

48 Hours 861

Chapter 861: Details

From what Zhang Heng saw, the Binota Mine was undoubtedly in trouble. The mine's gates were tightly locked, and there was no cart transporting ore. Even the guards who patrolled the mine to prevent nearby farmers from stealing the ore were nowhere to be seen.

Decius then put on an I-told-you-so expression and said, "Cobb has no reason to deceive us. Lying to us will do him no good."

"Whose side are you on, my friend?" Zhang Heng looked at Decius and asked.

"Hmm?"

"If you still want to finish your work and get those bronze statues delivered on time, you'd better pray that Cobb cheated you."

"But... If he really didn't lie to me..." Decius said in a soft voice.

"Then I shall congratulate you on messing up your first job given by His Majesty the Emperor," Zhang Heng said lightly.

Decius' expression changed. He knew that Zhang Heng was intimidating him, but he had to admit that what he said was indeed irrefutable.

"If you have figured out your situation. Let's get to work," Zhang Heng said.

After that, Zhang Heng climbed the fence and went over to the other side of the mine. Decius hesitated for a while before hurriedly following Zhang Heng.

The two walked down a muddy path, climbed a dirt slope, and finally saw the mine at the back. A group of slave miners entered and exited the mine, carrying out baskets of rocks and sand and dumping them outside the cave. A man that looked like an overseer saw Zhang Heng and Decius. So, he quickly approached them. He seemed to know Decius.

"Why did you come here?" asked the overseer in a surprised tone.

Decius then introduced the two to each other. Now, Zhang Heng knew that the young man in front of him was Cobb's eldest son, Krasai.

Krasai stretched out his hand and shook hands with Zhang Heng. "I've seen your performance before. It was exhilarating. You are indeed the most powerful man I have ever seen!"

Although he sounded polite, there was a trace of cautiousness in his behavior and actions.

"Oh, Zhang Heng is now an adviser to His Majesty the Emperor. He is responsible for the construction of the bronze statue," Decius added afterward.

"Why didn't you continue with the statue's construction? Why are you here in my mine?" While Krasai spoke, another group of slaves came out of the mine. However, they did not return immediately after

they dumped the gravel. Instead, a dozen of them just stood there and watched them. They all had burly figures and held iron pickaxes in their hands.

“Uh, we don’t have enough copper ore. So, we have been shutting down for a while now. Now, we are here to take a look at the situation on your side and see how long it will take to resume mining.”

“As you can see, the mine has collapsed, and we are still clearing it. I am not sure how long it will take before we can resume mining. I’ll remember to inform you immediately once the operation resumes.”

“Of course, we believe you. We just wanted to see what we could do to help. Besides, the air in the countryside is fresher.” Decius nodded and looked at Zhang Heng. He was trying to use his eyes to tell Zhang Heng that he should be satisfied with what he was seeing and that they should leave this place right away.

“There is no fresh air in this hell hole. There are only a group of stinky slaves and a pile of broken rocks,” scoffed Krasai. “No one wants to stay here. Once I deal with the problem here, I’m heading to the brothel in the city and reward myself with a good long break.”

“Yes, we can have a drink together. By that time, I guess I should be jobless.” Decius sighed and looked at Zhang Heng.

The latter raised his eyebrows, indicating that he had no more questions. Immediately, Decius sighed in relief.

Krasai and a dozen slaves watched on as Zhang Heng and Decius left the mine.

After walking for a while, Decius could not help but ask, “I didn’t want to mention it at first, but now, you should believe that the mine is really in trouble. Cobb didn’t mean to delay the whole thing.”

“It’s hard to say whether the mine is really in trouble. One thing’s for sure. You are now in big trouble, my friend,” Zhang Heng said.

Decius started to feel worried when he heard what Zhang Heng said. “I know, but this was an accident. I hope you can truthfully reflect the situation here to his majesty.”

“This is not an accident.” Zhang Heng shook his head.

“How is it possible? We saw it with our eyes...” Decius widened his eyes as though he did not believe that Krasai had lied with a straight face.

“All you see are the slaves taking out sand from the mine and Krasai’s men blocking the hole to prevent us from entering. Besides, I heard that the Binota Mine’s miners are not only made up of slaves. There are supposed to be some poor people nearby who asked to work for them. But this time, we only saw slaves, not those poor people.”

“Well. What could it mean?”

“Slaves are the property of the master. It is difficult for them to betray their master. On the other hand, the poor people are not the master’s property. So, if they are thinking of doing something bad, it wouldn’t be wise to let the poor people get involved,” Zhang Heng said, “and...”

“What else?”

“...did you notice that the slaves who were supposed to clear out the mine didn't have much sweat on them? This shows that they had only just started working. And do you remember the muddy road we passed by before going uphill?”

“Hmm...”

“I don't know if you paid attention to Krasai's shoes and trousers. They have wet dirt on them. This shows that he had just walked the path that we walked earlier. This guy came here shortly before us. They are just putting up a show for us. Besides, when I went to look for you just now, I spotted some sneaky men outside your door. If I'm right, those are the people Cobb had sent to keep an eye on you. They saw that I went to look for you. So, they quickly ran to inform the people at the mine. That's how they prepared everything so quickly.”

After Zhang Heng finished speaking, he turned his head and looked at Decius. He saw that the latter had his mouth wide open, with a look of disbelief on his face.

“Oh my god! Who are you? How could you see so many details that no one else would notice?!”

“You know me. I was a gladiator, but my observation ability happens to be better than most.”

Zhang Heng had no intention of explaining more. As a tenant of 221B Baker Street, such deduction ability was indeed not something worth fussing about.

“Okay, what do we do next?” Decius asked. “I mean, even if we know that the people at the Binota Mine are lying to us about deliberately shutting down the mine, technically speaking, they have not violated the contract, and they are still paying us. I still don't know why Cobb would do something like this. It does him no good.”

“Of course, Cobb doesn't have the guts to do something like this. So next, we'll need to find the mastermind behind him,” Zhang Heng said casually.

Chapter 862: Messenger

Decius had never been to East District before, but he had heard a lot about this place. Even the coachman was a little reluctant to take them when he heard that Zhang Heng and Decius wanted to travel there. In the end, Zhang Heng had to pay an extra fare to make the coachman bring them to their destination.

While they were on the way to the East District, Decius held back and did not say a word. However, after he got off the carriage, he could not help but ask, “Didn't you say you want to find out who the mastermind behind Cobb is? Why are you here? As far as I know, everyone living in this place is either a criminal, a villain, or a pauper. I don't think there's anyone here that can make Cobb obey orders.”

“Yes, you are right, but they are our goal.”

“What? Are you saying that our targets are the criminals and villains?” Decius asked, puzzled.

“No. Our goal is the poor people here.”

“Poor people?”

“Yes, I told you before. Mines like those need a lot of manpower. The slaves alone are not enough to meet their labor needs. Besides, a strong, healthy, and capable slave does not come cheap. If the slave dies, the master will lose a lot of money. On the other hand, if they hire the poor, they don’t have to worry about this problem.”

Decius finally came to a realization, “You want to find the poor people who worked in the mine?”

“That’s right.” Zhang Heng nodded.

But Decius soon frowned again, “But this place is vast and chaotic. How can we find individuals that worked for the Binota Mine before?”

“That’s something you needn’t worry about,” Zhang Heng said with a wave of his hand. A kid that was playing with his companions on the street quickly ran to Zhang Heng. However, when the kid saw Zhang Heng closing in, he wanted to run away. Unfortunately, he could not do as he wished. In the end, he had to walk towards Zhang Heng obediently.

Zhang Heng whispered a few words into his ear and placed a copper coin in his palm.

