

48 Hours 871

Chapter 871: New Domus And Visitor

“Wow, is this our new home?” The slave girl ran into the new house excitedly.

“No, it’s my new home. You are just staying here temporarily,” Zhang Heng said.

“Hmph! Stingy!”

“...”

The Domus given to Zhang Heng by Commodus was not in the area where Decius’s family lived, but it was a well-known upmarket area in Rome. And, as Commodus said, it was closer to the palace and more convenient for Zhang Heng to travel there from his residence.

Since Zhang Heng was the only person that lived in the domus, Commodus did not give him a house with large space. Even so, it was about the same size as Mark Reuss’s domus, especially the large and well-lit front hall. There was also a long and narrow rain-collecting pond. The domus was also fully furnished as well. Lastly, Commodus sent Zhang Heng two servants to help him upkeep the house.

The slave girl was immersed in the joy of moving to a new house. She ran around the courtyard and touched everything she could touch. On the other hand, Zhang Heng asked the two servants to move the luggage into the house. He then turned around, walked into the study room, and took out two bottles of wine from the cabinet before pouring himself a glass.

After solving the mine problem, he could finally relax. With Decius keeping an eye on the project, he did not need to go there every day to monitor its progress. Other than the monthly gladiatorial performance, he would occasionally return to the Southeast District to deal with the problems Soap and Marcus couldn’t solve. After that, he would spend the rest of his time digesting the assassin skills Dadatis had taught him.

Now that his assassin skills had been upgraded to Lv2, it meant he had almost reached the threshold of a first-class assassin. Coupled with Kreis’ Heart, an item known as the perfect assassin’s costume, Zhang Heng’s true strength in an assassin was close to the top assassins in the world. Once he digested everything that Dadatis taught him, he needed to accumulate experience like his assassin counterparts and polish his skills to improve as an assassin.

He had a shortcut, however.

And that was the Assassin’s Library of the Balanced Blade. It housed various assassin classics since the establishment of the Balanced Blade. If he could stay in the library for some time, he was confident that he could further improve his assassination skills. He had even reached an agreement with the priestess—after he killed Altrus, he would be granted access to the library.

Currently, this was Zhang Heng’s main goal. On the other hand, being close to Commodus also meant that he could get in touch with people from the royal guards and start investigating who had actually hired an assassin to murder him.

This problem had Zhang Heng very concerned. Enemies that were hiding behind curtains were usually the most dangerous. His rise to fame had been too quick. It was only normal that someone got jealous.

And Zhang Heng also realized that he had offended a number of people. Nobody in this world hated him to the point they wanted him to disappear except for the bosses of several small gangs he had previously eliminated.

Typically, it was hard for this type of people to come into contact with the royal guards. In other words, there was no other suspect on his list for now.

From a motive standpoint, Zhang Heng could not find a reason for anyone to kill him. He also knew that, at times, the murderer didn't necessarily have a reason to eliminate their targets. Some serial killers, for instance, had psychological issues, while others would kill by impulse. Looking for the individual that wanted to assassinate him would be a gargantuan task.

The only clue that Zhang Heng had now was the portrait. It appeared that he would need to meet the royal guards later on.

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At the same time, Zhang Heng did not expect his first guest to be Lucilla after moving to his new domus.

From the time the two first met, Zhang Heng did not want to get too close to the woman that possessed the intention to kill her brother. According to historical records, it took two years for her to assassinate her brother. By then, Zhang Heng would've already left this dungeon. After coming in touch with Lucilla, he realized how crazy she could get at times, frequently executing her actions in defiance of common sense. Since he could never figure out what she would do next, it was best he kept his distance from her.

If it were someone else, Zhang Heng would have warned her not to get too close to him. However, Lucilla had an outstanding status in Rome. Even her husband was required to treat her respectfully. Not one person in the entire empire could hold her down except for Commodus. Although she crossed the line sometimes, most people turned a blind eye to her. And just like the others, Zhang Heng couldn't refuse her request as well.

Therefore, in return for receiving the necklace, Zhang Heng gave her and Queen Christina a ticket to his gladiatorial show as promised.

Unsurprisingly, Queen Christina declined the invitation. It was something that Zhang Heng expected. Christina grew up in a prestigious family, after all, and special attention had to be paid to manners and character. She was also now married to Commodus and had become a queen. Hence, she had to make sure that she acted like a queen. She could no longer go crazy as she liked and did all those things she wished.

