckily, they have six more ships for me to destroy!"

"Erm... technically, there are only five ships left. We destroyed the Miranda a few days ago."

"Thank you so much. We are only alive now thanks to you and your Jackdaw. I plan to look for a ship to avenge Sam when I return to Nassau. I will make everyone involved in this scheme pay dearly!" Erik roared furiously.

"However, I won't force anybody to ride my path of revenge. The Quidah is gone, so is Sam. My life as a pirate is over. If possible, I'm hoping that you can take in the rest who are still alive."

"No problem. You can always come back when you've settled your unfinished business."

Zhang Heng shook Eric's hand warmly.

There were less than twenty survivors from Quidah. Half of them wanted to avenge Sam with Eric. The other half wanted to join Jackdaw. Whichever ship they chose to board, though, these men were all experienced pirates, an invaluable asset to any pirate ship of this era.

Most importantly, Zhang Heng was willing to absorb those wanting to join Jackdaw. Now that a wide range of talents was part of his crew, Zhang Heng was glad to know that the next challenge would certainly be met with a little more tenacity and valor. Owing to the unexpected 'enlistment,' pirates from the other two pirate vessels were quickly interested to join Jackdaw as well.

As for Swordfish, Brook was still alive. Hence, nobody there was interested to hop over.



## Chapter 234 Return to Nassau

After distributing the food and water to the survivors, Zhang Heng shifted his attention to getting the gold bars from the bottom of the ocean. There wasn't much time left, as the navy agreed that they would regroup on Parrot Island in two weeks. More than a week had passed, and now, only five days were left. However, knowing the navy, they wouldn't stick to their agreed time and would usually arrive a day or two earlier.

That would mean Jackdaw had only around three days to retrieve all the gold bars. After that, Zhang Heng would need to think about how to escape and avoid the navy en route back to Nassau. He would need a good day for planning. In other words, excluding tonight, Zhang Heng and his men had only two days to retrieve all the gold bars.

Amid all the bad news, a silver lining appeared. Earlier, Kent had thought about getting those gold bars as well, ordering their carpenters to make a set of salvaging tools. They were of crude design, where all they did to use a modified grappling hook. The carpenters added two more hooks to the claw and tied the ropes at the front part of the hook. This helped to make the contraption more sturdy and would allow them to lift the sunken crates. Even with the device, they would still need to send divers to attach the hooks to these crates. Initially, Worden wanted to force the captured pirates to get it done. Of course, Zhang Heng wasn't one to force his men to do it, so he decided to consult Gale.

"What do you think? Is it doable?"

"It's not hard to make the tools they made. They have come up with the right thing for this task. We just need to copy it. We have a ton of grappling hooks on the ship. I believe I can make ten of them before sundown."

"I have picked the most qualified men for this task as well. They are the best divers on Jackdaw. That said, we can't possibly ask them to stay underwater for too long. By that time, they would have to resurface before they even reach the crates," Dufresne added.

"Hmm, they'll run out of oxygen by the time they reach the gold. Tell the divers to hug heavy rocks on the way down. They would automatically start submerging, and no energy would be needed. Besides that, tie a rope around their waists and set a time limit. Once the time is up, we will pull them out. If everything goes smoothly, they should have enough time to install the grappling hooks on the crates."

As for the water pressure, Zhang Heng couldn't find any solutions. The divers simply had to overcome it themselves. Twenty meters depth should be bearable for a human body. Although it would leave them with the bends, it wasn't lethal. Considering the risks they would be taking, the divers would receive extra rewards if they completed the task successfully. This was a much-needed boost of motivation for these men.

Zhang Heng left the matter for Dufresne and Billy to decide. Dufresne nodded and instantly sent someone to test their theory. Once the first crate was out of the water, he would know right away that Zhang Heng's method worked well. All he needed to do after that was refine the technique until all the crates were out of the water. At the end of the second night, Jackdaw had managed to retrieve more than half of the sunken gold.

After that, the salvage operation slowed down tremendously. The Spanish treasure ship was exceptionally well built, and the pirates had to hammer her with cannonballs until she sank. Unavoidably, the cargo hold was hit as well. Jackdaw had retrieved all the crates that were still intact, but there were still many gold bars that were scattered all over the place.

It was going to be a troublesome and arduous task to pick them up one by one. The contraptions that they made earlier weren't going to help in a situation like this. It had to be manually done. In other words, they would need a longer time to complete the entire salvage operation. Other than that, the divers could only dive for a limited number of times a day. The depth and pressure would take a toll on them, and they would end up exhausted.

Luckily, the survivors on the island had mostly recovered. To show their gratitude to Jackdaw, not only did they give up their right to the gold bars, but they were even willing to help retrieve them without asking for anything in return.

It was the third night, and with the help of the survivors, Jackdaw managed to recover a total of 3,200 pounds of gold ingots. There were 1,800 pounds left on the ocean floor, but most of them were scattered around, and many were buried under the wreck. Of course, they could retrieve all of them if they wanted to, but that would take a longer time.

Zhang Heng had no intention to wait any longer. For the past few days, Jackdaw had been through nonstop combat. When they fled Parrot Island, every single pirate on Jackdaw began to hold a massive grudge towards the navy. When they destroyed Kent, the resentment was settled. Now, most of Jackdaw's crew lay spent and exhausted. Even though some ammunition was acquired from Kent, most of them had lost the vigor for another fight.