The latter then grabbed the copper coin and ran away.

“Uh... I don’t think he’ll be back.” Decius watched the kid running away from the back.

“Yes, he won’t.” Zhang Heng nodded in agreement.

“Then what should we do next?”

“You can go around, enjoy yourself, or something. I will visit a friend to see if there are other places where you can get the copper you need. I am used to making backup plans. Let’s meet at the Blackwater Bay tavern later. Then, we will meet the people that worked in the mine,” Zhang Heng said.

“I... I don’t think we should act separately.” Decius was startled and had broken out in cold sweat. He did not even have time to ask Zhang Heng how he would spot a mine worker in the Blackwater Bay Tavern later. He felt really anxious. So, he hurriedly said, “You are not a Roman. Maybe that’s why you don’t know how insane this place is. Fabino of the Coruna family was hired as the assessor to appraise this place. He brought two guards with him when he came here for the first time. However, he ended up getting robbed on the street, and he was beaten badly. His engagement ring; lost as well. You are the gladiatorial champion of the Amphitheatrum Flavium, and you may not be afraid of the people here, but once we are separated, I’m not sure if you’ll see me again.”

“Relax, my friend, you came with me, and many people on the street saw it too. No one will mess with you. I promise,” Zhang Heng said.

“How do you guarantee that?” Decius did not believe Zhang Heng’s words. He held on to his money bag as tightly as he could. At the same, he became suspicious of everyone he laid his eyes on. He could not help but think that the bad guys would suddenly emerge from the crowd, kicking and swarming him and taking all his belongings.

Zhang Heng did not know what to do with him. Fortunately, at this time, they happened to run into a passing patrol team. The patrol team was currently made up of talented people led by two official patrol members. Zhang Heng then stopped them and asked them to accompany Decius. With that, Decius finally agreed to move separately.

But even so, Decius still did not dare wander around the place on his own. He asked the two patrol team members to take him to the patrol station right away. When he saw that the time was almost up, and asked the patrol team member to escort him to the Blackwater Bay Tavern.

Decius was trembling in fear all the time. He bowed his head and stared at his shoes, afraid that looking at the wrong person would cause him some serious trouble. And when he arrived at the Blackwater Bay Tavern, Decius saw countless fierce-looking men that were best not trifled with. He felt like a little white rabbit that strayed into a weasel pack.

After that, Decius hurriedly ordered a glass of wine and looked for a corner to nest up. Fortunately, Zhang Heng's figure appeared at the tavern's entrance before he had to wait for too long.

Decius suspected that he was hallucinating. When Zhang Heng entered the tavern, everyone seemed to keep quiet for a moment. No one dared to make a sound. It was not until Zhang Heng made a gesture that the tavern became lively again. After that, Zhang Heng came to Decius' table and sat down.

"Are you done with your business?"

"Uh-huh," replied Zhang Heng.

"How did it go? Did you manage to find other sources of copper ore?" Decius seemed very concerned about this matter. After all, no one knew when Binota Mine could resume operations. This had everything to do with whether Decius could complete the task given by Commodus on time.

"It's not that easy. Recently, someone has been secretly purchasing copper ore in Rome. The price of copper ore has soared, but this is not the biggest problem. The main problem is that it seems copper ore has run out of stock everywhere."

"Does that mean we can only rely on Binota Mine?" Decius looked a little frustrated.

"So, this is the case." Zhang Heng took the wine he ordered from the waitress. His expression was as anxious.

At the next moment, two men in worn, old clothes and solemn looks walked into the tavern, heading right toward Zhang Heng. The older one of the two asked, "Are you looking for us?"

"Yes, please sit down." Zhang Heng pointed at the seat opposite him. He then took out two gold coins and tossed them to the men. "Don't be nervous. I just want to ask you a few questions. Please answer them truthfully. This is your reward."

"Wait, who are they?" Decius asked with a look of surprise.

"We are workers from the Binota Mine."

The elderly miner was overjoyed when he received the gold coin from Zhang Heng. He then thanked Zhang Heng and responded. It was a huge sum of money for the vast majority of people living in the

southeast city. When he received such a large sum in front of everyone, he was supposed to worry if he could keep the money before someone snatched it away from him. However, since Zhang Heng was the one that gave him the money, it meant no one would dare to take this from him.

But Decius, on the other side, was really nervous. He quickly asked the two of them to put away the shiny gold coins. And at the same time, he looked around to make sure that no one was paying attention to them before he spoke.

“You are the miners of the Binota Mine? But how is this possible?” Decius turned to look at Zhang Heng. “You found them with the help of a single copper coin?”

“Of course not. I didn’t spend a single copper coin. That is my token,” Zhang Heng said as he took the copper coin, he gave to the kid from the old miner’s hand. This token was given to the slave girl by Commodus. However, the emperor later discarded this version, with the remaining coins remelted and recast. Hence, Zhang Heng used this one and only copper coin as his token. Basically, whoever held this copper coin would become his messenger.

As for the entire southeast city, no one would dare to ignore what he said.

Chapter 863: The Person With The Red Birthmark

“How long have you been working at the Binota Mine?”

Zhang Heng then beckoned the waiter to bring two more glasses of wine to the miners.

“I have been working at the Binota Mine for five years. However, I did change jobs for two years, in between. I loaded and unloaded goods at the wharf. The work there was a little easier than in the mine, but the income was also lesser. Later, I had a fourth daughter and needed more money. So I went back to the mine,” the older miner explained. After that, he pointed at the younger miner beside him.

“He is my nephew, and he came to work with me in the mines this year. He is a good boy, never complains about anything. All he does is work hard.”

“Well, when did you stop work working this time?” Zhang Heng then asked.

“It was about half a month ago,” the old miner recalled.

“16 days ago, to be precise,” his nephew added, “We went to the mine as usual in the morning, but the supervisor told us that there was an accident and the mine had collapsed. We couldn’t start work until they cleaned the place up. So, everyone was asked to go home and wait for the news.”

“Did you check the mine out after the incident?”

The old miner and his nephew looked at each other.

“We said we could help with the clean-up. After all, our wages are paid on a daily basis. And we have to feed our families. It’s torture not knowing when we can resume work. We hope we can continue as soon as possible, but the supervisor did not allow us to go into the mine. Even after we told him that we would do it for him for free, he insisted that the slaves could handle this matter. And he asked him not to worry about it. But now... we have been out of work for two weeks. As of now, we can only work

random jobs and continue to support our families. If it weren't for the gold coins you gave us, we were ready to borrow money from the loan shark."

"Did anything unusual happen before you stopped working? Had anyone you've never seen before come to the mine?" Zhang Heng leaned back, switching to a more comfortable posture.

"Cobb's eldest son, Krasai. He doesn't like the mine and us, but he suddenly went to inspect the mine a few days before the accident. We saw him chatting with the supervisor for a long time, and he avoided all the other people. And a day before the mine collapsed, nothing happened in the tunnel. Also, it didn't rain that night. That was why so everyone was so surprised when the mine collapsed the next day," the old miner went on saying.

"What else? Is there anything else worth noting?"

Until now, what the old miner said proved that the collapse of the mine might be intentional. However, they provided no clues related to the mastermind behind this incident. Since this was the case, Zhang Heng had to pay Krasai or Cobb a visit again.

The old miner shook his head. Nonetheless, Zhang Heng noticed a hesitant look on the young miner's face.

"If you feel that the money is not enough, I can pay you three more gold coins," Zhang Heng added.

"Oh no, you misunderstand. The two gold coins are more than enough, and we can't ask for more. I haven't said this to anyone before because I didn't want to cause trouble to the person who told me about this," the young miner said.

