

48 Hours 241

Chapter 241 The Threat Against Eugene

Neither persuasion nor bribe were effective, and there was no way to employ direct force. Carina looked at Zhang Heng who was next to her, wondering if he had any idea about what else they could do.

Zhang Heng sat very still, not saying a word, sitting as silently as a rock on the couch.

After a while, another carriage arrived at the door.

Drew looked puzzled. "Mister Buffon has arrived earlier than usual this time."

However, when the vehicle stopped, it was a pale-faced young man who alighted. Blinded by the sunlight, he reached out a hand to shield his face.

Drew's expression changed abruptly upon seeing the man and he rushed to close the door to the house. But the young man quickly recovered and when he saw Drew and Carmen, he quickly moved towards the door. But his body moved as if it was hollow, his footsteps faint—he had only taken two steps forwards and already he was gasping for air.

Carmen said to Drew, looking rather annoyed, "Drew, go help him."

Drew was reluctant but it was his master's instruction so had no other choice but to walk up to the man and put on a smile. "Mister Gary..."

But before he could say any more, the latter pushed him away and spat impatiently. "Don't block my way."

As the young man walked into the house, he said to Carmen, "I've been tight on money lately. Give me another sum of money."

Even though Carina was unhappy with Carmen's reluctance to cooperate, this young man's haughtiness was just too much. She had never seen anyone ask for money so righteously. And from his appearance, Carina could tell that he had been smoking way too much opium.

Carmen's smile was visibly forced. "Wait a minute, Gary. Let me deal with the matter here, and send these guests away first, then we'll talk."

"Why? Am I keeping you from making money?"

As soon as the young man had finished talking, he received a hard slap across the face. Carmen could not hold back the anger bubbling inside her anymore. Her chest rose and fell violently in tempo with her fury.

Carina's eyes widened in surprise. She turned to Zhang Heng and whispered, "This is the friend you found. Who is he?"

"Carmen's late husband's younger brother. He has no purpose other than to cause trouble. Carmen's late husband had asked her to take care of his little brother. Contrary to what most people believe, Carmen had a very good relationship with her husband. If her husband had not passed away too soon,

she would not have chosen to make money this way. By the way, he is not my friend. My friend is behind him.”

An elderly gentleman with a pipe wedged between his fingers walked into the house. He took off his hat and greeted Carmen, then turned to nod at Zhang Heng.

“You are?”

“Klay King. Owner of a brothel,” said the old man, smiling.

Carmen could sense that something was amiss. “What is the reason for your visit, Mister Klay?”

“Oh, Miss Carmen, please take care of Mister Gary’s recent expenditures for him.”

“How much?”

“That’s a total of 720 gold coins.”

“How is this possible?” Carmen laughed in frustration. “How long did he stay in your brothel? Even if he was there for three months, it wouldn’t have cost that many gold coins.”

“Of course, I’m just a representative. The 720 gold coins not only includes Mister Gary’s spending at my place, but also at the gambling house and tobacco house... Oh, and this is bill signed by Mister Gary. Mister Gary here can verify them,” Klay said, offering the bill.

Carmen took the paper and quickly glanced through it. Then she turned to Zhang Heng and asked, “Is this your doing?”

Zhang Heng made no attempt to deny it. “The day of repayment is today. If it is overdue, Mister Gary will be sold to the mines where he will work to pay off the debt. The decision is yours, Mrs. Smith.”

The Zhang Heng today was very different from the one who had just arrived on the island. Jackdaw was now the most powerful pirate gang in Nassau. Zhang Heng no longer had to fight on his own as he did, and his network had also expanded; although only he and Billy, and a few others could be trusted to handle crucial matters such as dealing with Malcolm, in small matters such as dealing with Carmen, Clay and some others were more than happy to assist.

Carmen shook with rage. There was no way she could pay up such a large sum of money immediately; not to mention that she never liked Gary much. She was tempted to use this opportunity to solve the trouble that was her brother-in-law, but when she thought about her late husband’s request, her heart softened again. She and Smith never had children, and this was Smith’s only dying request.

No matter how much she despised Gary, she could not bear the thought of seeing him being sold to the mines.

Zhang Heng repeated, “There is no rivalry between Mister Eugene and I. On the contrary, we also want to help him solve his long-standing troubles. You probably have heard about the situation between the black-market alliance and me, and know my position.”

Carmen fell silent. After a while, she heaved a deep sigh. “I know what you want to know. But if I tell you, will you release Gary?”

Zhang Heng nodded. "You have my word."

Not wanting to be involved in the rivalry between Jackdaw and the black-market alliance, Klay did not stay to listen to the conversation. He patted Gary on the shoulder and smiled. "Let's go. There's an interesting new program back at the shop. Don't you want to give it a try?"

"Really?" Gary looked surprised. "Is it specially prepared for me?"

"Yeah. The girls miss you a lot."

Gary rubbed his palm together. "Then what are we waiting for? Let's go!"

Since Carmen had agreed to deal with his debts, he completely lost interest in her. He did not even thank her on his way out.

But that was not surprising to Carmen at all. After she had Drew brew a fresh pot of tea for her two guests, she said, "Eugene has an illegitimate child. Did you know that?"

Carina replied, "We heard that his relationship with Eugene is not great, and that he left Nassau when he was very young."

"Eugene still cares a lot about the child. He spent a lot of money hiring people to search for that child."

"Did they find him?"

Carina nodded. "They did. The child entered the navy academy and graduated four years ago. He was a very young officer. When he saw that his son was doing well, Eugene kept his distance, not wanting to bother him. Until one day, Malcolm found Eugene and used that child to threaten him."

"How did Malcolm do it?"

"Before the child left Nassau, he found work on a pirate ship very briefly-only about two weeks. But during that period of time, they robbed a cargo ship carrying cotton. The group of pirates killed the captain, the first officer and some sailors who resisted. Only five or six people were spared. Among them, two were rescued by a passing merchant ship and survived. Now, they are working under Malcolm."

Chapter 242

Eighty Percent Chance

"Malcolm controlled Eugene and made him frame Normand, not because he had leverage over him but his son?" asked Anne as she returned the weapon to Zhang Heng.

"Yes. Many of the colony's residents have a zero-tolerance policy toward pirates. If that incident was made public, not only would Eugene's son be booted from the navy, but he would even face the death penalty," Zhang Heng confirmed.

"No wonder Eugene was so compliant to Malcolm. Before we can ask Eugene to expose Malcolm, we would have to solve his problem first. Did Carmen tell you who the two survivors were?" asked Billy.

Carina shook her head.

“Eugene didn’t tell her the names of the two survivors, but I think I might have a way to find out. The customs have a record of the names of pirate attack survivors. I can write in and have someone look it up.”

“So, our next step is to look for the names of the two survivors. We have to find a way to either kill them or abduct them.”

“I don’t think it’ll be that easy... if it was, Eugene would have done that already. There’s no way he would let Malcolm hold sway over him for the rest of his life. Even if he didn’t do it himself, he could have hired someone to do it for him,” said Carina.

Zhang Heng simply kept quiet.

“What’s wrong?” asked Carina.

“Nothing. I suddenly thought of something, but I’m not sure if it’s the right way to achieve our goal. Can I borrow two men from you? I want them to travel to the colony and check something for me.”