That was why Zhang Heng decided not to continue staying on Parrot Island. Once he picked up Brook, he set for home. Everyone was more than eager to head back to Nassau. Running heavy, Jackdaw spent double the time they needed to return to Nassau. Having so much gold and the extra compliment on board, they were a lot slower than they usually were. They had to avoid the other five enemy ships as well. Luckily, they did not come across any threats. It wasn't until the stone walls, and Nassau's castle was spotted that they could finally breathe a sigh of relief.

Everyone on board had mixed feelings when they saw Nassau. To Jackdaw's pirates, they prevailed once again and claimed victory even although it was a hard-fought battle. As the captain of Jackdaw, Zhang Heng got to carry on being the legend of Nassau. In a dire, hopeless circumstance, Jackdaw was the only ship that survived and escaped the navy. They miraculously turned the tide around by destroying Miranda and Kent. In the end, they salvaged most of the gold bars and saved the pirates that were still alive on Parrot Island.

On the other hand, the other five pirate ships were not as lucky as Jackdaw. They lost everything this time. They failed to get anything out of the hunting trip, and to make matters worse, their ships were also destroyed as well. However, they were simply grateful to be alive and got to return to Nassau. Once Jackdaw arrived at the harbor, Brook and the other captain quickly got off the ship. They had a lot of things to deal with, having needed to recruit new pirates and look for a new boat as well. After that, Eric bid Zhang Heng farewell too.

Zhang Heng sent them off to shore in a small boat. Once they were gone, Zhang Heng ordered his men to unload the gold bars from Jackdaw. Although there were still 1,800 pounds of gold bars lying on the bottom, the other five pirate ships gave up their share. Thus, they were delighted and contented by their yield this time. The remaining scraps would most probably be snatched up by the navy and pirate hunters.

After this voyage, Jackdaw's pirates were wealthy enough to quit being a pirate. Most of them had never even seen so many gold bars before. As they unloaded their gold bars, the entire Nassau was left in shock.

### **Chapter 235 Capital Woes**

The pile of gold bars was a monument on its own, creating a stunning sight as it shone and shimmered in the sun. Except for the pirates tasked with moving the gold bars, Zhang Heng gathered everyone from his ship and distributed weapons to them. They needed them to maintain order at the harbor in case of untoward incidents. That said, after Zhang Heng annihilated the Skeleton, everyone knew it best not to mess with Jackdaw. Unsurprisingly, no one lost their minds when they saw the gold bars coming out from the ship.

Afterward, Zhang Heng sent someone to contact Carina, asking her to empty one of her warehouses. He would use it as temporary storage for the gold. The Jackdaw had an overwhelming yield this trip, and if Zhang Heng distributed the gold to his men right now, safety would be a primary concern. On the surface, no one seemed to dare go against Jackdaw's pirates but in actual fact, multitudes of thieves and robbers were waiting to get their hands on all those precious gold bars.

Other than that, the group of pirates who had previously gambled away twenty gold coins in a single night received a stark warning from Zhang Heng. Though the captain had no intention to poke around everyone's spending habits, he knew his men would become moving targets the moment he gave them their share of the money.

So, he decided to only give them a portion of their share first. He would help them to keep the rest for now. He came up with a ledger to keep track of all the gold that he gave his men. Anyone could ask for more whenever they needed it. After a while, Carina and her men came to the pier.

It was then Zhang Heng noticed that Carina didn't look too good. Since there were outsiders around him, he figured it was a bad time to talk about it. Only after reaching the warehouse and seeing that all the gold bars were safe did he talk to her in a quiet place.

"How's everything? Has it all been good throughout my absence?"

"The situation... is not looking good," replied Carina as she tried squeezing a smile.

"Huh?"

When Zhang Heng left Nassau two months ago, Carina's problem was solved because the Skeleton was no longer a threat to her. Along with the rise of Jackdaw, her trading business flourished in Nassau as well. Not only did she enjoy repeat business with the captains she used to deal with, but some pirate ships even left the black market alliance hoping to build a long term partnership with her. All the while, Malcolm had been trying to dominate the black markets of Nassau. Naturally, Carina's growth had

become a huge threat to him. More and more traders were increasingly interested in trading with Carina instead of the black market alliance.

This was indeed great news for Carina since the black market alliance had been retarding her growth for a very long time. When she saw hope in defeating Malcolm and the black-market alliance, she instantly signed every contract of the captains who wished to trade with her. To take control of a broader market share, she purchased another ship to help her move the increasing amount of items moving through her warehouse. Right now, she was the proud owner of three cargo ships. Of course, the expansion required an increase in hiring as well. With the large acquisitions, she literally invested everything that she earned back into her business.

Unfortunately, whatever happened after that was out of her control. Carina's biggest problem was her lack of shrewdness as a black-market merchant. The black market alliance was newly formed when she first came to Nassau. All her father's trading partners had left to work with them when he got incarcerated. In the end, Jackdaw was the first and only ship willing to trade with her. Owing to that, she managed to survive in Nassau. However, although sleeping on a bed of roses, sharp thorns were present as well. She had to face perpetual harassment and pressure by the black-market alliance, which just wouldn't let her off the hook.

That was why Carina differed from all the other black-market merchants. She never trusted anyone aside from Zhang Heng. Of course, she traded with many different captains under the radar of the alliance, but those were just one-off trades. The real situation, however, was way more complicated than that. Although Carina had a natural flair for business, she sorely lacked experience, not to mention needing a lot more time. All that in a place she was unfamiliar with. If Malcolm wasn't after her, she would have had sufficient space to grow like a potato seedling. Right now, Malcolm was akin to a giant stone pinning her down. She had waste precious energy to squirm and crawl underneath its weight. In other words, he had severely stunted her growth.