"Hmm?"

"I have a friend. She is a servant of the Cobb family..."

The young miner hesitated.

"A slave?"

"Yes, she had actually heard about something a few days before we were forced to stop working. She told me about it, but I didn't tell anyone else. And I told her not to breathe a word about it anymore."

"Don't worry. You have my word. We won't disclose this information to others, right?" Zhang Heng looked at Decius, who immediately nodded his head with a solemn look.

"I keep my mouth shut all the time, and I never talk nonsense."

"Well, I believe you." The young miner finally made up his mind and said, "One week before the incident, someone visited Cobb late at night. The two stayed in the study room for almost the entire night, plotting something. In the midst of it, he called the slave to pour them more water. It was at that time; my friend heard Cobb say that this was simply too dangerous a matter. And they asked the mysterious person to pay them more. The visitor then told them that all they needed to do was delay the casting of those bronze statues. After that, my friend left the study room."

"Did your friend see the visitor's face?" Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows.

“Yes, she told me. It was the kind of face that she could never forget. She said that there was a red birthmark on the left of the man’s face, like a ball of flame.”

“Oh, this narrows the scope,” replied Zhang Heng. “There are not too many people in Rome with red birthmarks on their faces. And there are not too many people who dare to delay the casting of the bronze statues either. I believe it shouldn’t be too difficult to find out who the person is.”

After that, he took out two more gold coins and threw them to the young miner. “You don’t have to reject the reward. You did me a great favor. You deserve it. I have nothing else to ask. You can go now.”

The young miner collected the money, thanked Zhang Heng again, and left the tavern with his uncle.

On the other side, Decius showed a nervous look and an awkward smile. He put down the wine glass in his hand and asked Zhang Heng, “Did we just... get involved in something serious?”

“What do you think?” Zhang Heng asked rhetorically.

“I’m just a nobody. Why do such things happen to me?” Decius complained bitterly, “Why would anyone mess with the bronze statues? By delaying their casting, what can the person gain other than destroying my life? And we are talking about the bronze statue of His Majesty the Emperor. Who would dare to mess with the emperor?”

Zhang Heng was noncommittal. “It’s too late now to talk about such things. If you don’t want to take the blame, you can join me and solve this problem. You heard what the young man said, right? I think you should know some of the people in the Senate. Do you know anyone with a red birthmark on his face?”

“I don’t think there’s anyone in the Senate with a red birthmark on his face... As for the senators’ subordinates,” Decius frowned. “With my identity, the number of senators I can meet is very limited. But I have a friend who is a rainmaker. He works with the approval or rejection of a certain proposal. In other words, he has seen everyone’s face. If there’s someone with a red birthmark on his face, my friend should know who he works for.”

“Very good, let’s visit your friend next.” Zhang Heng said. After finishing the wine in the glass, he put down six copper coins to pay for the drink.

And Decius was relieved to hear that he could finally leave the southeast area. But at the same time, he also felt a little strange. That was because no one had come to bother them since they arrived. Was this still the same southeast city where someone snatched Fabino’s engagement ring and beat him up after that?

Chapter 864: Do You Mind If We Go In And Sit?

When Decius stood outside the rainmaker’s house, he felt that something was not right. He wondered how the whole thing got to where it was today.

It was supposed to be a job that did not require much effort. All he needed to do was to sit still and keep an eye on the workers. Once he got his job done, he was supposed to be appreciated by the emperor. However, he ended up looking for a man with a red birthmark all over the city with Zhang Heng. But as Zhang Heng said, at this point, the only way out for him was to look for the mastermind behind this

matter. Otherwise, if he angered Commodus, he would not only lose his job, but it might also affect the emperor's trust in his family.

Unlike him, Zhang Heng looked calm and relaxed from the beginning to the end. He even took out the time to see the tenants in the corridor. Decius was a bit unsure of what was going on with Zhang Heng. He thought that Zhang Heng would have to bear a part of the responsibility if he failed to ensure that the bronze statues were delivered on time. Or was he preparing to push all the blame to Decius? If that were the case, Decius would be living a miserable life after that.

Decius was so nervous that he continued to knock on his friend's door. The latter was still taking a nap, but the continuous knocking on his door woke him up. Getting up from the bed, he groggily slipped on his clothes. While he was walking around in the house, Zhang Heng and Decius could hear the creaking of the floorboards. After that, he hurriedly opened the door and poked his head out.

"It's you, aren't you supposed to be busy with casting the bronze statue? Why are you here looking for me?" Decius's friend was a little surprised when he saw the people outside the door.

"We are in a bit of a pickle, and we need your help." Decius glanced at Zhang Heng quickly, not knowing how much information he should reveal to his friend. However, Zhang Heng did not say a single word. So, in the end, Decius asked the most crucial question: "We are looking for someone with a red birthmark on his face."

"A person with a red birthmark on his face?" Decius's friend shrugged, "Uh... I haven't heard of such a person, is there anything else?"

"Huh?" The reply startled Decius. "No... nothing else."

"Then I hope you can find the person that you are looking for as soon as possible." Decius's friend was about to close the door as he spoke.

But the next moment, a hand jammed the door that he was about to close.

"Mind if we come in and sit down?" Zhang Heng asked.

"To be honest, my house is a mess," Decius's friend rubbed his disheveled hair and said.

"It doesn't matter. We are not here to build a relationship with you." After Zhang Heng finished speaking, he stepped into his house.

Decius's friend wanted to stop him, but his small body was quickly pushed aside by Zhang Heng.

"Ah, who are you?! I don't even know you! Why did you break into my house?" Decius's friend screamed.

Zhang Heng ignored him and looked around his place. As its owner had said, the room was an awful mess, with wine bottles and dirty clothes everywhere. Two drunk women were also on the bed. Apart from that, being a unit on the second floor with a balcony, the rent was expensive. The place could be compared to Zhang Heng's insula by the Tiber River.

“Uh, this is Zhang Heng, the gladiatorial champion of the Amphitheatrum Flavium. He is also an advisor to His Majesty the Emperor.” Decius tried his best to calm the situation. “This is my friend, Klaus. He is a rainmaker and works for the senators.”

“Gladiator? No wonder you solve your problems with brute force. I am not like you. I rely on my brain and mouth to eat,” Klaus sneered.

“If you are smart enough, you should’ve been more polite. If you had upset me, I’d probably have thrown you out of here,” Zhang Heng said casually.

When Klaus heard that, his expressions changed. Not daring to look at Zhang Heng, he turned to his friend, Decius, instead. He was clearly irritated. “What is going on? Can you give me an explanation?!”

“This is a misunderstanding... a misunderstanding,” Decius quickly explained, “We are tracking down a man with a red birthmark on his face. Consultant Zhang Heng thinks that he should be working for a high-ranking person in the Senate. I know you know a lot of people in the Senate. That’s why I came to you.”

“You are really good at making trouble for your friends.” Klaus pulled the sheets and covered the two women on the bed. “I made it very clear when you were outside the door. I have no idea about the person that you are talking about.”

“Uhh... think about it again. This matter is essential to us,” Decius coaxed with a smile.

And Zhang Heng, on the other side, also spoke up, “I heard Decius say that when a bill is submitted to the Senate, your job is to persuade those who originally agree or disagree with the bill to change their mind.”

“Uh-huh. What does that have to do with this matter?” Klaus had no intention to treat Zhang Heng politely because he was worried that Zhang Heng would throw him downstairs. Hence, he did not dare to say anything provocative anymore.

“I believe there’s something fishy about this incident. Should I appoint two guards to follow you all the time?”

“How can you do that?!” Klaus snarled.