As for Lucilla, she was very interested in Zhang Heng's gladiatorial performance. So, she accepted the ticket. However, she did not show up on that day. Mark Reuss was left in an awkward spot since he had prepared a welcome speech for her.

After that incident, Zhang Heng thought that Lucilla's enthusiasm for him had faded, but he did not expect that the woman would suddenly show herself in front of him after disappearing for two months.

Lucilla did not inform him before she came over. She walked into the domus just like that. And she also encountered the same obstacles as her brother visited Zhang Heng for the first time. The excited slave girl stopped her.

Lucilla wasn't as nice as her brother, though. She signaled the guard behind her with her eyes. With a solemn face, the tall knight walked toward the slave girl.

The slave girl suddenly became very nervous. There was just too much of a difference between her height and size compared to the knight. To her, Lucilla's guard was like a small hill. However, this was her home, and she was half-master. So, this time, she insisted on not taking a step back.

That was how the slave girl thought, but she did not expect her subconscious to force her to retreat. After that, Zhang Heng came out of the study room and picked her up by her collar. He then put the terrified girl down behind him while nodding at Lucilla.

"Augusta."

"Just call me Lucilla."

Lucilla smiled at Zhang Heng and waved at her guard as if she had done nothing to the slave girl before Zhang Heng came out of the study room.

Of course, Zhang Heng wasn't expecting Lucilla to admit her mistake. He simply asked the aggrieved slave girl to go to the second floor before asking, "To what do I owe this pleasure, Augusta?"

"Call me Lucilla. I don't want to repeat it the third time." Lucilla still wore her smile. "You men are such unsympathetic animals. You haven't seen me for so long. I would've forgiven you if you told me you didn't miss me, but how dare you ask me why I came looking for you?"

"..."

Zhang Heng did not know how to answer the question. So, he chose to maintain his silence.

Chapter 872: Banquet

Fortunately, Lucilla did not dwell on the previous conversation. She looked around, nodded, and said, "This is a good place. My brother seems to value you a lot."

"His Majesty graciously rewards those who have helped him and rightly punishes those who go against him. He has always treated his men well," Zhang Heng said.

Lucilla smiled nonchalantly when she heard what Zhang Heng said. "I heard you are the first to solve the public security problem in the southeast city. And right after that, you made sure that the bronze statues were delivered on time. I believe that these two achievements made my brother really happy."

"It's all part of my job."

"Let's put aside the fact that this is your job. I have to admit that you are indeed quite capable. I wonder why you keep trying to avoid me." Lucy paused. "You know who I am, and I can give you something my brother can never give."

Zhang Heng remained silent.

"Do you know what I'm most curious about?" Lucilla continued.

"I appreciate further details."

“You approached my brother to gain more power. You don’t have to deny that. That night at Senator Dior’s domus, you deliberately provoked Sartonilos to attract Commodus’s attention. At one point, I thought that you were no different from the others. But what’s interesting is that you have no intention to get close to me. If you become my friend, there is no doubt that it will be useful to your political career. But you don’t seem to think so?”

A glint flashed in Lucilla’s eyes, “Either I am that ugly that it makes you sick, or I’ve misjudged you from the beginning. You are not simply approaching my brother to gain more power. It seems like you have another agenda in your mind.”

Zhang Heng’s heart clenched when he heard what she said. He did not expect that this seemingly unreliable woman would have such extraordinary observation skills. Indeed, Lucilla had asked the right questions this time.

If Zhang Heng had indeed approached Commodus to gain more power, he would have worked hard to gain Lucilla’s adoration as well. The real reason why Zhang Heng approached Commodus was that he wanted to know Altrus’ whereabouts. And Lucilla had nothing to do with Altrus. Hence, Zhang Heng had no reason to please her.

Fortunately, Zhang Heng’s advantage in understanding history could be brought into play at this time.

After a moment of silence, Zhang Heng said, “Your beauty is distinguished across the land of Rome. And no man can reject your invitation... I didn’t dare to approach you because I heard rumors that your relationship with his majesty is not as good as everyone thinks.”

Lucilla raised her eyebrows. She was a little surprised, “Who told you about that?”

Zhang Heng shut his mouth, making it clear that he did not want to answer this question.