Zhang Heng and his men were on the wanted list of several ports and though he had spent a long time at sea and was now tanned, his oriental appearance still made him stand out like a sore thumb. That said, the Northern American colonies of this era had always fascinated Zhang Heng, and given the opportunity, he would have loved to traverse the lands on a sightseeing tour. All that, of course, on the premise that his core mission had been completed and had earned enough money. He could even pay the retired Roscoe a visit. The old man had taught him so much, not to mention controlling the sails and reading the winds. It wasn’t hyperbole to say he was Zhang Heng’s enlightenment guru. However, those wisps of sentimentality lingered in his mind only briefly – it was simply too risky. It was a shame knowing that with his current identity, he was destined to never reintegrate into civilized society.

“Of course,” Carina nodded, adding, “Pick whoever you want.”

Zhang Heng selected two somewhat competent-looking men and briefed them on the matter they were to investigate. Then, he gave them forty silver coins for their expenses, which had the two pleasantly surprised and pleased. That very night itself, they embarked on a journey back to the colony.

As usual, Zhang Heng didn’t waste any time. After digging around for a bit, he quickly found the pirate gang that Eugene’s son had been a part of.

As a matter of fact, that pirate group had long since ceased to exist. Like most pirate gangs on the island, it existed only for a short time before disbanding in less than a year. It wasn’t even a large group to start with. At their peak, the time when Eugene’s estranged son joined in, there were fewer than thirty individuals. There wasn’t much to gloat either; their most significant achievement being robbing a merchant ship hauling cotton, and that was nine years ago.

After the gang’s dismantling, the small portion who were left joined other pirate gangs, and one after another, they were subsequently buried at sea. There were even a few who returned to their life as fishermen. So, after about a week, and with Brook’s help, Zhang Heng found a guy who used to work on the ship. After asking the man a few questions, Zhang Heng thanked him and went on his way.

Coincidentally, the results of Carina’s investigation were out – she finally understood why Eugene submitted to vicious humiliation all these years and was unable to get rid of Malcolm’s control over him.

Malcolm had sent one of the two survivors to the naval fleet, and the other to the governor's mansion as a bodyguard. This meant that Billy's plan wouldn't work. Unless resolving to a mass bombing akin to Queen's Anne Revenge's bombardment of Charleston, it was unrealistic that they could kidnap or kill the two men.

Carina felt a strong wave of frustration ramming into her. They thought they had identified Malcolm's weakness, but after all that bloody effort, they found themselves at another dead end. Malcolm was like a juggernaut without a flaw. Carina couldn't help but wonder who was going to win this war. After all, even Normand, the leader of the first generation Black-Market Alliance, lost to a fledgling Malcolm. Compared to him, she was nothing but a dabbling rookie in the industry.

Four days had passed, and Carina still found no solution. She grew more anxious by the day, generally uneasy and edgy. That was until Zhang Heng knocked at her door and said, "Let's go. The men you've lent me are back. We should pay Eugene a visit too."

"Now? Are you sure you can convince him to give up his only son's life to be on our side?"

"At least an eighty percent chance," Zhang Heng answered.

"How is that even remotely possible?" Carina replied with wide beady eyes.

"It's actually not as complicated as you think. I'll explain later."

So that night, the pair arrived at Hayman Manor by carriage. Drew was already waiting at the door. He led them upstairs to the study, where Carmen and Eugene were present. After the latter finished reading the letter in his hand, he grew emotional. He asked with a sniffle, "How do I know what you're saying is

true?"

"If you've read the letter, you would know that your son never boarded any pirate ship before he left Nassau. He paid for his journey with what he earned doing odd jobs around the island," Zhang Heng said. "When Mrs. Smith mentioned you and your son, she said that you both grew apart after the fire, and you haven't been in contact ever since. And this is why Malcolm's scheme worked."

"Do you think that I didn't look into it at that time? I found a pirate from that ship, and he verified that my son was indeed there! I even had customs check the records of the two survivors. They really were survivors of a plundered vessel! Are you about to tell me that Malcolm planned years ahead just so he could threaten me?"

"No, Malcolm is not God. He couldn't have planned this so far ahead of time. So, the survivors are real, that pirate ship is real, and the robbery is real too, except for one thing. The person on the ship wasn't your son. Malcolm must have found out by chance that you and your son were estranged. When he realized that he could use it against you, he only had to buy off one person, the helmsman of that pirate ship."

Zhang Heng paused, then continued, "I found an old sailor from that ship. It was all very close to what I anticipated. At that time, the ship experienced a very high turnover rate – a common problem among the underdog pirate gangs. If their loot wasn't nearly enough, it was difficult to retain people. In reality, most either fished or grew crops for a living. They would only rush over if they heard a ship is hiring.

Most of them don't even know each other or would be acquainted for a short while before completely forgetting each other. There happened to be a teenager around your son's age at that time. Malcolm saw it as the perfect tool to be used against you!"

Chapter 243 Two Sets of Arguments

"The helmsman is the person responsible for recruiting manpower. Only he knows where everyone comes from." Zhang Heng said to Eugene, "You can find someone to verify this matter and you will definitely find the helmsman of the ship. He will tell you that your son is on that boat. As for the others, because so much time has passed, they will only remember that there was indeed a teenager who worked on the ship. However, this seems to further affirm what the helmsman has said and make you believe that your son is indeed on that boat."

Carina looked as astonished as Eugene. "You mean, Malcolm actually has no leverage at all, he just created an illusion of having one?"

"That's right."

"Wait, but what about the two survivors? Why did one join the navy and the other the governor's residence? If they had nothing to do with this matter, why is Malcolm protecting them ..."

"No, you still don't understand that it wasn't Malcolm who sent them to join the navy and governor's residence. It was after they had joined, and Malcolm discovered it that he chose them, which put the entire plan in his favor and makes it more believable. Zhang Heng turned to Eugene and asked, "When you first heard the news, were they already in the navy and the governor's residence?"

Eugene was silent for a moment, then nodded. "After all, seven years have passed since that incident. I went back to the colony myself and learnt about it. I confirmed that they had entered the navy and the general-governor's residence two years ago and realized that I stood no chance. At that time, I naturally thought that Malcolm had done this, and I felt that he was too terrifying a force to contend with. The thought that he planned it all two years in advance, left me discouraged and in despair."

"So Malcolm knows that the state of your relationship with your son, and how important your son is to you. So, he used a real event to fake your son's pirate experience in order to control you." The businesswoman felt chills run down her spine. She did not know which version of Malcolm was more terrifying – the invulnerable one with no apparent weaknesses or the one who had his opponents in the palm of his hand.

In contrast to her, Eugene had calmed down after the initial rush of emotions. The ropes that had been around his neck for many years showed signs of loosening. In his chair, he seemed to be different from than before. He straightened his back and his gaze grew sharper, as looked up at Zhang Heng who was seated opposite.

"I must admit you're really close to persuading me, but so far, these are just your inferences. Except for that letter from my son, you have no concrete evidence. I haven't seen my son in ten years so I don't recognize his handwriting anymore. How would I know that the one who's deceiving me is not you?"

Eugene paused. "I've heard of the conflict between you and the black-trade alliance. The two of you have worked so hard to resolve my problem as a stranger. I'm guessing you must need my help to deal

with Malcolm. I can agree to your request, but I need more evidence to be certain that my son is safe if I am to be going up against Malcolm. That's not too much to ask, is it?