“Because I am the emperor’s adviser. It is my job to investigate the corruption of the Senate and ensure that the empire develops better.”

“So, you want to investigate the corruption within the Senate. Even if you are the emperor’s advisor, I don’t believe that you dare offend so many nobles,” Klaus scoffed.

“Who told you I’m going to offend those nobles? I just want to find a right reason to send someone to keep an eye on you,” Zhang Heng said indifferently. “I don’t care how corrupt the Senate is, nor do I care about what your colleagues do every day.”

Klaus was frightened and furious. He finally knew what Zhang Heng was planning to do. For people like them who help their employers do private deals, staying low-key was their way of survival. If two guards were keeping an eye on him all the time, he would not be able to move freely. Besides, the competition

in this line was very fierce. If he did not perform well, he would be replaced by other rainmakers in a month or two.

“If I were you, I would answer his questions honestly,” Zhang Heng pointed at Decius.

Klaus’s expression changed. He then walked to the table and poured himself a glass of water. After drinking it to calm himself down, he asked, “Why are you guys looking for such a person?”

But this time, before Zhang Heng opened his mouth, Klaus spoke, “Forget it, don’t tell me, I don’t want to know.”

“You are indeed the rainmaker, a wise move.” Zhang Heng praised.

Klaus quickly wrote down an address on the papyrus and handed it to Decius. “The person you are looking for is also a rainmaker like me. Forgive me for not telling you where he lives. Being nosy is taboo in our line of job. It is better to keep ourselves out of unnecessary troubles.”

“I can understand that.” Decius accepted the note and apologized, “I’m sorry about this time. I will buy you a drink when the matter is over.”

“No. I will be grateful if you can forget about me.” Klaus replied with a sullen face.

Chapter 865: Short Of Time

It had been half a day since Zhang Heng and Decius met for the first time. The two traveled around Rome, from the Binota Mine to the southeast city, then to Klaus’s insula. They had been constantly on the move.

As the investigation continued to deepen, the truth about the shutdown of the mine gradually emerged. The key person of this incident was the man with the red birthmark on his face—Amidio. As the middleman, he met Cobb and came up with the whole plan. Finding him meant finding the mastermind behind him.

And now Zhang Heng and Decius were standing outside of Amidio’s insula.

The sun was about to set.

Amidio’s lived in a more remote location than Kraus. Although nowhere nearly as chaotic as the southeast city, it was a shanty slum. Most who lived here were short-term tenants, having to pay the rent once a week. If they failed, they would be kicked out of the insula. Although not as famous as Klaus, as a rainmaker for the Senate, it stood to reason that he shouldn’t be living in such a place.

With his income, he could have easily afforded a better residence. There was only one reason why he’d choose to live here, and that was to keep a low profile.

He knew what he was doing wasn’t something that could see the light of the day. Hence, he wanted to attract as little attention as possible. With all that in mind, Zhang Heng deduced that he was not a permanent resident of this place. In other words, Amidio constantly changed residences from time to time.

Decius did not like the atmosphere on the street. At the same time, his stomach was making some weird noises, reminding him that time for dinner was way overdue. In the past, he would have finished his work at this hour. He would've returned home, sitting at the dining table, and waiting for the servant to bring him some steaming hot food.

But he knew that they had now arrived at the critical point of the investigation, and it was no longer a matter of whether he was going to lose his job. It was directly related to the future of his family. So, he chose not to complain. Instead, he asked Zhang Heng, worried, "Shouldn't we call some guards over? That guy is unlikely to cooperate with us."

After dealing with Klaus, Decius had come to an understanding that it was not easy to get these rainmakers to cooperate with them, especially when asked to betray their employer.

"To tell you the truth, I was only appointed as an advisor not too long ago, and I haven't figured out how to deploy the guards. But it doesn't matter. I have you by my side. You are like my Watson," Zhang Heng said.

"What am I to you again?" Decius couldn't understand what Zhang Heng said.

"Watson... Don't mind me. I just said it for fun," Zhang Heng said. From downstairs, he looked up and saw the approximate location of Amidio's room. An insula designed for the poor, there was no balcony on the second floor. The only place where fresh air could enter was via a small window. However, it was now closed tightly. No one could see what was going on inside the house. Other than that, the wall was tilting. It seemed the building had not been maintained for a long time.

Zhang Heng patted Decius on the shoulder and said, "Let's go upstairs and meet this, Mr. Amidio."

"Oh, okay." Decius tried to dig through his memory, confirming that he had never heard of such a person named Watson. He then moved forward and followed Zhang Heng up the stairs.

The two walked through the dark corridor before stopping outside Amidio's house.

Decius reached out and knocked on the door. In following Zhang Heng's teachings, he said, "We are the landlord's people; coming to collect rent."

However, there seemed to be no movement in Amidio's unit. On the other hand, the tenant beside Amidio's unit opened their door first. And a man walked out of it and said in surprise, "The rent was collected two days ago, wasn't it?"

Decius looked at Zhang Heng with a look of embarrassment. However, Zhang Heng did not change his expression, "The rent has increased. And now it's time for him to pay up."

"But the rent was just increased last month." The man looked incredulous, "Only a few days have passed."

The man had a rather boomy voice, and tenants from other units came out to see what was going on. After all, a rent increase was undoubtedly something that everyone cared about. Zhang Heng knew that he couldn't continue keeping up with the lie. Amidio's room was extremely quiet too. So far, he heard no sounds of movement at all. Hence, he winked at Decius, signaling him to step aside. He then proceeded to kick on the door of the room.

“Oh my god! Is that even necessary? All he did was he forgot to pay the rent once. Besides, you guys increased the rent on him again! This is...” The man in the next room stopped talking suddenly, and his eyes widened.

The sight in front of him caused him to inhale sharply. He saw a skinny man lying motionless on a round table. His clothes were dyed red with blood, and the blood was still dripping to the floor. Immediately, everyone instinctively took a step back upon witnessing this bloody scene. Only Zhang Heng’s expression remained unchanged. He then stepped forward and walked into the room.

He had seen similar cases while being Holmes’ assistant, and he was numb to such a scene. First, Zhang Heng walked toward the round table. He reached out and touched the man’s nose to confirm that he had stopped breathing. After turning the corpse over, he took a look at the dagger stuck in his chest. After that, he saw the red birthmark on the corpse’s face.

“Hmm... It seems like this is the man we are looking for,” Zhang Heng said to Decius.

“He... is he dead?” Decius’s face had already become as pale as a sheet.

“Yes, and the time of death should be only a few minutes ago,” Zhang Heng looked at the bloodstains. No part of it was solidified yet. “It seems someone was in a rush to visit our target before we could. We walked up the stairs earlier. Maybe we walked past the murderer.”

“Huh?” Decius tried to think of the people he met at the stairs, but he could not remember anything. With a blank mind, all he could think of was that he must’ve gotten himself involved in something big.

What he couldn’t understand was that he was a mere nobody responsible for casting a bronze statue for the emperor. Why would anyone mess with him?

At that time, the man from next door finally recovered from the shock. “There has been a murder case! We should get the patrol team!” he yelled.

After hearing what the man said, everyone quickly went back to their houses, leaving only Decius standing at the door.

Zhang Heng waved at him, “What are you doing? Come in. We don’t have much time. The patrol team should be here soon.”

“What do you mean by that?” Decius asked doubtfully. “Amidio is dead. What else can we ask?”

“People like Amidio do business in the dark. In other words, he carries many secrets with him. He’ll definitely be watching out for assassins. Clearly, the murderer was poorly prepared this time. I checked the corpse, and I can tell you that he was killed with a single blow. No other surface wounds are visible, which means the murderer had no time to torture and interrogate Amidio. If we are lucky, we can still get the information we want without Amidio talking to us.”