Not wanting to delve into it, Lucilla put away the smile on her face and said casually, “Since you have entered this power circle, you should know that unverified rumors are something that will always be around. These rumors are the weapons politicians use to attack each other. I’m the only remaining blood relative of Commodus. How could I go against my only brother? Commodus’s real enemy is the one souring our relationship.”

Zhang Heng bowed, “I have learned my lesson here. I am the emperor’s advisor, after all. I have to maintain my loyalty to his majesty no matter what, even if unpleasant rumors circulate me...”

Lucilla interrupted impatiently without waiting for Zhang Heng to finish his sentence. “You are a conscientious man. I’m overjoyed that my brother has finally found a decent person to work with. He needs an undespicable person to lessen his burden. If that’s the case, I won’t interrupt you putting on a show with your loyalty.”

Zhang Heng took out the necklace that Lucilla gave him some time ago.

“Keep it. I don’t lack jewelry. Besides, I do not take back items I gave out.”

After Lucilla finished speaking, she seemed to have lost her interest in Zhang Heng. She turned and walked out of the front hall with her guard. Zhang Heng followed her and respectfully sent Lucilla out of

the door and waited for her to leave. When she got to the street, she stopped again, turned to Zhang Heng, and said, "Don't think that no one knows what you are doing. I will keep my eyes on you."

Zhang Heng frowned, wondering what Lucilla meant. At the same time, the latter had already gotten into her carriage.

And the slave girl ran down from the second floor when she saw that everyone had gone.

"Is she the emperor's sister? She doesn't look like a nice person."

"What makes you say that? Is it because she ordered her guard to get rid of you?" Zhang Heng asked.

"Also, what did I tell you about blocking people from entering the house? You don't even know who the person is."

"I can't be letting people into our house as they please, can I?!" the slave girl replied angrily.

"It's my home. I don't mind. You don't have to get angry. If a similar thing happens again, ask the servant to deal with them. If you can't stop them, just let them come into the house. Don't go and stick your nose into their business."

"Okay."

Seeing that the slave girl was still a little unhappy, Zhang Heng took out a gold coin, gave it to her, and said, "Go to the tailor's shop and bring back the clothes I ordered. I will wear it for the evening dinner later. By the way, use the rest of the money to get yourself a set."

"Are you going to the palace to attend the dinner party?"

Making the slave girl happy again was a breeze. She immediately felt better once she received the coin. Zhang Heng had recently discovered that the slave girl liked money a lot.

"Yes. I'm going to the palace to attend dinner later. I have worked as an advisor for a while now, but I have not met most of my colleagues. It's time for me to meet them," Zhang Heng said casually.

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Lucilla's visit was an expected event. Zhang Heng needed to attend the upcoming dinner. It was the banquet that Commodus had dedicated to him, welcoming him into his small political group. According to Commodus, his advisers and other hardcore supporters would be there tonight as well.

Of course, what Zhang Heng cared about most was Altrus. He had never seen him before. Zhang Heng could have killed Altrus at the dinner party, but he promised the priestess that he would hand him over to her for a while before he killed him.

Since this was the case, he wouldn't be able to kill him at the banquet. Besides, if Altrus died there, he would get into trouble as well. Although Zhang Heng was confident that he could make the death look like an accident, he would look as if he had something to do with Altrus' death since he was the main protagonist of the night.

Hence, Zhang Heng decided to put a temporary hold on his plan and use this opportunity to get to know Altrus a little more. He would look for chances afterward to eliminate him. And he had to make sure that no one would suspect him.

Chapter 873: Make Rome Great Again

Zhang Heng rushed to the palace before dark. And now he got closer to the guards outside the palace. They knew that he was someone that the emperor valued. So, they no longer stopped him when they saw him entering the palace.

However, it would be better if Zhang Heng was given access to a secret passage that led directly to Commodus's study room, like Altrus. Unfortunately, he realized it would be something he would never get.

Commodus's trust in Altrus had reached a level that no one could match, greatly surpassing the relationship between the emperor and an advisor.

From this standpoint, Zhang Heng could understand why the Balance Blade, which had considerable political resources, had to eliminate Altrus. Other than assassinating him, there was no other way for them to separate him from Commodus.