"Actually, the simplest way is for you to look for your son and speak to him face-to-face," Zhang Heng said.

Eugene fell into silence again. It was noticeably longer this time. None of the four people in the room spoke. The atmosphere seemed to have frozen over before the intelligence dealer spoke again with a sad smile, "I'm not sure if I still have the right to be his father. When the fire broke out, I was cowardly and ran out of the house. At that moment, I had lost them forever. I don't deserve his forgiveness."

"Perhaps it's because you've never tried asking him for his forgiveness." Zhang Heng stopped talking and got up from his chair. He opened the wooden door behind him which led to a balcony, where a young man who looked like Eugene stood, with a complicated expression on his face.

Carmen, who had not uttered a word before this, said softly, "Sorry, I didn't tell you about this in advance. I was worried that you would be unwilling to meet him. But now that you're both here, we'll give you both some time alone."

After she finished talking, she got up and left the house first, followed by Zhang Heng and Carina, and closed the door behind her.

The three went down to the living room downstairs, and Carmen went to get wine for the two. There were too many surprises tonight. Carina was still recovering from the shock.

After a while, she asked, "It was you who found his son?"

Zhang Heng nodded. "Eugene is a very cautious person. Without enough evidence, it was impossible for him to help us deal with Malcolm. However, it was not an easy task bringing his son back. The enmity between them runs deep. Under normal circumstances, they would have only met again at Eugene's funeral."

"So how did you manage to persuade him to return?"

"I had prepared two sets of arguments in advance. One from his mother's perspective, and the other regarding his blood ties to Eugene."

"Which one convinced him?"

"Neither. Fortunately I still had a card to play. I let the dispatcher inform him that if he wants to go back to Nassau, I can pay him forty gold coins," Zhang Heng explained. "Although room and board are included in the navy, low-ranking officers like him have a low income. If he wants to climb up the ladder, he would need funds but he's unwilling to receive support from his father. Of course, considering my identity, this money will eventually need to be paid through Miss Carmen."

Carina took a moment to digest all this then said, "So now we have already won Eugene over."

"If all goes well, yes. Laeli's preparations are nearly done. Tomorrow night I'll have Billy take twenty crew members to wait for him on the west side of the island, which is the coast closest to Terrance Manor. There is nothing but shells and sand in that area, so people rarely go there. The Jackdaw can take them away from Nassau by night.

“Once you get those letters, and Eugene’s accusations, Malcolm’s reputation will fall fast, and the other black-market merchants will not allow a person tied to so many misdeeds to continue controlling the black-market alliance. Considering Redmond and Normand’s relationship, he can’t just ignore what happened three years ago. So Malcolm will have a hard time making a comeback this time.”

Chapter 244 New Contact

Of late, a dark cloud had been hanging over the heads of Terrance Manor’s residents.

Leah was in the kitchen, making Malcolm his breakfast when she subconsciously glanced at an empty corner. Just three weeks ago, a familiar face had stood there. She last saw Nadya when he got dragged out of the kitchen by the supervisor after he was reported.

By the time she saw him again, he had already been whipped to oblivion. The supervisor lifted the mangled Nadya and dragged him out of the house. Leah’s heart dropped as she trembled with fear at the awful sight of the now unrecognizable man. Thankfully she managed to put up a calm front.

The constant anxiety she had been subjected to caused her to have vivid and revolting nightmares each night. She started dreaming that the supervisors had come to get her too.

During that trying period, everyone who had been in contact with Nadya was brought in for questioning. Many didn’t make it back, and yet, she had somehow escaped it by serving Malcolm breakfast each day. As a result, no one thought of approaching her so far.

Ever since she was sold to Terrance Manor, Malcolm saw her in a different light. The same went for the other members of the household, who unexpectedly treated her with the utmost respect. Leah was certain, though, that this special treatment wasn’t because of how important she was. Once she lost this “viewed-in-a different-light” status, she would be demoted to the fate of the other slaves in the manor; their survival at the mercy of Malcolm’s whimsical temper. Despite the confusion and the mess in it all, she saw the whole situation crystal clear.

After Nadya’s apprehension, Laeli’s lifeline to the Terrance Manor was severed, turning communications into a daunting task. With tensions running high, the slaves were strictly prohibited from contacting outsiders. They went as far as to replace those tasked to buy food with the supervisors.

Seeing how challenging the situation had become, Laeli put in extra effort to look for a new messenger. Who he found happened not to be a black slave but a missionary who would come to preach at the manor every day. He hailed from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. (Founded by Thomas Bray in 1701, it was approved by the British Royal Family to preach the gospel to Native Americans, blacks, and whites, albeit with limited success.)

Laeli attempted to bribe the priest with the gold coins Zhang Heng gave him, hoping that he could pass his words on to Leah. To protect Leah, he told the priest not to talk to her directly, but instead, to a girl from his tribe. This girl would pass his words to Leah after that.

So, as it was, Laeli was set to leave the place in two days. On that day, Leah was supposed to clean Malcolm’s study. This time, she was asked to slip Normand and Redmond’s letters out of the manor. By choosing this day, Laeli could lower Leah’s risks when she stole the letters. All she needed to do was to

hold out until the night, and she would be able to leave the manor. A day before the plan's execution, Laeli asked the clergy to smuggle in a pile of daggers, guns, and weapons into Terrance Manor.

Unsurprisingly, the straight-as-a-fiddle priest rejected him. Initially, he sympathized with the slaves and yearned to earn a quick buck as well. Never in his mind did it occur to him that Laeli would blow the whole thing out of proportion. The moment he caught sight of the weapons, he was terrified to death.

It was too late for Laeli to step back right now. He had no idea how long Nadya would last inside the manor. He wanted to wait no longer, seeing that he had run out of time to look for a new insider. Once he missed this window of opportunity, he would need to wait another week before he could act again.

In an attempt of encouragement, Laeli kidnapped the priest's brother after apologizing, intending to use him as a means of leverage. Unbeknownst to the priest, his sympathy would eventually put his life at risk. Suddenly, he realized that Laeli wasn't the simple man he thought he was. He was a dangerous wild beast that would do anything it took to achieve his goals. Besides, blacks like Laeli were naturally hostile towards the whites since they enslaved them for centuries. It drove him harder to save his people from the manor even if he was to pass the gates of hell and diminished all thought of the consequences that his actions might bring.

man

There was no turning back for the priest too. He had no choice but to carry out Laeli's demands if he wanted to save his brother. He came up with an excuse that he was to distribute food to the slaves. Seeking to appear as inconspicuous as he could, he rode on his horse carriage piled with bread back to the manor. At the sight of the heavily laden wagon, the mansion's butler felt it strange, recalling that the churches didn't typically help slaves since they all had their masters. If they started distributing alms, it would send a distasteful message to everyone that their masters were not feeding the slaves enough.

However, the priest once said that everyone walking this earth was god's children, and the status of their wealth did not categorize them. The butler failed to come up with anything that could rebuke those words. After all, everyone in the manor, Malcolm included, respected these missionaries highly. Many of these priests had willingly given up their lives in Scotland to serve the people of the more impoverished regions. Such a sacrifice was deemed admirable, one that almost always gained reverence.