Chapter 866: Clue And Ambition

Although the second century Decius did not know who Watson was, he played the role of Watson with due diligence. Although he felt quite uncomfortable with the corpse in front of the round table, Decius still mustered his courage, entered the room, and quietly closed the door.

In the old days, there was no such thing as protecting the crime scene. So Decius had no objection to what Zhang Heng wanted him to do next. After he looked around the room, he did not make a move immediately. Instead, he turned to ask Zhang Heng again. "Uh... Although I understand what you said earlier, what are we looking for exactly?"

"Pay attention to all the corners where things may be hidden. Check whether there are any notes or inconsistencies with Amidio's identity."

As he spoke, Zhang Heng came to a cabinet. He then stretched out his hand to open the cabinet door, and he started to pull out all the clothes from the wardrobe. After that, he bent down and looked under the cabinet. So, Decius quickly copied what Zhang Heng did. He began to search Amidio's residence with Zhang Heng.

Unfortunately, neither of them could find the thing that Zhang Heng mentioned before the patrol team arrived.

"Maybe he placed the items at his friend's place?" Zhang Heng asked.

By the time the patrol team arrived, Zhang Heng and Decius had already left Amidio's residence, leaving the messy crime scene behind them for the patrol team. They were taken aback when they saw how unkempt Amidio's residence was.

"It's bad. We don't know Amidio that well. So, we don't know which friend he chooses to trust." Decius said bitterly, "And Klaus will not help us anymore."

"It's okay. The one who should be feeling anxious now is the enemy. Now, they had killed Amidio. If that thing is with Amidio's friends, he will find a way to deliver the thing to the person that could help to avenge Amidio's death."

"Who can avenge him?" Decius asked.

"Me." Zhang Heng said, "Since the enemy doesn't want me to meet Amidio, they definitely don't want me to know who the mastermind is. So, all I have to do now is tell Amidio's friend to deliver the thing to me."

Zhang Heng waved his hand, beckoning a painter drawing an advertisement on the wall not far away from him. The latter then put down his brush and paint and walked over to Zhang Heng.

Zhang Heng asked the artist, "How much does it cost you to paint a picture?"

"One Sestertius, sir."

"I'll give you 1 Denarius." Zhang Heng threw a silver coin at the painter.

"I need you to write something on this insula's wall: Zhang Heng, the Emperor's advisor, is responsible for investigating the murder of Amidio. Please come to us for clues. Meet me at the Tiber's bank."

"That's it? It's not supposed to cost you so much." The painter received the silver coin and said.

"Just words. However, I want you to fill the walls of the building so every passing person can see it."

“No problem.” The artist accepted the large sum of money and immediately began to put in work. He put a pause to his previous job first and tried his best to complete the task given by Zhang Heng first.

“Will this be useful?” Decius looked at the big letters on the wall with doubt.

“Well, I think we should know about it tomorrow.” Zhang Heng patted Decius’s shoulder again, “Let’s stop here today, Watson. Let’s go home for dinner. After a day of running around, I need a good rest, and we will continue tomorrow.”

After being reminded by Zhang Heng, Decius remembered that his stomach was grumbling. Due to the incident that he went through earlier, he had forgotten that he was feeling hungry. And now, he realized that he had lost his appetite. With a worried look, he asked, “Do we really have to investigate this matter? We have already witnessed the death of someone. Who knows what will happen next? Will we also be targeted by the enemy?”

Zhang Heng nodded when he heard Decius’s concern, “I can’t rule out this possibility, but I am a gladiator champion, the Emperor’s adviser, and not a nobody like Amidio. It would be more difficult to kill me. Besides, they would have to face lots of trouble after they kill me. So strictly speaking, you will be in danger next. Not me.”

“...”

“But don’t worry, you are my Watson. As long as I’m still alive, it doesn’t make much sense for them to kill you.” Zhang Heng comforted.

Decius sighed again when he heard Zhang Heng’s reply, but he did not say anything more after that. In the end, he went home looking worried.

By the time he returned home, it was already over his meal hour. Decius was not the son of a first wife. Hence, he did not expect anyone to wait for him to come back for dinner. However, when he walked to the kitchen with a hungry stomach, he was told that no one had saved any food for him.

After a busy day, Decius had all but anger stored in his stomach. After that, he planned to look for the servant who cooked the dinner and vent his anger on him, but all his anger disappeared the moment he saw another person in the kitchen.

That man was an old servant dedicated to serving his brother, Nino. Decius knew immediately who the person targeting him tonight was. His mother was just a slave, and he was the product of his father’s one-night stand. In other words, his position at home had always been very awkward. He was constantly looked down on by his half-brother and mother.

Decius knew that he would be the one to suffer from this quarrel in the end. So, he did not say a word after that. He turned around and went back to his residence, where his wife bought him dinner from outside.

Decius asked his wife while eating, “Did Nino harass you again today?”

Decius’s wife hesitated and finally nodded. “It’s no big deal. All he has is his potty mouth.”

“That bastard, his good life won’t last long,” Decius sneered.

Decius's wife seemed to worry that his words would be overheard. Hence, she looked around and whispered softly, "He is your younger brother, after all. If you happen to cause some big trouble, who do you think your father will favor?"

"I don't care what the old man thinks. Anyway, I will never be a member of this family," Decius said.

"Don't say that. He is responsible for all our living expenses, and he also found you a job."

"It's only temporary." Decius hugged his wife. "But don't worry. I have found a way, and I will be able to enter the Senate soon. Then, we won't have to rely on anyone anymore."

"The Senate? But you are not his official son."

"I'm not going to rely on that old man. I have my own way of doing things," Decius said secretly, and he took his wife to the bed, "but before that, I will continue to play the useless big brother role in this family. I'm sorry that you have to suffer because of me."

"Then, how will you make it up to me?" Decius's wife bit her lip and gazed at her husband with affectionate eyes.

"I will give myself to you tonight," Decius said with a smile.

Chapter 867: Return That Thing To Me First

Decius waited until his wife fell asleep before he got up from bed and got dressed again. He gazed at his lover on the bed again as if he had made a strong determination. After that, he walked out of the room quietly.

With tiptoes through the dark front hall, he tried not to awaken the sleeping slave, waiting until he walked past the house's domus before he let out a sigh of relief. Glancing left and right, he made sure he wasn't being watched, then moved all the way to the south. However, he did not go too far since most who lived in this area were Roman upper-class nobles.

Being the most expensive area in Rome, money simply wasn't enough to buy a house here. The buyer had to have a certain status in society before a purchase could be made. Decius's family had moved here too after gaining more power. Their domus, however, was smaller than most around them.

In contrast, the place where Decius was going now was more luxurious. It indicated that the owner of this domus was quite famous in the Senate. Hence, Decius had to tidy his clothes before visiting the owner.

Before he knocked on the door, a familiar voice came from behind him.

"From a friend's standpoint, I don't recommend you doing this."

Decius was taken aback, especially when he realized whose voice it was. It almost scared him to death.

"You! When did you come here?"

"I have been here for a while now," Zhang Heng answered. "I have to say. It has a very decent environment. And I like the small fountain outside your house. It's cute."

“Why didn’t I see you just now?” Although Decius tried to appear as calm as possible, his heart thumped wildly in his chest.

“Because I don’t want to scare you. However, in the end, I almost scared you to death, I think,” Zhang Heng admitted regretfully. “It’s late. Why are you here instead of sleeping at home?”

“Uh, I’m a little... I can’t sleep. You know... lots of things happened today. That guy named Amidio still got killed right before we entered the house. I...”