At the same time, Zhang Heng became a little curious about which side the Balance Blade was on. Killing Altrus would surely weaken the emperor's influence and leave Commodus no one to rely on. Perhaps they did not want Altrus to continue bewitching Commodus.

This matter had nothing to do with Zhang Heng. He was simply thinking about it while traveling in the carriage. After that, he handed his Persian short swords to the maid beside him and followed another maid into the palace.

The hall was already filled to the brim with people. However, Commodus was not there yet. Zhang Heng, too, hadn't seen anyone that remotely resembled Altrus. On the other hand, Clint had arrived early and was walking through the crowd. Zhang Heng could see that he was quite popular among his peers. Everyone seemed to respect him a lot. When Clint saw Zhang Heng, he gave the young man he was talking to a pat on his back and walked over to Zhang Heng.

"Welcome, I heard about the mine. You handled it very well. The batch of bronze statues was delivered as scheduled," said Clint before lowering his voice. "Did you find out who the mastermind was?"

Zhang Heng shook his head, "I have no idea as well. I asked Senator Divo Braille, hoping he could provide me with some help. Unfortunately, he refused to help me. Anyway, the matter was resolved afterward."

"Divo Braille?" Clint raised his eyebrows, "That cunning old fox! It's not surprising that he refused to help you. That man would always stay neutral because he doesn't want to offend anyone. However, why did he secretly help you in the end? Could he have done it in good faith?"

Clint seemed a little baffled.

"I heard that you encountered some troubles recently." After Zhang Heng realized that he had drawn Clint's attention to Divo Braille, he quickly changed the topic.

“Oh, someone wanted to interfere with the introduction of the new copper coin. I killed some of them. After that, the rest of the people began to fall in line obediently,” Clint said with disapproval. “Some people in the Senate are living so comfortably that they have forgotten who grants them their power. His Majesty’s father was too tolerant of the Senate when he was still on the throne. And some of them are way over their heads now. We need to change the way they work. If I’m right, I believe that will be our next task.”

Clint had inadvertently revealed some of his plans to Zhang Heng. It was his way to gain political allies. The two chatted for a while before Clint stopped talking about politics. He then started to talk about the food, the drinks, and enjoying himself. He recommended several famous restaurants in Rome to Zhang Heng. Writing it down, Zhang Heng planned to take the slave girl to those places. This was his only chance to dine at Roman eateries of the second century. He also wanted to know if he could gain any points from it.

After a while, Commodus finally walked into the hall.

The crowd stopped talking and paid their respects to the young emperor. The latter seemed to be in a good mood tonight. He waved his hands and chirped, “The purpose of our banquet tonight is to welcome a new friend! There are no outsiders here, so you are free to loosen yourselves.”

After speaking, he looked at Zhang Heng.

Upon seeing this, Zhang Heng walked toward Commodus. The young emperor immediately put his hand on his shoulders. He then said with great enthusiasm, “Next, I will introduce my new advisor! I believe you are quite familiar with him. The entire city of Rome knows his name! He makes all the women go crazy for him! He was the champion of the Amphitheatrum Flavium, and he can defeat a bison empty-handed! He is Zhang Heng from another far-eastern empire!”

Commodus deliberately raised volume when he said Zhang Heng’s name, and a festive round of applause rumbled through the banquet hall.

As the applause died down, Commodus continued, “I’m betting that all of you here combined may not be enough to defeat Zhang Heng. Never for a second should you think that he is simply a man that knows only violence to solve problems. In fact, his wisdom amazes me. All of you here know about the southeastern city. The public security problem there has existed for at least a century or two. Countless emperors have attempted to improve the area, but none have yielded any result. And indeed, most believe that the area no longer has hope. Zhang Heng spent only two months there, and he greatly improved the security situation. Compared to his combat skills, his intelligence is more valuable to me. My father told me constantly that the brain is always better than the sword.”

Everyone nodded when they heard the emperor’s speech.

Commodus took two glasses of wine from the waiter, gave one of them to Zhang Heng, and raised the glass in his hand. “Let’s pay our respects to this mystical oriental man who will never let us down! Let’s welcome him to join us. Let us all make Rome greater together!”

When he heard that, Zhang Heng raised his glass too and said, “His Majesty; under your leadership, Rome will be filled with glory!”

“To our emperor and Zhang Heng, our new friend!” everyone toasted and hollered.