Adding to that, the priest was a regular visitor to Terrance Manor, and the butler felt it wasn't necessary to inspect his carriage. Thanks to the constant patronage, he was allowed in almost immediately. He was so nervous at that time that he almost bit his tongue.

Once in the compound, the priest parked his carriage at a space where he usually gave his sermons. Once the supervisor saw the man getting down, the slaves were swiftly gathered. The time to eat had almost arrived, and in order not to hold up work, the priest would usually use this time to preach to them.

However, considering the man he was, the priest was too nervous to think straight. All that came out of his mouth were a jumble of unintelligible sentences as his mind reeled with blankness. Luckily for him, the supervisors weren't the least interested in his sermons. As usual, they would indulge in poker as the words of the priest floated them by. Ironically, none of them noticed the priest acting strangely. As for

the slaves, they had always been the priest's most faithful listeners, daring not to complain or say a word although they noticed that he wasn't quite himself today. Although seemingly drowned in his words, most slaves actually drifted away as the sermon droned on and on, unconcerned by what the preacher had to tell them.

Ten long minutes later, the priest finally ended the sermon and began distributing the bread around. After making sure everyone had a piece in hand, he took four baskets of bread that were stored under the horse carriage and walked toward the manor. However, the guards blocked him the moment he arrived at the entrance.

The priest knew that his most crucial moment was upon him. Whatever he did next would determine if the plan was a failure or success.

"I'm here to deliver the bread. The female slaves are inside, right?"

"I'm sorry. You are not allowed in the manor without permission."

"I am burdened by my duty bestowed by the Queen herself to spread the gospel across this land. I have the liberty to travel anywhere I want on this island."

The priest did his best to sound convincing, but unfortunately, the two guards seemed unmoved by his effective proclamation. Just when the priest was figuring out another way to enter the manor, he heard Wallace scoffing.

"You guys can't stop him. Father Tim is one of the bravest men that I've had the fine pleasure of meeting. I heard that he once walked three days and three nights around North Carolina preaching the gospel! Let the man in."

Chapter 245 Are You Planning To Run?

Priest Tim steadied his breath as he entered the manor with the baskets of bread in hand. Wallace then signaled over a slave to take them from him. Suddenly, Priest Tim spoke up.

"Is Daisy around?"

"Why? Do you need her for something?"

Wallace raised an eyebrow, surprised that Priest Tim would specifically ask for Daisy.

"She asked a question about my last sermon, and I didn't get to answer her right away. For the past two days, I've been praying for God to guide me. Now that He has finally graced with an answer, I must let her know."

"You can tell me the answer. I will relay your message to her," smiled the slave who was with Wallace.

"I'm sorry, but I think it would be more appropriate if I tell her personally. This is, after all, my job."

Priest Tim stood his ground, insistent and adamant. The slave then turned around to look at Wallace for an answer, but he simply shrugged.

"It's hard to say no to a priest. Call Daisy here."

After that, Wallace turned to Priest Tim again.

“Priest Tim, are you feeling warm? This is the second time I see you wiping your sweat in five minutes.”

“Indeed. The weather is extra hot today.”

Priest Tim’s heart thumped violently in his chest when he heard Wallace’s remarks. Instinctively, he wanted to wipe off the sweat on his brow again, but quickly put down his trembling arm. Wallace noticed that something wasn’t right, but just as he was about to say something, Daisy arrived. Out of courtesy, Wallace stepped aside and allowed the vicar and slave to talk. Graciousness notwithstanding, he actually intended to eavesdrop on their conversation, and hence, lingered around the vicinity, hoping to pick up on something

Henceforth, Priest Tim spent a good five minutes explaining Daisy’s engaging question: who God would listen to first if the blacks and whites prayed together at the same time.

“Very impressive explanation, Priest Tim. I was wondering. Is there anything else that you need to do here?” asked Wallace right after the vicar was done talking.

Priest Tim shook his head and passed the baskets of bread to Daisy.

“Please help me distribute the bread to the rest of the children.”

“Allow me to send you off then,” said Wallace with a stare as he gestured at the door with his hand.

Once Priest Tim left the mansion, Wallace quickly talked to two of his supervisors.

“Fetch Daisy to the torture room. Give her a healthy dose of whipping. I’ll be there in ten minutes.”

“What about Priest Tim?”

“Leave him be. We shouldn’t mess with priests if there’s no solid evidence. It could get us into a lot of unnecessary trouble.”

At that, the two supervisors ran to Daisy’s room, grabbed her by her hair, and dragged the struggling girl of the room. Wallace then walked in and kicked the four baskets of bread, expecting to find something. Lo and behold, whatever was in the baskets, was indeed nothing but good ol’ bread. Wallace then stepped on all the loaves, crushing them to verify their contents. However, he found nothing within, as well.

Wallace wasn’t the least satisfied. He went on, turning over the sheets and flipping her bed, going as far as to dismantle every single plank that held it together. Still, despite ransacking almost everything, he found nothing unusual. Wallace frowned in frustration. For good measure, he tossed her entire wardrobe before walking out of her room. The few slaves who had gathered at the door to see what the commotion was all about quickly opened up a way for the storming Wallace.

In a blinding rage, Wallace suddenly targeted one of them and asked, “Have you seen Daisy leave the room?”

The slave quickly shook her head, only making Wallace ever the madder. He growled in a low, menacing tone,

“You know the consequences of lying to me,
right?!”

The slave was so fearful of Wallace that she started crying loudly. Wallace shoved the terrified girl away and looked at the rest of the slaves.

“How about you guys? Did you see Daisy leaving her room?”

All of them shook their heads together. Although it could happen, the possibility of so many slaves lying to him all at once was tiny, and Wallace began to doubt himself. Perhaps he was mistaken after all. When he thought about the strange way Priest Tim behaved, he was almost sure that there was something wrong with him. This was a critical period for Malcolm, and Wallace wasn't taking any risks. Since he failed to find anything in Daisy's room, he would have to resort to interrogating Daisy personally.

Wallace wasted no time and rushed to the torture room with long strides.

Leah's room was right beside Daisy's. When she heard Daisy screaming, she quickly hopped over to see why. Whatever she saw next terrified her. Daisy had become Laeli's new insider from Terrance Manor after Nadia's apprehension. She didn't expect her to be caught just days before her escape.

This time, Leah started to panic. It wasn't because Daisy might tell Wallace that she had a part in it, but once Daisy was captured, Laeli's link to the manor would once again be severed. Right now, she had no idea what Laeli was up to, and she didn't know what to do next as well. What worried her most was Laeli thinking that she must have received his message, and he'd jump into action when the time wasn't right. Not only would he fail to save his people, but he would also get himself into big trouble.

Suddenly, someone tapped Leah's shoulder. When she turned around, she saw Lola. The woman wasn't from her tribe, and they weren't in good terms with each other. Lola had been envious of Leah getting special treatment from Malcolm and would usually ostracise Leah in front of the other slaves. At such a critical juncture, Leah didn't want Lola to see her panic. What Lola said next, however, left her in shock.

“Are you people planning to escape this place?”

“What... what are you talking about?”

Leah's heart instantly fell in dread, and her teeth started chattering.

“Hey, listen. Now, don't you be afraid, little kitty. Daisy asked me to come for you. Follow me. I have something to show you.”