“Have you never seen prisoners getting executed in the arena?” Zhang Heng asked curiously.

“I’ve seen it before, but that’s a completely different thing,” Decius said. “Besides, we might also be in danger following Amidio’s death.”

“Hmm. You carried much thought with you when you came out for a walk, and you even accidentally wandered to the aedile, Andrea’s residence,” Zhang Heng said. “It sounds reasonable to me.”

Decius was left silent after he heard what Zhang Heng said. He then raised his head and asked Zhang Heng, “Why are you here again?”

“I’m here to prevent you from doing stupid things. And I want to solve the bronze statue problem with you.”

“And how do you plan to do that?” asked Decius in surprise. “Do you know who the mastermind is?”

Zhang Heng did not answer Decius’s question. Instead, he stretched out a hand. “Give it back to me first.”

“What is it?” Decius’s heart clenched, but he still did not spill the secret.

“The necklace you stole from Amidio’s room.”

“I stole nothing... Wait...” Decius appeared to realize something all of a sudden. With widened eyes, he gasped, “You placed the necklace there on purpose?!”

“Yes. Do you now understand why I stopped you from meeting Andrea? If you had used this necklace to negotiate with her, I’m worried you’d really follow in Amidio’s footsteps,” Zhang Heng blinked and said. “The necklace is not a piece of evidence left by Amidio but, uhh... a gift from someone else. I am the one who threw it into the cracks of the bed frame.”

Since Zhang Heng lacked few good options at that time, he could only throw his game item there if he didn’t throw the necklace that Lucilla gave him.

“You set a trap for me?” Decius seemed to be in disbelief. “But when did you suspect me?”

“I didn’t set a trap for you. There are three possibilities here. The first possibility is that you did not perform Watson’s duty well enough, overlooking the necklace. If that were the case, nothing would happen after that. Second, you found the necklace, and you notified me about it. I really hoped you would have gone for that because I would’ve praised you for it. Third, our current situation: you took the necklace behind my back, and I need to stop you in time from doing anything stupid.”

Zhang Heng continued, "As for when I started to suspect you, I trusted you fully at the beginning. Your family became nobles with the support of the former Emperor, Aurelius. They have always been hardcore supporters of the royal family, so logically, you should have sided with us in this bronze statue affair. When I got to know you better, however, I discovered that your family background was rather interesting.

"Your mother was a slave, and... I must first apologize, for what comes next might come off a little harsh. Your birth was actually an accident. Your father had sex with your mother after he got drunk. After she gave birth to you, she was kicked out of the house by your father's wife. I can imagine that you didn't have a happy childhood. In fact, up until now, your position in this family is more to that of a leech. Fortunately, you have a wife who loves you dearly, and she is very considerate as well. Unfortunately, your brother is a b*stard. He harasses your wife when you are not there. So, do you really have a sense of belonging in this family?"

"Did you investigate me before you came to see me?"

Decius looked serious.

"No, I came to look for you right after I left the palace," Zhang Heng said.

"But we didn't spend much time together. When did you..."

Decius was startled as a sudden realization came to him. "At the southeast city, you said you were going to find a friend to help us to solve the ore problem. At that time, we were apart for a while..."

"Yes. You are really smarter than you seem on the outside. I know a guy. The force behind him is said to be everywhere, specializing in collecting all kinds of information. They don't just nest in the southeast city. So I asked for your background information from him," Zhang Heng said,

"And this solves my biggest doubt. Suppose the bronze statue doesn't get handed over on time, your family will undoubtedly suffer losses, especially new aristocrats like your father, who relied on Aurelius to join the Senate. Once he loses the Emperor's favor, your family will start to deteriorate. But I guess this is not bad news for you since you and your family's interests do not align."

Zhang Heng paused. "Of course, I'm not saying that you stand in a different position with your family when it comes to the copper mine incident. Strictly speaking, I started suspecting when you brought us to meet your friend, Klaus."

Chapter 868: Drag You Down

"When we went to see Klaus, did I do anything that made you suspicious of me?" Decius asked.

"No. Strictly speaking, it wasn't you. Do you remember what I did before we walked into the house?" Zhang Heng asked.

"You were looking around, looking at the people in the corridor... Oh, you saw Andrea's man," Decius said.

"I don't know who those people are, and I'm not even sure what their purpose is. But my southeast city friends told me that those guys have been following us for some time, and the murderer killed Amidio a

few minutes before we arrived. In other words, someone realized that we were about to uncover the truth. So, they hurriedly killed Amidio to prevent him from talking to us. Here comes another problem.”

“Even if they were following us, how did they know our movements so well?” asked Zhang Heng in return.

“Have you been suspecting me since then? Was that why you made something up and told me that Amidio was likely to leave evidence behind?”

“Well, this isn’t something I made up. The likelihood of something like this happening is very high,” Zhang Heng said.

“Aren’t you afraid that I’d find the evidence he left behind and hide it from you?” Decius could not help but ask.

“We were in the same room, my friend. Do you think you can hide anything from me?” Zhang Heng sighed.

Decius was rendered speechless.

“The only remaining question that bothers me now is—how deeply you involved in this matter?” Zhang Heng looked at Decius. “I’m tending to think that there’s an agreement between you and Andrea. However, your understanding of the whole thing is limited. As the situation developed, your shocked expressions didn’t seem faked—unless you are an outstanding actor, of course.”

“I think your childhood experience contributed a bit to your acting career. However, you are still not good enough to deceive me. When we saw Amidio’s body, the fear and shock you presented in front of me were real. Therefore...” Zhang Heng snapped his fingers, “...I was a little surprised that you did not hesitate to hide my necklace afterward.”

Decius finally spoke up after staying silent for a long while. “You only know me by hearsay. You don’t know what my actual life is like. If I get the opportunity to take my beloved one and leave my family, you can be sure I’ll be taking it.”

“Before you can do all that, though, you’ll be needing chips to bargain with Andrea. And why are you so sure that you won’t end up like Amidio?” Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows. “I’m also curious about the promise that Andrea made to you. How did he make you side with him?”

“He told me that as long as I don’t get involved in this matter, he would provide me with a stable and decent job when it’s all over. So that my wife and I can move out from here,” Decius explained.

“That sounds good. It’ll help if you did what he said. Leave the necklace alone, stay by my side, and continue to play the role of Watson,” Zhang Heng sincerely replied.

“But I want more. I want to achieve greatness and become a senator. When that time comes, I’ll be able to lift my head high in front of my father and that b*stard brother of mine! If that necklace is important physical evidence left behind by Amidio, I have my bargaining coin to negotiate with Andrea.”

Decius clenched his fists.

“Your courage is commendable,” Zhang Heng praised before turning around and denouncing him. “Unfortunately, you don’t have a brain.”

“...”

“Well, I probably understand your position in this matter. Let us solve the ore matter together.” Zhang Heng clapped his hands.

“Are you going to confront Andrea?” Decius asked.

“Amidio is dead. If you were Andrea, would you admit that you were the mastermind?”

“I probably won’t,” Decius said truthfully.

“Yes. Even if you and I confronted him together, he will not admit to anything. And strictly speaking, all he told you was not to be nosy. He didn’t instruct you to do anything. Besides, you just took the necklace spontaneously.”

“Then how are you going to convince him to restart the Binota Mine?”

“After knowing who the mastermind behind this whole incident is, it isn’t that hard getting the mine to resume operations. I don’t need him to admit that he did it. I just need to take advantage of his weakness. Let him have a taste of his own medicine.” Zhang Heng smiled. “It’s better that you stay oblivious to the details of the plan. You can continue fulfilling your agreement with Andrea. Don’t be nosy.”