Malone's betrayal had also slowly affected Carina. After all, he used to be her father's most trusted partner. He was also the only one familiar with his trading techniques. Without Malone's guidance, Carina had to rely on herself to do business in a world filled with hounds and sharks. From that time on, one problem after another began to plague her.

For instance, she had supposedly set her buying price at 5% higher than the black market alliance, a rate Carina and the captains both agreed with. However, the black-market alliance offered different prices to captains from different tiers. Some pirates eventually discovered that they had been offered different rates compared to some others although the items they sold were similar.

It was hardly surprising then, how some pirates felt increasingly displeased with the double-standards. During that time, Carina was busy discussing partnerships with the merchants, worried that the bad reputation of the alliance would spill over to her. Ultimately, she was forced to cap her prices at the highest possible rate. That would mean she would be getting significantly less profit from all her trades.

The low-profit margins were just the beginning. Along with the increase in her cargo volume, the customs officers demanded an increase in bribes as well. This would all translate to higher costs, and subsequently, the retail price for the items would increase as well. Such a situation would only spell fewer buyers in the end. Initially, Carina thought that Malcolm must have been messing with her.

Shockingly, she attempted a different port but found the same thing happening to her again. It was then when she realized that this was an unspoken rule for all black market merchants.

As if to worsen the situation, she had troubles at her business spot as well. The local traders were unhappy after seeing Carina dealing on a large scale on their turf. Two lawsuits were filed against her thanks to the jealous and disgruntled lot. The matter had to be settled regardless, and she was forced to spend a considerable sum to settle the case outside court. The detour eventually incurred huge losses for her.

All the above led to only one conclusion: the financial pit, the worst of her woes. Before Zhang Heng left, he gave Carina the Skeleton. Although it was supposed to be her third cargo ship, she would still need to pay for its refit and the manpower required. During that time, she had just spent a large sum of money to expand her warehouse by opening a grocery store. When the time came for her to purchase loot, she was so cash strapped that she was forced to mortgage her father's property just to have enough.

The entire process of purchasing the goods from the pirate ships, finding prospective buyers, and shipping them to various colonies usually required a set amount of time. It was a well-established system that most traders were familiar with. Unfortunately, the situation didn't always go as planned. The time the ships would return to port remained an uncontrollable factor. At times, a few pirate ships would all return to Nassau at once, and she would need a tremendous amount of money at hand to purchase their loot.

A week before Zhang Heng's return to Nassau, Carina was already on the verge of financial collapse. As of now, she still owed two captains a large sum of money. Then, this morning, she was trying her hardest to calm her increasingly disgruntled partners who had not received their payment on time.

Unfortunately, the heightened emotions caused some pirates to lose all patience and they proceeded to ransack her grocery store.

### **Chapter 236 Malcolm's Dilemma**

Competition in business was akin to the cruelty of an actual war.

Malcolm knew Carina's weakness and quickly changed tactics from aggression to concession. This time, he threw a bait the businesswoman could never refuse.

If Carina wanted to expand her business, she couldn't solely rely on Jackdaw alone. It didn't matter if it was flourishing her second-hand dealership or the private transactions with pirates from the black-market alliance – they were all retaliation to the obstacles Malcolm threw at her. Thus, there was no reason for her to turn down an opportunity laid before her feet.

Had Carina been given another six months, and being a quick learner at that, she would have solved her current predicament and turned her rags into riches. However, for obvious reasons, Malcolm was never going to allow her to do that.

"How much money do you have right now?" Zhang Heng asked.

"To get the business running again, I would need to throw in at least 700 gold coins. But then again, what's the point of continuing anyway? We are bleeding money by the barrel. Before this, the business

was slow, but now... now, we lose money every day, every hour, every minute," she replied. There was a hint of frustration and exhaustion in her raspy voice, a rarity for her.

She had come across the most challenging time for her business. Strangely, no matter how hard she worked, she couldn't seem to turn the situation around. An endless string of problems simply kept ramming into her.

Because they were expanding at an exponential rate, her capital reserves would not keep up with her expenditure. To make matters worse, the current market had reached a saturation point, with too much stock lying around and no buyers to take them. Then there was the problem of increased customs bribes and the local business' boycotts – significant impediments that simply couldn't be solved in such a short period.

"I can give you an additional 800 gold coins as a follow-up to my investment. On top of that, I can lend you 200 gold coins," Zhang Heng said. During their last voyage, Jackdaw came back fully loaded. He made a simple calculation – as the captain, he and the founding members of Jackdaw would each get around 1200 gold coins – an indubitably tremendous amount of money.

With the newfound wealth, he could simply retire now, buy two plots of land, and live a comfortable life on the island. Nonetheless, Zhang Heng thought about how Roger Woode and his fleet would come back in a few years to recapture Nassau and how he refused to put his life at the mercy of others.

Roger Woode, the first governor in the history of Nassau, occupied the island with his fleet and pardoned most of the pirates there. However, Zhang Heng found it hard to believe that things would go that well for himself, especially given what he had done – including Scarborough, he had now attacked two navy fleets. Jackdaw, the pirate ship he now captained, had also been taken from the navy, not to mention that he was part of Queen Anne's Revenge' bombing of Charleston. Then, not long ago, he killed Worden, the highest-ranking navy commander of the British Caribbean.