After that, Lola led her to the hut used to store the cleaning equipment. Leah hesitated for a while but decided to follow her anyway. The thoughts of Lola using this method to sell her out to Wallace swiftly crossed her mind. After all, the two weren't exactly friends, and Lola wasn't from her tribe either. She had no obligation to help her at a time like this. Either way, Leah was left with no other option. As long as a slim chance to turn the tide around existed, she didn't mind the self-sacrifice.

Once Leah entered the hut, Lola lit up an oil lamp and lifted the canvas lying at the corner of the room. Two guns and eight daggers were presented before her.

“These are the weapons your allies brought for you. I also have one more thing to pass to you,” said Lola as she produced a letter.

Leah was about to take it, but Lola suddenly pulled it back.

“Did you really think I’ll give it to you just like that? I have taken a massive risk hiding these weapons for you. If I weren’t there to clean up the place, Daisy would have been caught in possession of those weapons.”

“What do you want?” asked Leah. She had finally calmed down.

“I want whatever you guys want. I want to leave this hellhole as well. I want to take a huge whiff of the air of freedom! You can either let me join you, or we can all rot here for eternity in this god-forsaken manor.”

Chapter 246 True Enemy

Right after Zhang Heng and Carina left Hyman Manor, they met up with Billy to improve and calibrate the plan that was to be carried out when they received Laeli’s letter. That included the partnership with Eugene. They needed to spread the news as soon as possible within the black-market alliance, badly needing all the support they could find on the island. In this operation, Redmond’s approach was the key to their success. As the leader of the black-market alliance and a highly-reputed black-market merchant, his decision would affect the fate of all the other black-market merchants in Nassau.

However, it wasn’t easy convincing Redmond to go against Malcolm. After all, Redmond was old, and it was getting hard for him to deal with all these managerial nonsense. With Malcolm leaving the alliance, it would be almost impossible for him to keep it running. The good news was that Redmond was from his counterpart and was not quite as ambitious as him. When it came to Carina’s trading business, Redmond actually wasn’t that harsh on it.

As of now, Zhang Heng had two trump cards with him. One was the friendship between Redmond and Normand. Almost the entire island knew that Redmond was Normand’s only supporter in the black-market alliance. If Redmond knew what Malcolm did to Normand, he would definitely not sit still.

The second trump card in Zhang Heng’s hand was Malcolm funding the political enemy of Redmond’s son-in-law behind his back. With the heated argument that had broken between them, there was a high chance that Zhang Heng could pull Redmond to his side.

The sun was almost up when the discussion came to an end. Carina returned home, where she cleaned up and prepared to take a short nap. Just as her head hit the pillow, a horse carriage pulled up in front of her house. She heard a knock at the door and an ensuing commotion. Immediately, she put on some proper attire and went to open the door. The sight of her newly hired bodyguards with loaded guns in their hands greeted her. There were in a confrontation with the visitor, and a fierce fight seemed to be imminent.

“I think I’m not very welcome here,” said the man as he pulled off his black gloves.

Carina was in shock when she saw the unexpected visitor.

“You’ve got some nerve, showing up in front of my house after what you did to me. I should order them to shoot you right now!” she replied.

“Why don’t you do it then?”

At that, Carina was rendered speechless.

“It seems like you’re still thinking straight. You know you’ll never set foot in Nassau again if you kill me. Great. I love dealing with those who can think logically. Since you are not going to shoot me, aren’t you going to invite me in?”

Carina didn’t like what she was feeling right now. It was just like the feeling she had at the coffee shop, the very essence of herself being overshadowed by an oppressive aura. Right now, Malcolm held absolute power over her, and she found it hard to argue with him. Technically, there there wasn’t much the two could talk about right now. After tonight, the winner would be disclosed.

Be that as it may, Carina moved aside and allowed Malcolm to enter.

Malcolm was cool and calm when he entered Carina’s house. He appeared to be comfortable as if he was in his own home. Carina’s two bodyguards, on the other hand, were on high alert and stuck as close as they could to her. After hesitating a short while, she ordered her bodyguards to stand down. Carina and Malcolm were now alone in her house. Malcolm pulled out a chair, sat down, and went straight to business.

“I want to suggest a truce between us.”

“Why? It’s because you can’t hold up any longer?”

To her surprise, Malcolm didn’t disagree.

“I have to admit that I made many mistakes. I thought of two possibilities when Sam set to plunder the Spanish treasure ship. The first would be them successfully getting the 5000 pounds of gold. The second would be failure, and they would be forced to return to Nassau. None of these possibilities would solve your current problem. However, I’m astonished that it was Jackdaw who took into possession more than half the gold. The navy attack was unexpected, though. After learning a few lessons, do you really think I lost this time by coincidence?”

“Isn’t that right?”

“If my plan had been perfectly executed, in no way would I have allowed you to survive until Jackdaw returned.”

“I see now. The omnipresent leader of the black-market alliance has to resort to parlor tricks to drive fear into me.”

“You don’t know who your real enemy is, do you?”

Malcolm placed his gloves on the dining table and leaned back on the chair.

“No. I’m entirely clear about the matter. You ordered pirates to plunder my ship and asked that asshole of a Wilton to threaten me and kill my sailors. You also planted a mole in my company to monitor me. The entire black-market alliance locked me out, and I was bullied for my lack of experience. You’re also the one who lured me into over-expanding my business...”

“This is what competition is in business! You’re doing the same thing to me as well, are you not? All the while, you’ve been snatching away tons of captains from me. Do you know what trouble you’ve caused me? It seems you’ve been enjoying this, huh?”

“Enjoying this?! You used dirty tricks to incarcerate my father and destroy my family. Now, you are telling me we are supposed to be friends?! This has to be the lamest joke I’ve heard in my entire life.”

“So it’s your father. I finally know where your anger comes from.”

Malcolm raised his eyebrows and paused before continuing,

“What if I tell you that I have nothing to do with your father getting jailed? What would you think of me then?”

“C’mon, Mr. Malcolm, I still respect you as a competitor. Please do not lose whatever little respect I still have for you.”

“I’m sorry to disappoint you, but I wasn’t joking. From the beginning, I’ve always respected your father a lot. We have a different view on things, and as a competitor myself, I won’t hesitate to defeat him and drive him out of Nassau. Rest assured, I will never resort to such lowly methods to eliminate him. The moment he was in jail, I contacted my family for help in investigating this matter. Unfortunately, concrete proof in such matters is usually hard to find, and in the end, I made them contact Count Slaughter with their connections. We invited him over for a meal and gifted him with two pieces of top-notch ceramics in exchange for telling us what he knew. Eventually, he told us who put your father in jail.”

“And who might that be?”

“You wouldn’t believe what I’m about to tell you. This man was a dear friend of your father. No, he was a friend to every black-market merchant on this island. His name is Redmond, the current leader of the black-market alliance. It’s not the first time he’s done something like this. Have you heard of a man called Normand? He used to be Redmond’s close acquaintance as well. The first-generation black market alliance’ dismissal had everything to do with Redmond!”

Chapter 247 Don’t Do Anything

“Mr. Malcom, do you really think I’m that stupid? Let’s not talk about my father’s case first. Redmond was the vice leader of the first black-market alliance. Why would he be against Normand? It’s not like he would gain anything out of it. According to what I know, Redmond stayed on to support Normand during his most difficult time. As for you, you just arrived on this island at that time. If the first generation of the black-market alliance was stable, you would have had a tough time getting to where you are today, right?”