“I... don’t quite understand.” Decius looked a little confused. “Are you not going to hold me accountable for this matter?”

“Yes. You’ve been my Watson for a while, after all. It’ll do me no good to hold you accountable,” Zhang Heng said. “Be also rest assured that even if Andrea knows that I’m going against him, I won’t make you look suspicious. But from now on, you’ll have to update me on any news you receive. I might have something for you to do later on. You want to join the Senate, right? Maybe I can help you.”

...

After knowing who the mastermind was, Zhang Heng immediately formulated a counterattack plan. But before that, there was one important thing he needed to do, and that was to make this an even more chaotic affair by dragging someone into it.

Early the next morning, Zhang Heng visited the senator, Divo Braille.

Divo Braille was still very cautious. Since he remained neutral in the Senate, he had heard about a group of people who were against the new emperor that just inherited the throne.

Hence, in adherence to his consistent attitude of not offending anyone, he welcomed Zhang Heng, the new emperor’s advisor, into his house. However, he didn’t seem too enthusiastic. They chatted for a while in the front hall, where Zhang Heng proposed that they head to the study to examine Braille’s collection. Feeling that it would be inappropriate to reject Zhang Heng’s request, Braille agreed, and the two proceeded to the study room.

Soon, Zhang Heng got bored. Hence, he took the initiative to say goodbye to Divo Braille.

Divo Braille was relieved. He then sent Zhang Heng to the front hall and watched him leave his domus.

Zhang Heng headed straight to Cobb's residence on the city's outskirts, spending a long time there. It made Andrea, who had been secretly monitoring Zhang Heng's whereabouts, very nervous. He knew that Divo Braille was Cobb's largest buyer.

Earlier, he had asked Amidio to negotiate with Cobb. He was willing to help Cobb pay the liquidated damages of the mine, and in addition to that, pay an additional sum of money to Cobb. However, the mine was only a small part of Cobb's business. His main income source was still his farm. If Divo Braille got involved and used his identity as the largest buyer to pressure Cobb, Cobb would probably reveal the contents of all his transactions.

But Andrea still did not think that he was doomed. After all, the cunning Divo Braille had stayed neutral for a long time. It'd made no sense for him to stick his nose into this matter suddenly. Of course, Andrea was not afraid of Divo Braille. After all, Andrea was just an executor that worked for someone even more powerful. Otherwise, Andrea, a small aedile, would never dare to challenge the emperor.

And Divo Braille would not transgress them either. Otherwise, from tonight, he'd be clutching Commodus's thigh tightly. Andrea thought perhaps Zhang Heng was just trying to scare him.

Another day passed, and Andrea received bad news. Last night, the sewer pipe in the area under his jurisdiction had been damaged by an unknown person.

Chapter 869: I'm Not Close To Him

The aedile originated in the Roman Republic. At first, this position could only be held by the civilians. They were mainly responsible for the maintenance of the temple and the management of the archives. Later, with the development of society, the nobles could also work as an aedile. And at the same time, the power and responsibilities of an aedile had gone through some changes.

From managing the archives and maintaining temples to being responsible for the city's municipal administration, they maintained public facilities and even did public security work. In the republican era, the aedile was not paid. Often, they had to dig into their own pockets to pay for certain items. Like Caesar, he used to be an aedile. He ended up bankrupting himself, racking up considerable debt and was even prevented from leaving Rome by the loan sharks.

Of course, Caesar was no fool. He would not do something that was not going to benefit him.

Working as an aedile was one of the most effective ways to gain public favor and political capital. For example, if you built a road for everyone with your own money, it was only logical that they would be grateful to you. Caesar had accumulated a considerable reputation during his tenure as aedile, and it was all done with the help of his money. So, it was not difficult to understand why Caesar went bankrupt at that time.

Other than that, becoming an aedile would pave the road for the person to become a financial officer and magistrate in the future. Although it wasn't mandatory for someone to be an aedile before they could become a financial officer or a magistrate, most financial officers and magistrates, according to statistics, had worked their way up from an aedile. It was simply how the politics of that era worked.

Andrea had served as an aedile for three years, and this year, he was expected to be promoted to financial officer. At this most critical juncture, he certainly did not want to make any mistakes. Hence, when he heard that the sewer pipe was damaged, he quickly rushed to the scene as soon as he could. The good news was that the damage was not severe, and it could be repaired within two days. The bad news was that if he did not want this matter to taint his career, he would need to pay for the repairs.

Of course, he could afford the fees, but the problem was that Andrea did not know who damaged the sewer pipe or whether the group of people would continue to damage it after it was fixed. As an aedile, he could mobilize some of his men to keep an eye, but the area he was responsible for was huge—almost half of the city. It would be impossible to get his people to guard every section of the sewers. It was a stupid thing to do. Besides the sewer, there were many public facilities in the city.

What Andrea worried about the most was that someone might be targeting him. If that were the case, his enemies would have plenty of options to mess with him. And it would be impossible to guard all of them. Right now, Andrea faced the same problem Zhang Heng was facing. He needed to find out who the mastermind was before formulating a strategy to overcome this problem.

So, Andrea spent the entire afternoon making a list of people he might have offended. And he found the recently famous Oriental man to be at the top of his list. Besides, Zhang Heng had just visited Divo Braille yesterday. He then proceeded to Cobb's residence right after that. Andrea had no choice but to begin to accept that whatever he did to the mine had now been exposed.

And the way the enemy was opposing him seemed familiar, just like the situation in the Binota mine.

Would the cunning Divo Braille start to take a side?

Earlier, Andrea had only suspected Zhang Heng. After receiving the "secret report" from Decius, he was 70% confident that his guesses were right. Decius had told him that Zhang Heng did not ask him to tag along when he looked for Divo Braille. Before leaving, he even told him that it was better that a nobody like him didn't participate in such an event.

This was also the real reason why Andrea felt that Divo Braille had betrayed him. With the way the cunning Divo Braille usually worked, he would never want to attract too much attention if he ever colluded with Zhang Heng. Everyone knew that he would gain more if he kicked Decius aside.

It appeared that an opportunity to confirm his conjecture further had presented itself. In the afternoon, Zhang Heng came to his domus.

Zhang Heng was no longer what he used to be. Instead of entertaining others with his life as an arena gladiator, he was appointed to become Commodus's advisor. In other words, he had now stepped into the world where most of the powerful politicians nestled. Even if the two were enemies, Andrea had to let Zhang Heng enter his domus.

Initially, Andrea wanted to have a quick chat with him. He did not expect Zhang Heng to speak first.

"Shall we go to your study?"

Andrea subconsciously wanted to say no, but he suddenly remembered that someone had damaged the sewer pipe. So, he eventually agreed to Zhang Heng's request.

The two soon came to Andrea's study. Andrea then closed the door. They were the only people in the study room. After a while, Andrea spoke first, breaking the silence. "So, to what do I owe the pleasure of your visit?"

"Oh, I heard an accident happened to the sewer pipes not long ago. I was shocked at how awful it was. I happened to be passing by your domus, and I wanted to see if I could offer my help."

Before Andrea asked Zhang Heng to take a seat, Zhang Heng pulled the chair out and sat down.

"Advisor Zhang Heng, you are too kind." Something was flashing in Andrea's eyes. He then said coldly, "My people have total control of the situation, and I believe it will be fixed soon. There is nothing for you to help."

"That's good. I came to Rome not long ago. Two months ago, I was just a gladiator. There are so many things for me to study every day... So, if I make any future mistake, I hope you can forgive me." Zhang Heng paused and continued, "A friend told me that it is not too complicated to gain a foothold in Rome's political ground. Just get one thing done, and I'll be able to gain a friend. If today your friend comes across trouble, and you extend your helping hand to him, my friend will naturally lend me his when I'm in a rut myself."