With Blackbeard Teach missing, Black Sam dead, and Honegg retiring, Zhang Heng and his sailors were now the de facto top group of pirates on the whole island.

Should Roger Woode manage to take Nassau, many others would still have a chance to keep their lives, considering the fact that Nassau required a ton of young laborers to help develop the island. But not Zhang Heng. He would be among the first to be gotten rid of. So long Roger Woode's head was attached to him, he would kill the chickens to scare the monkeys (to punish an individual as an example to others).

On that account, even though Zhang Heng had already completed his primary mission, he couldn't go on a vacation. Moreover, it was no longer just him alone. As the captain of Jackdaw, he was now responsible for the welfare of his sailors, all depending on him for stipends. And then there was Anne, of whom he looked after. Without his support, the competition between Carina and Malcolm would instantly be over, with Malcolm completely crushing her.

At this point, it was hard to think of himself or resign at the height of his prosperity.

"But in return, my share of the business must increase by 10%," Zhang Heng said.

“That won’t be a problem. But are you sure you want to continue? At least in the short term, there won’t be much hope of making a profit.”

“What if the Malcolm were to be resolved?” Zhang Heng asked.

Considering the windfall they got from their most recent expedition, Jackdaw’s sailors would most likely withdraw into a lengthy sabbatical, and it would probably be a while before they put to sea again. On top of that, the legendary battle of the Jackdaw had basically entrenched her dominance in the entire island of Nassau.

This meant Zhang Heng had enough time and energy to deal with the final opponents – Malcolm and his black-market alliance.

Although Carina’s business seemed to be bleak for now, she had made a strategic move that unwittingly pressured the black-market alliance. Regardless of whether Malcolm’s concessions were voluntary or not, his moves had indisputably caused this large-scale expansion of the used goods business.

The black-market alliance did not voice their doubts. Only Malcolm was assertive enough, foreseeing that he could afford it, whereas Carina couldn’t.

But when Zhang Heng returned with all that gold, it had become a whole total different ballgame altogether. On the other side, though, the black-market alliance lost five powerful pirate ships, the loss of Black Prince Sam and his Quidah, an especially big blow to them.

It appeared that Malcolm’s current situation might not be better than that of Karina.

In the early days of the black-market alliance’s establishment, they offered very favorable prices to the pirates, meaning that it also a time when their profits were at their lowest. Now that the number of powerful pirate ships was on a rapid decline, it was foreseeable that the amount of valuable loot would also decrease – aggravating an internal conflict that had been brewing within the black-market alliance.

Later that day, Zhang Heng secretly met up with Laeli behind Smoked Fish Alley.

During this period, the gladiator had also made a lot of progress. With Leah on the inside, Malcolm’s study could practically hide no secrets. She took the opportunity to go through his letters quietly each time she cleaned the room. To avoid being discovered by Malcolm, Leah did not take any of them but simply memorized any useful information she came across. Then, she would put them into writing, and have someone take the notes to Laeli.

Zhang Heng flipped through the notes, spotting some interesting messages. Along with the summary of the letters, Leah had also jotted down her impressions and analysis of Malcolm’s antics, which helped paint a more comprehensive picture of the man’s character. However, news regarding Carina’s father, Fegan, was only found in one letter.

Although it confirmed that Malcolm’s family had indeed contacted Count Slaughter, the man who framed Fegan, it wasn’t enough evidence to charge him for it. There was also a letter stating that Malcolm secretly invested in a parliament member of Whitehall and that he and Raymond’s son-in-law were political enemies.

## **Chapter 237 Interrogation**

“Let’s not talk about your father’s imprisonment first. Financially aiding political enemies should start a new conflict between Redmond and Malcolm. We need to investigate the Normand matter first.”

“Normand, who is that?”

“The black-market alliance that you know right now is actually not the first in existence.

“I heard my father mentioning it before. Three years ago, another black-market alliance was established in Nassau. However, it did not end well. It existed only for a short period of time, and it was dismissed soon that.”

“The leader of that alliance was Normand. We all know Redmond as the most experienced black-market merchant in Nassau. When Normand was still around, he was the most respected black-market merchant on this island, which was why he was chosen as the alliance’ leader. During that time, Redmond was second in command. Not too long after that, the whole thing was managed poorly, and Normand’s reputation was destroyed thanks to that. He left many angry and resentful. After that alliance was dismissed, Normand secretly left Nassau. In the end, I heard he died of some illness in his home.”

“Does this incident have anything to do with Malcolm? He’s been only on the island for a year, right?”

“He made a name for himself during that time. Of course, it fades in comparison to what he’s achieved today. He played a big part in the establishment of the black-market alliance, but he chose to lay low instead. I believe he is not a good man.”

Zhang Heng then passed the notebooks to Carina.

“Malcolm incited the black-market merchants against Normand. Why would he do that? Isn’t he one of the supporters of the black-market alliance?” he asked.

“He is one of the supporters of the black-market alliance, but he wants to be the one in charge of it all. It was too soon for Malcolm to do anything when Normand formed the alliance, having only been in Nassau for a year. His position and growth were limited, and it wouldn’t be good for him if the alliance managed to fortify their territory on the island. If he wanted to grow and expand further, he had to put a stop to the black-market alliance. To achieve that, it was done in great secrecy. I heard that he used a courier called Eugene.”