Malcolm’s expressions stayed the same, even after hearing what Carina said to him.

"I don't blame you. Even I missed the real target. Redmond has bigger ambitions than anyone could imagine. As one of the pioneering black-market merchants on this island, he was never worried about his wealth and fame from the beginning until now. However, he was forced to live under Normand's shadow. If he didn't do what he did back then, he couldn't have gotten to where he is today. He is now the leader of the black-market alliance.

"As for me, it's true that I secretly wished the first alliance wouldn't last long, all because of profits, of course. I did ask a merchant called Eugene to sabotage the black-market alliance, but the impact was minimal. With Normand's reputation, it was hard to shake him off from his position."

"So, you asked Eugene to coin up a story that Normand had been secretly working with two captains, right? Since you had the guts to do something like this, why should I believe that it wasn't you who sent my father to jail?"

"It seems like you are well-informed of the past. Whatever Eugene did after had nothing to do with me. I didn't ask him to frame Normand of something he didn't do. After your father was jailed, I started my own investigations, and I found out that Redmond had something to do with this incident."

"Why would you do that? You are not even that close to Normand, aren't you? So, why are you investigating this matter?"

"Because I don't want to be the second Normand. All this time, Redmond had always resented the setting up of the alliance, hoped that it never existed in the first place. He only supported the first alliance to get rid of Normand. This time, he believes that I'm a huge threat. I have to say, he's one brilliant old man. Though he's now the leader, and I'm just the vice leader, he knew that I would eventually get to his position within three years. By that time, he would be forgotten everyone around him."

"If what you say is true. Why would Redmond agree to form the alliance with you?"

"Why would he support Normand to form the first alliance in the first place?" asked Malcolm.

Before Carina could answer, Malcolm, continued,

"That's because he couldn't figure out an effective way to get rid of Normand. If Normand weren't the leader of the alliance, it would be hard for Redmond to turn everyone against Normand since he's a rather reputed person here. Things were different when Normand was elected leader. The alliance's members automatically went against him when they were told that he had been receiving bribes from the captains. The profits of the members were severely affected, causing them to revolt.

"I knew that he would use the same strategy to fight me. Your problem isn't the only one I've had to deal with lately. I have to admit that your business did give me some problems, and if Redmond's men didn't stir up trouble, would I have been so passive? Most importantly, Frazer betrayed me. He told me earlier that he had a beef with Zhang Heng, and he was willing to dispose of you and your people for me. However, I started to be suspicious of him after what happened to the Skeleton.

"Don't you think that Zhang Heng and his Jackdaw arriving that night was too much of a coincidence? Wilton's Skeleton arrived first, and Jackdaw came right after that. That wasn't a coincidence. Frazer calculated everything. According to our agreement, the Skeleton was supposed to sink your ship and kill

everyone on it. After that, they were supposed to leave Nassau. However, Frazer told me that Wilton was out of control. Not only did he take your money, but he also wanted to use your sailors to rip you off. Can't you see that he's fooled us here?

"Frazer is considered to be Zhang Heng's mentor, more or less. He knows Zhang Heng better than anyone else on this island. In that situation, he knew exactly what decisions Zhang Heng would make. Frazer had already anticipated that Wilton and his men would live past that night. I have to admit that he had it all hidden so well. Though I suspected him before, I couldn't find anything solid to pin him. So, I decided to trust him once more. When he contacted the captains on the island to leave the alliance and deal with you instead, I realized that I made a huge mistake.

"It was supposed to be a 'kill-two-birds-with-one-stone' strategy. If everything went smoothly, I would use the opportunity to destroy you and your business. Once you're gone, the other captains on this island would have no option but to rely on the black-market alliance even though they don't like us. The person that destroyed this plan wasn't Zhang Heng. It was Frazer.

"We all know his conflict with Zhang Heng on this island. I only chose to believe him previously because I thought his target was always Zhang Heng and not me. After this incident, I can tell that he works for Redmond. However, it would be naive for Redmond to think that he can get rid of me so easily. If he can look for Frazer's help, then I can work with you to get rid of him as well. You get to keep your twelve pirate ships, and I won't interfere with your business anymore. I can even provide you with assistance to get through certain customs and local markets. Once this whole thing is over, I will help you to get your father out of jail."

"What would this cost me?"

"You don't have to do anything. I just want us to stop fighting each other. I will solve my problem while you just sit quietly and watch the drama unfold. As for your father's case, I'll make the person responsible pay the price. Take your time and think over my offer. I'll give you three days to think about it. We will meet again at the coffee shop in three days."

Chapter 248 Tempted

After Malcolm left, Carina sat silently at the table for a full hour, staring blankly without even taking a sip of water.

Her well-heeled upbringing and the comforts that came with it sheltered her from actual malignant adversaries. Her most serious incident was simply caused by jealousy among little girls, literally child's play at this point when compared to Malcolm. He was the first "proper enemy" she ever encountered.

He had ruined her life, slowly laying out its bare, harsh realities before her eyes.

It was the first time Carina experienced such powerful sensations of fear and abhorrence. Throughout her days on the island, she would dream of diminishing Malcolm in her sleep, making him pay for every single horrible thing he'd done to her.

However, when the day actually came, a time when the opportunity was ripe, and victory was nigh, Malcolm simply strolled into her room, looked her in the eye, and told her that she had the wrong man

all along. The man who had destroyed her family, and locked away her father, was, in fact, someone else.

Carina considered the possibility of Malcolm lying, and that it was just another deceitful narrative he conjured out of desperation to throw her off. Although she hated to admit it, she knew deep down inside that Malcolm's rationalization actually made sense.

Of late, she had been in a state of continuous disillusion, unsure of herself and where she was actually headed.

Everything seemed a little too smooth this time around. Although Carina was forced through dire situations before, to the verge of bankruptcy at one point, Malcolm and the black-market alliance didn't take drastic measures to defeat her in her most trying times – very unlike Malcolm. On top of that, they even located Eugene without much hassle. While it took significant effort to persuade him, Eugene's resistance wasn't as vehement as expected.

Compared to previous clashes, Malcolm's standards seemed to have fallen short this time. It would all make sense if Redmond had secretly intervened, though.

Carina simply found it hard to accept that after all this while of chasing him down, Malcolm wasn't the perpetrator. It was as if she had been traversing an arid desert for an eternity, heading in one direction, and just when an oasis was in sight, it suddenly disappeared like a mirage.

Nonetheless, wherever the truth lay, Malcolm's offer was indeed, very tantalizing. Not only would the black-market alliance officially recognize her pawn business, but they would even agree to a whole list of favorable terms. The most important thing was that they promised to set her father free and help her exact revenge. Now that they shared a common enemy, she didn't have to worry about Malcolm and his bothersome antics anymore.

Carina was slightly tempted.

"Is this your escape plan?" Lola asked, looking baffled. "We have first to take out the two guards at the gate, then avoid the night patrols to sneak into the torture chamber and rescue Daisy and Nadya? Then, we pray hard that we didn't alert anyone, right? After that, we just have to run to the gate, kill a whole team of highly trained guards, and finally, make our way to the beach? Forgive me for being blunt, but this is not an escape plan, this is suicide!"