"What are you trying to say here?" Andrea frowned.

"I'm working hard to make friends, as he said." Zhang Heng spread his hands. "You should also know that I am now in charge of the casting of the bronze statue, but I'm encountering a little problem right now. The Binota Mine happens to have collapsed, and our ore supply is cut off. Work there has been suspended for some time now. I want to resume the work as soon as possible."

Zhang Heng looked at Andrea's eyes as he spoke.

Andrea then sneered, "What does this matter have to do with me? Besides, don't you already have friends? Let Divo Braille help you."

"I didn't say you have anything to do with this. As for Divo Braille, I am not too close to him. I went to look for him yesterday, but he refused to help me." Zhang Heng shook his head. "So I could only come to you and try my luck here."

Andrea almost yelled at Zhang Heng when he heard what he said. At this point, Zhang Heng still refused to acknowledge his relationship with Divo Braille. Without Divo Braille's help, how could he have come to his domus the very next day?

Previously, Andrea had only suspected Divo Braille's involvement in this matter. Now, he firmly believed that Divo Braille had indeed picked a side after Zhang Heng denied his relationship with him. It was also because he could sense that Zhang Heng possessed Divo Braille's unique aura, where he dared not admit whatever he did. And at the same time, he did want to offend anyone too.

Chapter 870: Reward

"If Divo Braille is unwilling to help you, what makes you think I would?" Andrea asked coldly.

"You know, after I was free from the arena, I joined the patrol team in the southeast city for a period of time. I've investigated far too many criminal cases. According to my accumulated experience, cases like

vandalizing public facilities would surely happen more than once. And the next time, I'm afraid you won't be getting it repaired in a day or two."

Andrea felt a chill when he heard what Zhang Heng said, knowing that he was being threatened. Just as he would never admit his connections with the Binota Mine, Zhang Heng would never admit that the damage to the sewer pipe was related to him. So, he gave Andrea a fair reminder.

Andrea knew what Zhang Heng was trying to tell him, though. If the Binota Mine problem could not be resolved, Andrea would never get his peace as an aedile. And this was the critical time for him to be promoted to financial officer. Even if he had political allies propping him up, he would still lose the support of the people if he did not do his job well.

And once he lost the support of the people, no matter how powerful his political allies were, they wouldn't be assisting his promotion to become a financial officer.

Andrea knew at that time that Zhang Heng had gotten a hold of his weakness. As of now, he had two options to choose from. He could insist on sticking to his original plan. If he did that, Zhang Heng would never complete his task. However, he might lose his entire political career. There were more than a person or two who were against Commodus now. Although everyone was secretly fighting the emperor, each person had their own agenda.

Some people wished that they could control the young emperor to gain more power, and some wanted to show Commodus that they were not afraid of him. Some adopted the soft and hard approach, ensuring that they could keep their existing power. Then there were some who wanted to complicate the situation and take advantage.

As for Andrea, he chose this side so he could cozy up to certain core political figures and benefit from them. At the same time, he weighed the pros and cons of his decision. For now, if he insisted on following his plan, his personal interests would be greatly affected. Hence, being so stubborn was simply meaningless.

On that account, Andrea could only choose the second option. He responded after a moment of silence. "You don't have to worry about the mine. I heard that the accident wasn't that serious. Another one or two... no. They can resume work today."

"Very well." Zhang Heng nodded and said, "I know some people from the patrol team. I can ask them to keep an eye on the sewer pipe. If someone dares to do damage it, we will help you to catch the culprit."

"Thanks for your hard work." Andrea gritted his teeth and muttered a thanks.

And Zhang Heng pretended that he did not hear the man grinding his teeth. Instead, he laughed and said, "I'm glad we finally reached a consensus so that the matter can be resolved peacefully. I won't bother you anymore. After this, I'm going to tell Decius the good news. Since the mine can resume operations tonight, I believe he will want to gather the craftsmen in advance."

After Zhang Heng finished speaking, he got up from his seat. "We have lost a lot of time. It's time for us to hasten the pace if we still want to meet the dateline."

Andrea struggled for a moment, finally reaching out his hand before Zhang Heng left. "I've seen your heroic appearance in the arena, but I didn't expect you to play so well in the political world too. If someone looks down on you in the future, I believe they will surely regret it."

Zhang Heng discarded his aggressive manner too and shook hands with Andrea. "I am also amazed by the importance of the public facilities to you. I believe you will become a financial officer smoothly."

...

It only took three days for Zhang Heng to restart the construction of the bronze statue, which had been suspended for a long time. And finally, the works were all completed before the deadline.

Fifty-two freshly-made Commodus bronze statues stood out in an open space on the outskirts of Rome. The rising sun plated the statues with a golden coat. The young emperor, accompanied by his wife, reviewed the bronze statues, and he was pleased that each one looked as majestic as they stood. The statues looked just like him.

When these statues were transported to various provinces, especially the more remote ones, the people from there would have a chance to admire the emperor's likeness.

"You did an excellent job. Once again, you perfectly completed the task I gave you. You will never let me down, won't you?" Commodus then patted Zhang Heng on the shoulder and looked at his wife. "What kind of reward do you think I should give him?"

"It's my responsibility to complete all tasks you ask of me, Your Majesty." Zhang Heng bowed slightly.

"It is also my responsibility as the emperor to reward those who do well," Commodus responded wittily.

Queen Christina thought for a while, and she said, "I heard from Lucilla that you still perform in the Victor Arena. That means you shouldn't be short of money. Since you used to be a gladiator, I don't think you need any slaves at home. However, you don't have a wife yet."

Commodus's eyes suddenly lit up when he heard that. Helping someone to pick a partner was a skill set all emperors possessed.

Zhang Heng was also taken aback and hurriedly spoke before Commodus said something, "...I actually have a lover."

"Oh, is it? Which girl?" Queen Christina was curious.

"She's a spectator of my shows, and she is a civilian. We have been engaged in a private relationship for a while now." In order to prevent Commodus and his wife from finding him a wife, Zhang Heng had to make up a love affair spontaneously.

Christina wanted to ask more questions, but she noticed the impatient look on her husband's face. Hence, she hurriedly suppressed her curiosity and returned to the elegant posture a queen should have had.

Commodus then continued, "I heard that you now live by the Tiber River. The scenery there is good, but it is too far away from the palace. Sometimes I need my advisor by my side as quickly as possible. And

you are renting a house. If you want to integrate into this city fully, you need to have your own house. Since this is the case, I will give you a domus.”

“That’ll be too expensive, Your Majesty,” Zhang Heng said.

“No, this is what you deserve. You did a good job with the southeast city. Working as an advisor is your job, but it is not a reward. Strictly speaking, the house is not a reward too. I’m just giving you a place to stay. Later on, I will pick a fief and reward you,” Commodus said happily, “However, all the fiefs near the city of Rome are now occupied by others. There are still lots of fiefs in the local province, but they are too remote. You will have to find someone to take care of it for you. I will pick a fief for you afterward.”

Zhang Heng had to admit that although future historians portrayed Commodus as a worthless, bad-habited emperor with—and he died in an extremely embarrassing as well—the young emperor standing before Zhang Heng did treat his men quite well, for now, at least.

Zhang Heng was actually thinking about finding a fief for himself. Once he was given one, it would mean he’d be completely separated from the plebians and became a nobleman. Considering that he had freed himself from slavery only four months ago, the speed of him being promoted was almost like riding a rocket.