“Eugene? The intelligence trader who lived on our island?”

“Well, he was once a black-market merchant as well. Once the alliance was dismissed, he switched jobs as an intelligence dealer. We need to talk to him. Amongst the merchants, Normand’s reputation was unparalleled. Though the black-market alliance incident had cost him his good reputation, he still holds the respect of many. For years now, his best friend was always Raymond.

“After Normand passed away, Redmond took care of his funeral and buried him. If we can get Eugene to testify against Malcolm, we could deepen the conflict between Malcolm and Redmond. With the letters that the two have, I believe it would hit Malcolm harder than exposing your father’s issue. Considering that the black-market alliance isn’t doing well, I believe that we can land him a critical hit if we expose this old incident about him.”



Just as Zhang Heng finished, someone ran into the cellar. It was Cauchy.

“Something bad is happening at the mansion! You guys better head to the central plaza and take a look.”

Fifteen minutes later, Zhang Heng and Carina arrived at the central plaza with their faces covered. A large number of people had already gathered. At the center of it all, a naked black man was being tied to a wooden stake. There were whip marks and open wounds all over his body, and he seemed to be not long for this world. The butler that Zhang Heng met before at Terrance Mansion, Wallace, stood there calmly.

“I’m going to give you one last chance. Who have you been contacting outside the mansion? Who did he ask you to pass the message to? Tell me his name, and I will let you go! I’ll give your freedom back to you! What do you think, eh? Isn’t that what you’ve always wanted? To become a free man.”

The black man’s mouth remained shut, causing Wallace to instinctively pick the whip before slashing the man again. The poor soul howled in pain when a big chunk of flesh on his back was torn off by the whip. Soon, he could no longer stand the pain, and he lost consciousness.

After that, Wallace lifted a bucket of water and splashed it on the man. It did its work, waking him up with his face all twisted.

“You lot won’t stop begging me to be more merciful! Alright! Right now, I will show you mercy! You have my promise, and the people around you shall bear witness to my words. As long as you give me the name, I will release you immediately. Before you leave, I will even throw in a doctor to treat your injuries. As a bonus, you will be given a new set of clothes so you can leave this place with honor. Honestly, I can’t think of a better deal than this. All I want are the names. Just give me the two damn names, and we can end this bloody farce!”

The black man started panting rapidly. Nonetheless, after a short while, he decided that he would not say a word to the butler.

“This is why I hate your kind. The kind that will never learn how to put themselves in the shoes of others. Why do you have to turn this into an ugly scene?” growled Wallace in a disappointed tone.

After that, Wallace stood up and took two steps back. The supervisor behind him moved to the front again. The black man was trembling, dreading terrible things would befall him soon. Laeli could bear it no more, and was about to punch Wallace in the face. However, someone grabbed his arm before he could go.

“Calm down. The reason why Wallace chose this place was to make sure that you get to see all of it. If you show yourself right now, you are walking right into their trap. The man on the pillar... is that your contact?”

Laeli nodded as he clenched his jaws, trying his best to suppress his anger.

“His name is Nadya, a kitchen helper in the mansion. In the morning, he would usually visit the market with the chef to get the day’s supplies. We would secretly meet up and I’ll pass him the messages for Leah.”

“How did Wallace come to know about it?”

“We always met behind the cook’s back. I’m pretty sure that another kitchen helper sold him out, and the traitor is apparently not from my tribe. However, Nadya told me that he had been dealt with. I tried my best to meet up with him only when he was alone. Then, I realized that another kitchen helper would always stand close by whenever we talked. All the slaves who have been granted permission to step out of the mansion are usually very obedient. Still, he is worried that some of them might escape when they are out. That is why he would never let his slaves stray too far. Just so you know, I made sure to always cover my face when I talked to Nadya. No one should recognize me unless they know me well!”

Chapter 238 Eugene’s Secre

Carina was heartbroken as she looked at the black man’s horrendous condition. Unfortunately, there was nothing the three could do to help him. In this era, blacks were treated no differently than livestock. Even if Malcolm ordered all the black folk in his mansion to be killed, nobody would do anything about it. Besides, Wallace ordered his men to hide around the central plaza to see who would emerge to rescue Nadya.

In the end, they were forced to watch Nadya getting brutally whipped by the supervisor to the point where he fainted again. Despite his display of total dominance, Wallace wasn’t happy with the outcome. The moment he was told that Nadya was dealing with someone outside, he quickly planned this fracas to lure out the man behind all this. Unfortunately, the main character didn’t show up in the end. If he beat Nadia to death, his only clue would cease to exist.

Seeing that Nadya had stopped screaming, he was left with no other option but to stop the supervisor from whipping.

“Look for a doctor to treat his wounds. Let’s head back to the mansion,” said a dark-faced Wallace.

Since the scene was over, the crowd gathered at the central plaza slowly dispersed as well.

“What do you plan to do?” asked Zhang Heng.

“Though Nadya is not a warrior from my tribe, I can say that his willpower is stronger than most warriors. He will never betray us,” Laeli replied, his eyes redded by the horrendous barbarism inflicted upon his kind.

“This has nothing to do with loyalty. People rarely survive such continuous torture. Say he could withstand the agony this time. What about next time and the time after that? Sooner or later, Wallace will figure out a way to make him talk.”

“What should I do then?”