Leah tried to explain, "No, Laeli will eventually bring in more people, and we'll take care of the guards at the gate together. And he's already prepared a carriage that will send us to the beach."

"But it still doesn't change the immeasurable danger we have to face before all that. You can't just pray for the guards to go blind, or for the guard at the chamber to magically disappear. There's no way we can fight so many with just two blunderbusses and eight daggers.

"We will kill the two guards outside the gate, and that itself is a huge risk. After that, we go straight to the main entrance. You've seen how the slaves sent to the chamber were treated. Come tomorrow; Daisy would've been in there for a day, and more than twenty days for that Nadya guy. Even if we manage to get them out, could they even walk in that state? I don't need to be dragging along two deadweights while trying to escape!"

“They are not deadweights; they are my companions,” Leah insisted firmly. “Without them, we would have never contacted the people outside. It if hadn’t been for Nadya and Daisy’s perseverance, we would’ve ended up in there with them. So we either leave together, or no one leaves at all!”

“Your stubbornness will only kill us all!” Lola bemoaned with wide eyes. “You are like a tiny canary that Malcolm caged up for too long. You have no idea how cruel the world is outside this place.”

“So, it seems this is all about your personal resentments. What about you, then? Do you know how cruel it is?” Leah retorted.

“Of course, I do!” Lola stripped off her dress and pointed at the thick scars pockmarking her chest. “At least I’ve actually tried escaping before. How else do you think these came about?”

Leah stared in stunned silence. After a while, she blurted, “I’m sorry. I didn’t know about this.”

“Of course, you don’t. You weren’t even here yet.” Lola slipped her dress back on and said earnestly, “I have attempted escape before, and I’ve seen many others do the same. I know better than anyone just how dangerous it is to do so. You have to do all you can to lower the risks involved. Perhaps you’ll have a chance to succeed then. I know that they are very important to you and I also know that you don’t want to disappoint them. But sometimes, Leah, someone needs to make the difficult decisions.”

For a minute, Leah stared silently at the floor. Then, she looked up and replied, “I’m sorry. We either go together, or none of us leaves.”

Lola felt deep frustration coursing through her veins, and in a rage, she erupted in curses. “I’m so stupid! I should never have gotten involved in this!”

“I’ll understand if you want to back out now. But no matter what, I will always be grateful to you. Without you, we couldn’t have gotten the weapons, and we wouldn’t have communicated with our allies outside the manor,” replied Leah, sincerity brimming in her eyes.

“Do you still not understand?! I have nowhere else to go! If you fail, you will be tortured until you confess and sell me out!” Lola punched the shelf next to her before taking in a deep breath and composing herself.

“Alright, you win. I give in. We can go save your friends, but we cannot rush it.”

“Any ideas you can think of?” Leah asked humbly.

“There’s no way around being noisy if we break into the torture chamber. Since that’s the case, we just make a louder noise. We’ll distract the patrols by setting fire to the granary east of the manor, as well as the firewood store. That way, we’ll have enough time to save your friends.”

“But with so few with us... it can’t be done, right?” Leah wondered out loud.

“Yes, which is why we have to convince more to join us!” Lola answered resolutely.

Chapter 249 Special Leah

Leah’s insistence on saving her friends significantly lowered the chance of a quiet escape.

Since they were throwing in everything, Lola went all out to encourage everyone she could to join the daring escape, albeit remaining extremely conservative on who she told. She didn't inform everyone about the plan, revealing it to only a trusted few at lunch the next day. Those who were part of the plan would be alerted, and they would start preparing themselves without leaking any information.

Leah was set for an important task herself. Her job was to steal any letters related to Normand and Raymond. Since she cleaned Malcolm's study every week, it wasn't too complicated, provided the room was empty.

Leah's biggest worry was that Malcolm would be there while she cleaned. The good news was, Malcolm had something important to do and left the manor early that morning.

Thus, when noon came around, Leah entered the study as usual. After greeting the guard with a smile, she closed the door behind her, letting out a massive sigh of relief as he steadied herself. Instantly, she went about the chore of cleaning the room. She was extra swift this time, but once she was done, there wasn't much time left for her original mission. Leah hastily stormed to the bookcase and pulled the drawer open.

There was nothing inside.

It was completely empty! She swore the letters were still there when she cleaned the room last week.

Could the recent tensions and successive incidents of Nadia and Daisy have prompted Malcolm to move away everything important? But then again, from the haphazard way those letters were piled up, she could tell that Malcolm didn't care about them much.

She forced herself to stop panicking as she went through the various possibilities in her mind. At the same time, her hands didn't stop, searching the entire study as she went along. However, despite her best efforts, there was still no trace of the letters.

Leah grew more anxious by the second as every drawer she opened turned up empty. In her haste, she made a blunder. As she shifted backward, she accidentally knocked a low cabinet, sending the binaural vase on it to come crashing down!

She turned around to try to catch it, but it was already too late. The vase had already fallen onto the floor. Fortunately for carpets, it didn't shatter, although one of its handles had broken off.

Leah was horrified, her heart falling even harder the vase. This was Malcolm's favorite piece of porcelain. An adventurer brought it from a distant and mysterious land of the far east, and no doubt. It was a priceless artifact, worth hundreds of times of what she was sold for. She had always been extra careful whenever she cleaned, but this time, her mind was so preoccupied with finding the letters that she discounted her surroundings.

Before she could even think up a plan to salvage the situation, she heard footsteps from the outside of the study.

They were the sound of Malcolm's unique stride, swifter than most men, but with a pace firm and confident. The interval between each step was almost always the same too. It was just as he was, efficient, solemn, and calm.

The guard pushed the door open, and Malcolm entered. The moment he saw Leah clutching the vase with one hand and cleaning the counter with the other, she thought she was done for. However, he simply cocked an eyebrow and didn't seem to notice anything out of the ordinary.

In fact, he seemed to be in a good mood today. "Stop cleaning. Go tell the kitchen to put some steak on the grill," he instructed Leah.

"Alright. Haven't you had your lunch yet?" Leah turned around, hiding the damaged vase behind her back and trying her hardest to maintain a smile.

"Mm. I had two bites of apple pie on the way back. Average tasting stuff."

Thank goodness Malcolm wasn't looking at her. In an attempt to shift the man's attention, she picked up a wine bottle and hurried over to pour him a glass.

Malcolm cleared his throat.

"I heard that you and Daisy are quite close."

Leah froze, and a feeling of dread overwhelmed her. Malcolm must have turned his suspicions to her. To her relief, he said, "Do you happen to know who she's close to?"

"That..." Leah started but was hesitant.

"What's wrong? Are you afraid that the others would shun you if you tell me? But haven't you always been getting the cold shoulder anyway?"

Leah was surprised that Malcolm knew about it.

"Are you surprised? I've been giving you preferential treatment, so naturally, the others will be unhappy. They are too afraid to hate me, so they turned to the person closest to me. That happens to be you. But because of that, I get to sniff out the rogues. Don't worry, I won't let them hurt you. Haven't you realized it yet? Those who have mistreated you have all but disappeared?" Malcolm paused. He finished up his wine as he stared at the girl with a cocked head. "With you helping me, I don't have to worry about anything," he went on.

Leah wasn't the least pleased the creepy undertone in her master's voice. When those words hit her, her blood ran cold, and a frigid chill ran down her spine.

Truth be told, she actually felt guilty that she had seen Malcolm's letters. No matter what the other slaves thought about him, he treated her well, at the very least. And after all these years of Malcolm's influence, her mindset was actually closer to that of a white woman.

That also made her different from her own people. At times, she even felt that Malcolm understood her better than her own compatriots. He played a similar role as her father and mentor, and undeniably, she felt some warmth from it. However, as it turned out, it was all an illusion. Malcolm treated her differently, not because of how special she was, but because he needed her to seem "special."

"Alright, I'm hungry. Go hurry the chef up," Malcolm said. "And oh, it's been quite humid recently, so I had someone sun the letters this morning. Collect them later in the evening, will you?"

“Yes, sir.”

Leah nodded and left the study.

It was destined to be a sleepless night.

When the hands of the clock in the living room struck twelve, Lola woke the maid in the bed next to her and told about their escape plans. At the same time, the same thing was happening in all the other rooms until eventually, almost twenty maids were gathered in Leah’s quarters.

These were almost half of all the maids in the manor. Except for Laeli’s people, the rest of the colored women wishing to escape were now practically together. Lola tied up the ones afraid of getting caught, gagging them to keep them from blowing the whistle. Most of all, it was done for their own good. If they were caught with any information, they would be punished severely once Leah and the others escaped.

As for the male slaves living in another building, they were led by someone else.

Leah glanced at the faces of the women before her. In their eyes, she saw anxiety, fear, and a powerful yearning for freedom. Without hesitation, she declared, “Sisters, let us together, break the shackles that bind our necks!”

Chapter 250 Riot

Malcolm couldn’t remember the last time he got some proper sleep. Once he realized that Redmond was the enemy, he wasted no time coming up with a plan to deal with him. However, that wasn’t Malcolm’s biggest problem right now, as he would need to stabilize the increasingly volatile black-market alliance once Redmond was out of the game.

Most outsiders viewed the black-market alliance as an invincible and impenetrable force. As one of it’s founding fathers, Malcolm secretly knew that its foundations were weak and crumbling. No matter how robust the system was, solving every internal conflict that arose within its core would be impossible. This was where Redmond’s influence came in handy, something the system couldn’t do.

Every black-market merchant had their own cliques and factions, and naturally, some were hostile to each other. Malcolm wasn’t the right person to balance power and resolve their conflicts since he’d only been in Nassau for a few years. When it came to matters like this, he still had to rely on Redmond. After all, Redmond was one of the eldest and most experienced black-market merchants in Nassau.

This was why Malcolm was in charge of the alliance’s operations while Redmond became its leader. Within two or three years, Malcolm would have built a strong reputation within the alliance, and Redmond would be kicked out of the game. He was even confident that he could take over all his tasks within a year. Owing to that, he was surprised that Redmond would turn against him a lot earlier than expected.

At this point, the two could never go back to how they were before. Redmond knew that the longer he dragged things on, the more unfavorable his situation would be. To him, Carina, Malcolm’s rival, was the wildcard in this game, and it would be unsurprising if he decided to secretly take action on her. That said, Redmond failed to keep it a secret from Malcolm

Malcolm's priority, as of now, was to find a way to kick Redmond out of Nassau, and at the same time, ensure that the operation would cause minimal effects on the alliance.

Malcolm wrote down the names of a few influential black-market merchants on a piece of paper, supposed candidates for Redmond's replacement. It wasn't until late that night that he went to bed. Not too long after he fell asleep, he was awakened by some loud shouting and rapid thumps of footsteps outside his room. Such actions were typically forbidden inside the manor. Instantly, Malcolm's eyes popped open as he jumped out of bed. At that time, someone knocked at his door.

"Come in!"

Wallace pushed the door open and stormed into the room.

"What's going on outside? What's with that loud noise?" asked a frowning Malcolm while hastily changing his attire.

"The slaves are rioting! They've set fire to the barn and our wood and cotton warehouses!"

"How many of them?!"

"I can't come up with a number right now, but I believe more than half of our slaves are in it. They are all armed mainly with stones they picked, and knives from the kitchen. But there are some with daggers and guns. On the bright side, they have at most, two or three guns with them. I've sent for a team to protect you, and I've also rushed a messenger to get help from other plantations. Once their men arrive, we should be more secure."

Once Malcolm put on his proper attire and shoes, he walked out to the balcony and instantly saw the fires that were raging nearby. It seemed that a new fight had just broken out at another spot. It was just like what Wallace said, the black slaves had the numbers, but the guards were better equipped. As of now, the guards were holding up well. Not too long after that, the supervisors joined the brawl as well.

Getting assistance in crushing the dissent should be a breeze too. Managing the slaves had been a constant headache for landowners like Malcolm, and as he shared a good rapport with a few plantations, they would inevitably run to his aid in a time like this. Malcolm's confidence was boosted, and he wasn't too worried about the ever-growing riots around his manor. Even when Wallace told about the massive losses they had suffered, he seemed unconcerned.

Malcolm was trying to figure if the riots had something to do with Redmond. If it did, what was he hoping to achieve? How did he convince so many to work for him?

A handful of slaves had attempted to escape Terrance Manor before, but a riot of this scale was unprecedented. It would have been a massive undertaking, not to mention that with so many being involved, the secret was bound to be spilled somehow. Most slaves weren't petite as well, and they could be easily spotted. There was no place they could hide even if they escaped successfully. Malcolm was also baffled by how the slaves got their hands on the daggers and guns. All these questions could only be answered after the riots were over. He knew one thing for sure, though. Daisy wasn't the snitch.

Soon, they received updates that the slaves were moving toward the ranches, a spot that was poorly defended. If that were to be the case, the guards might actually be on the losing end. Once the horses

were set free, the situation would only become more chaotic and eventually get out of hand. So with Malcolm's permission, Wallace and his men scrambled to the ranch hoping to stop a horse stampede.

Wallace was running when he suddenly stopped in his tracks. It dawned on him that fierce fighting was happening at three different locations around the manor. One place, however, had been unusually quiet tonight. It was in the fields where the torture chamber was.

"Cunning little pieces of shit!"

Wallace reloaded his rifle, and with a scowl, turned to the plantation. From afar, the body of the supervisor guarding the room could be seen lying on the ground. Several knives were sticking out of his back like bristles. Meanwhile, a black man was dragging Nadya out of the room.

Wallace pulled the trigger, the bullet missing its target and landing on a nearby barrel instead.

Startled, the black man fell to the ground as he dropped Nadya. Wallace's men had also started shooting as well. Desperate to save his own life, he left Nadya and ran back to the torture room. At the same time, Leah heard gunshots as well. She was right behind the black man. As for Lola, she was carrying Daisy and was behind Leah. They were joined by four women and two men who had previously been slaves at the plantation.

Earlier, a few slaves were in a fight with a supervisor, and one woman survived with light injuries. Those were their only people left still capable of fighting. As for Wallace, he had five guards with him, and four were armed with guns. Creeping slowly and quietly to the torture room, they hoped to take their targets by surprise. Just as they were about to reach, they were greeted by a loud gunshot, followed by the loud thud of a guard dropping to the ground. Wallace and the rest quickly crouched as low as possible; the casualty only turning them more cautious. What they didn't know was that Leah only had one gun, and she had just shot her last round.