“It’s time for you to consider leaving this place. You have given us so much useful information all this time. It is enough for us to figure out how to deal with Malcolm. My earlier promise to you still holds ground. During my last voyage, I scouted some islands for you, and I managed to find a suitable one. There is a ready supply of drinking water and a thick forest on the island. It’s a perfect hideaway for your tribe. And if you need weapons, I can give them to you. Don’t worry about your daily essentials. I’ll send you a batch as well.”

Zhang Heng paused for a while before continuing.

“Just as I said. My ship and men will be waiting for you at a designated location. I can’t get involved in your slave war. Otherwise, the plantations on the island will make an enemy out of me.”

“I can understand that. When I leave, I will ask Leah to bring all the letters you need and pass them to you.”

Once Zhang Heng was finished with Laeli, he looked for Carina to discuss Eugene. They quickly realized that it was going to be an uphill battle getting Eugene to work with them and stand up against Malcolm.

“Sounds easy enough to me. We just need to tie him up and give him a good beating,” grinned Anne.

“This time, we are not allowed to use any violence. Otherwise, we could lose all credibility. We need to make sure that Eugene is willing to speak out the truth. His words will be proof that Malcolm has always placed his own interests above the black-market alliance. Eugene also needs to tell everyone that Malcolm is not suitable as a leader. Anyway, we’ll need to check him out first.”

Billy wanted to be a part of this operation as well, and on the third day in the morning, the four of them gathered at Zhang Heng’s place.

“I will speak first. Eugene became an intelligence dealer three years after the first black-market alliance collapsed. After the first alliance was formed, he managed to convince a group of people to bring Norman down by becoming his competitor. From what I know, he succeeded in snatching away a few important deals from the black-market alliance. The situation was still salvageable at that time. After all, Normand’s reputation was soaring in Nassau. A large number of people were willing to trust and follow him. That was until something happened...” said Carina.

“What happened?”

“Normand was caught secretly dealing with two pirate ships. He was accused of misusing his power to gouge for higher prices. In return, the two pirate ships gave half of their earnings to Normand. This was the incident that caused him to lose all his reputation. It all seems so wrong to me. The captains of the two pirate ships were close to Eugene. One of them even used to work with him.”

“Can you locate those two pirate ships?”

“I’m afraid not. My investigation stops here. From what I know, one ship set off and didn’t return after that. I’m guessing that they were plundered and subsequently sank. The other ship was forced out of business by competing pirates. One year ago, their captain was stabbed to death over an argument in a tavern. After that, the entire crew underwent major changes. All the old pirates were replaced by new ones. Even if we could find the original crew of that ship, it would be pointless. After all, there’s only so much an ordinary pirate would know about the captain,” said Billy.

“Anyway, the black-market alliance was disbanded because of this incident. Normand has a lot of friends, though, and Eugene wasn’t welcome in the black-market merchant circle after what happened to Normand. That was why he was forced to quit to be an intelligence dealer instead. With his strong connections with the customs, he has become quite successful now. Of course, it’s nothing compared to what he achieved when he was still a black-market merchant. Now, here’s the problem. In the end, Eugene got nothing from this incident. Why would he do what Malcolm asked?”

“Are you trying to say that perhaps Malcolm rewarded Eugene secretly?” asked Billy.

“On the contrary, I think there’s a big possibility that Malcolm threatened Eugene to submission. I’ve studied Malcolm’s character, and he seems to be a before very cautious person. If he can make Eugene accuse Normand of something he didn’t do, he definitely held something against Eugene. However, judging by Eugene’s personality – if he was willing to frame Normand for money, he could do the same to Malcolm as well.”

“So, right now, we need to find out what Malcolm’s beef with Eugene is?”

“I think I might know the answer to that question.”

No one expected Anne to voice up in a moment like this. Immediately, everyone turned their attention to her. At that, she simply shrugged.

“What’s wrong? I have my own methods of investigation. Harry is very close to the kids around this area. Though all they do is mess around every day, they are actually quite useful when I need help. Due to their young age, no one really pays attention to them. From time to time, they would overhear secrets from the adults and spill them out. Very few people actually know that Eugene has an illegitimate son.”

“Illegitimate son? How old is he? Where is he right now?”

“A prostitute bore his child when he first arrived on this island. According to what the kids heard, Eugene got the prostitute out once he knew that she was pregnant. He even bought her a house in Nassau. Unfortunately, the house was burned down. Eugene managed to get out in time but not the woman. Miraculously, the child survived the fire. This incident caused him and his son to be at odds. He left Nassau alone when he was only ten.”

### **Chapter 239 Hesitation**

“Was Eugene married?”

“As far as I know, he’s got a wife in the colony, but they couldn’t have kids. If that’s true, then the illegitimate son is probably his only child,” Billy said.

“This child must be of great importance to him. Eugene must have felt very guilty, especially about that fire,” Carina reasoned.

“So, Malcolm used the child to make Eugene do his bidding?” Anne quizzed.

“No, that’s not Malcolm’s style,” Carina shook her head. “At times, he’d use the simplest and most straightforward way to solve a problem, much like the Skull issue. However, keeping someone captive like that is crossing the line – there’s no way he would imprison a living person for that long.”

“So, Malcolm’s hold over Eugene is not his son,” Billy said, stroking his chin. “Then we’re back to square one. Is there anything else that Eugene really cares about?”

“I’m sorry. I couldn’t find anything other than his son. He leads a pretty simple life right now. Spending most of his time each day in the same tavern, he buys and sells news to the captains. Other than this, he rarely does anything else. He’s one man with a bloody rigid life. Apart from work purposes, he never interacts with people, and only does things that rarely put him in conflict with others,” said Carina.

"I still think that Malcolm is using Eugene's son," said Zhang Heng, who hadn't spoken a word since the start. "But he didn't resort to lowly means such as holding the child in custody. I believe Malcolm showed Eugene that he would always have a way to get to his son, which is why Eugene did as he was told automatically. I know someone we can ask."

"Who is it?"

"I've been investigating Eugene's interpersonal relationships mainly because I was curious – he's only in his early forties, meaning that his physique hasn't suffered significant deterioration yet. Men of this age still have their basic physiological needs. But like you said, after the fire, he had no relationships with women, and he never visited the brothel either. How did he manage to maintain his chastity for more than ten years?"

"Did you find the answer?"

"Mhmm. Eugene suffers from severe backache. He's tried various methods but hasn't found a cure. Then someone recommended him to try the remedy of the Guanahatabey people. He would go to a small manor on the island every other week, where a woman named Carmen owns the place. I believe both of them share some kind of intimate relationship... no, more like a very, very intimate relationship. The treatment has continued for nearly ten years now. They are not simply ordinary friends or lovers. Carmen probably knows quite a bit of Eugene's secrets, and it's highly likely that she knows how Malcolm controls Eugene."

"So, all we have to do is find this Carmen to tell us what Malcolm has on Eugene. Right! then what are we waiting for?" Anne raised her chin.

"We're waiting for a friend. Carmen will be easier to handle than Eugene, but like I said, she and Eugene have been in a relationship for nearly a decade now. We need to be prepared. Carina and I will go. If there's too many of us, she may feel uncomfortable."

Just as Zhang Heng finished, the sound of a carriage coming to a halt could be heard downstairs.

Zhang Heng grabbed his coat and went downstairs with Carina. This was a relatively safe undertaking – Carmen was not much of a fighter – so, to minimize the chances of hostility, Zhang Heng left his knife behind. He only brought a short musket for self-defense.

He opened the door of the carriage for Carina as she picked up her dress and entered it.

Once Zhang Heng was inside, he told the driver, "Go to Hyman Mansion."

"What about your friend?" Carina asked when she noticed that the third person wasn't in the carriage with them.

"We've arranged a time to meet. He will be there when he's needed. Let's just hope that it won't get to that point."

Only until the carriage door was shut did Carina finally relax as if stripping off a masquerade. Gone was her stern, unrelenting stance. She leaned back against the seat, rubbing her temples in exasperation. Then, she suddenly remembered that she wasn't alone and was immediately embarrassed. She did not know what to say to Zhang Heng.

“It looks like you’ve been having a tough time.”

“Not really. Thanks to the money you provided, I was able to pay off all our debts. The rest are just small problems. Speaking of which, whatever you’re doing now... isn’t that even more dangerous? I heard that you came across the navy this time! Six pirate ships went out, but only you made it home. Not only that, you even brought back most of the gold. I don’t think I’ve even congratulated you. It must have been an interesting story,” Carina straightened herself.

“There was also a lot of luck at play.”

“It may be blind luck the first time, but after the second and third, it’s not luck anymore. Now that Black Sam is gone, you and your men are the most powerful pirates on this island. I knew that this day would come when I first met you, but I didn’t expect it to come so soon.”

“You did pretty well yourself. Even though you have Malcolm and the black-market alliance breathing on your neck, you are still able to grow your business into what it is today. When you first came to the island, I’m sure no one believed that you could get to where you are now, not to mention that you were a newcomer.”

Carina smiled thinly. “But I’ve never even won once against Malcolm! If it weren’t for you, my bags would’ve probably been packed, and I would’ve and left Nassau a long time ago.”

“Malcolm has been operating on this island for so long, and now, he even has the black-market alliance under his grasp. You wouldn’t have stood a chance. Now that we’ve identified his weak point, it’s our turn to forge the path ahead.”

At Zhang Heng’s calming suggestions, Carina rested for the remainder of the journey. When she closed her eyes, her mind drifted to the first time she boarded Jackdaw. That night, after having one glass too many of whiskey in the captain’s cabin, she began rambling about her childhood and turbulent past.

That night alone, she revealed her entire life’s story, but ironically, whatever she really wanted to say simply couldn’t leave her lips. After that, when she found out about Zhang Heng and Anne, a woman whose bravery she admired, she had to admit that she must have hesitated at some point.

Concerned that she was merely attracted to his air of mystery, and troubled by Zhang Heng’s pirate identity, she didn’t despise Anne for getting him first. The truth was, what caused people to lose out had nothing to do with timing, but rather, their own hesitation, hesitating at the point of a crucial decision.

## **Chapter 240 Carmen**

The horse carriage had parked outside Hyman Manor when Carina opened her eyes again. Carina was the kind of woman that could move on once she realized that her goal was a lost cause. Although she felt upset for some time after she knew that relationship between Zhang Heng and Annem, she snapped out of it and focused solely on her business. Time had washed off the sadness that she had within her heart.

She was reminded of some of the memories that she had since she was in a small space with Zhang Heng. After taking a short nap, she felt that her energy was rejuvenated. Once Carina got down from the horse carriage, she stretched her back and looked around the place. This place was different from Malcolm’s Terrance Manor. Carmen’s Hyman Manor was not as huge as Terrance Manor. Its size was

only one-tenth of Terrance Manor's size. There were no plantations around the mansion. The mansion was surrounded by a huge garden and grassland. Carmen had inherited this place from her late husband, Smith. Only one year after they were married, Smith fell from the horse carriage and died.

"How can I help you both?"

A black man was cutting grass in the garden. He put down the scissors and walked toward them when he saw them standing in front of the mansion.

"I heard the master of this mansion is an expert at Guanahatabey's healing skill. I'm here to ask for her help," Zhang Heng said after he got down from the horse carriage.

"You are right about that. Mrs. Smith is very talented at Guanahatabey's healing skills. I can say that her healing is better than all the Guanahatabeys on this island. However, you will need to make an appointment if you need her help. We need time to prepare herbs and the right medical tools for you. Other than that, Mrs. Smith will need to go into meditation one night before she uses this healing skill on others."

"Is that right. But we are here right now. Can we at least experience her healing skill a little?"

"About that..." The black man looked sheepish. "You came at the wrong time. In half an hour, a patient will come and meet up with Mrs. Smith. So..."

Before he could finish his sentence, he was interrupted by a woman.

"That's alright. Drew, let them come in."

"As you wish."

Drew then moved aside and welcome Zhang Heng and his people into the mansion. Zhang Heng and Carina followed behind him, and they passed by a small garden before then entered the main entrance. After that, Drew went to the kitchen to make tea for them. About five minutes later, the woman that talked to Drew earlier finally came down from the second floor. Before that, she was standing in front of the window on the second floor. Zhang Heng managed to take a quick look at her. Finally, he had the chance to meet her officially.

According to the information that Zhang Heng gathered about Carmen, her age should be similar to Eugene's—around forty years old. However, it was hard to guess her age from the way she looked. It seemed like she had a great method of taking care of her skin, as her entire being was emanating an aura that was mixed with maturity and innocence. Zhang Heng could finally understand why Eugene was so attracted by her.

"Drew, did you know who you stopped from entering my mansion?"

"Forgive me for not knowing, madam."

"Who is the most famous person on this island recently?"

"Mr. Malcom that formed the black-market alliance. Black Prince Sam becomes the pirate king of Nassau. And the most recent famous person on Nassau is the captain of Jackdaw, Zhang Heng."

It was at that time that Drew realized the person sitting in front of him was Zhang Heng. After all, the characteristics of Easterners stood out amongst all the people in this mansion. At the same time, he was astonished by this realization.

“No matter what, you can’t ask the most famous captain in Nassau to leave this mansion right now. Drew, I need you to cancel my next appointment. Tell Mr. Buffon that his treatment has changed to tomorrow night.”

Drew nodded his head and served the tea to Zhang Heng and his people before he left the house.

“I hope that my man didn’t offend you.”

Carmen extended her hand. All these while, Zhang Heng did not like European’s hand-kissing gesture. This was a tradition passed down from the Vikings. It spread to Europe, and it became a polite gesture used by the aristocrats. Usually, this gesture was used by men to show their respect to married women. In modern society, it was still commonly used amongst the royalties in Europe. Still, it did not hide the fact that it was an unhygienic move. Considering the people that lived in this era showered only once every week, there were surely a lot of bacteria on their hands. So, Zhang Heng extended his hand and chose to shake her hand instead of kissing it.

Carmen was embarrassed by it, but she managed to conceal her emotion before anyone realized it. She then turned around and smiled at Carina.

“Let me guess. Since the captain, I’m pretty sure you are Anne. No, Miss Anne has red hair that everyone is envious of. You are Miss Carina. Though the things that you’ve done are not as famous as Captain Zhang, your name had spread across the entire Nassau. Especially the women on this island. A lot of them are always talking about you and Miss Anne. The two of you have proven that women can still rule in the world that is dominated by men.”

“You think too highly of me. I’m just a businesswoman that wants to earn more money.”

After a while, the three of them were done with complimenting each other.

“I have never thought that Captain Zhang Heng knows me. How can I help you?”

“There is something I need your help urgently, Madam Smith.”

“That would be my honor. Might I know which part of your body is unwell?”

Carina lifted the cup of tea in front of her and asked.

“Madam Smith, I heard that you are very close to Mister Eugene.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“We have no ill intention towards Mister Eugene. Actually, we know that he is being stuck in a helpless situation for many years. We wish to help him to solve his problem. But I need you to tell me the things that are threatening him right now.”

“I don’t know what you are talking about. I’m just a doctor that knows Guanahatabey healing skill...”



“We know the relationship between you and Eugene. He always comes here to look for you in the middle of the night, and he would leave the next morning. His wife is not on this island, and you have remained a widow for so many years,” Carina interrupted.

“Forgive me for being straightforward. You know nothing about being a widow. If you are here for this matter, I’m afraid I have to end the conversation here. Drew, the guests want to leave.”

Carina’s tone had changed. She was no longer as polite as before. Drew came into the mansion, but Zhang Heng and Carina did not get up

“I heard that you are not in a good relationship with your late husband’s family after he passed away. They want to reclaim all the properties that he owned, especially this mansion. I think we can provide you with some assistance.”

Carmen was moved by it, but she still rejected them in the end.

“I don’t know what you are talking about. I can’t help you even if I want to. Whether you want to believe in what I say or not, Mister Eugene is just a patient to me. If you are here to seek my healing skill, I welcome you. As for all the things that you have just mentioned, forgive me for not being able to help you.”