After that, Commodus asked Clint to take Zhang Heng to meet the people that attended the banquet.

Zhang Heng then shook hands with the guests one by one. As Clint continued introducing the guests, his heart gradually sank because he discovered that Altrus was not there.

Almost all of Commodus’s men were there tonight, except for the mysterious Altrus.

This also meant that Zhang Heng’s previous plan was now nullified. He realized that he wouldn’t be approaching Altrus anytime soon.

If Altrus was so cautious that he even refused to attend a banquet his colleagues attended, it meant that no one else could see him except for Commodus. The difficulty of assassinating him would become very high, not to mention that Zhang Heng needed to hand him over to the priestess for some time before he got to kill him.

After that, Zhang Heng did not bother making any new friends. He had a different purpose from everyone here. After all, he was just a passer-by in Rome during the second century AD. It would be pointless for him even if he were promoted to Clint’s position.

Chapter 874: Surprise Meetup

The banquet ended in a relaxed and happy mood. Only halfway through the function, Commodus had already made a move. Zhang Heng wanted to leave as well, but considering the personality he had created for himself, he had to wait until the end of the banquet before he could leave the place. Lucilla’s visit this afternoon also reminded him that as he became more and more famous, more people would be paying attention to him now.

It was crucial that someone like him attended such an evening banquet. It allowed him to exchange conversation and make friends with powerful political allies. If Zhang Heng wanted to maintain his power-hungry persona, it would be unwise for him to leave too early.

Although Zhang Heng was not interested in socializing, he had to pretend that he was fond of talking to them.

He did not remember how many glasses of wine he drank that night. The Roman nobles liked to drink their wine with lead glasses. Besides, red lead could effectively reduce the sourness in wine. Other than that, the water containers that supplied the water to everywhere in the city were made of ceramic and lead. Smaller items like tableware, kitchen utensils, jewelry, and cosmetics contained lead, not to mention that Roman ladies liked lipstick that contained lead or cinnabar (red mercury sulfide).

It was not hard to understand why the Roman nobles found it difficult to bear children. Zhang Heng was not bothered by it, though, considering he would only be in this dungeon for a year and a half. When he returned to the real world, his physical state would be restored to the state before he entered the dungeon.

So, in theory, as long as Zhang Heng did not drink himself to death within a year and a half, chronic lead poisoning was not a big deal to him. However, he suddenly felt dizzy when he was drinking a glass of wine with a young man.

An ordinary person would have thought that Zhang Heng might have consumed too much alcohol that night. However, for a well-trained assassin like Zhang Heng, it was easy for him to realize something wrong with the wine. Not to mention that when Zhang Heng met Dadatis not too long ago, the latter used the same method to doze him off. That was why Zhang Heng was extra cautious when he encountered a similar situation.

Hence, he reacted immediately after taking the first sip. He saw a honey pot and vomited the rest of the wine in his mouth. After that, Zhang Heng pretended that he was drunk and dropped the honey pot on the ground. Immediately, a maid went over to clean up the shattered pieces.

The other maid who helped Zhang Heng up said, "His Majesty mentioned that if you are drunk, you can rest in the room upstairs."

Zhang Heng mumbled a few vague words. Although he vomited most of the wine, he could still feel that the small sip he took had started to take effect. Not only did he become dizzy, but his breathing began to accelerate as well. His pupils became dilated. Fortunately, Zhang Heng could still manage to control himself. He figured that he had around 80% of his strength left. If he drank all of the wine in the cup, he would have lost all his mobility, and others could do whatever they want to him. Now, he still had enough strength to protect himself, at least.

Zhang Heng was a little surprised at the beginning because he was at the royal palace. And it was probably the most difficult place for someone to poison others. Not to mention that many guests attended the banquet tonight. Now it seemed like he was the only victim, which meant that the person that poisoned him had control over the maids. And the person had also prepared a room for him.

In other words, Commodus probably knew about it. Even if he did not know anything, it seemed he wasn't opposing it from happening. Since Zhang Heng had already known who did this to him, he actually felt relieved.

The maid helped him to get to the room upstairs. Unlike the magnificent banquet hall below, the room was empty, with only two chairs facing each other. The maid put Zhang Heng on one of the chairs, then turned on the light and walked out.

Zhang Heng immediately closed his eyes. He made use of the time he had to feel the state of his body and analyzed what he had consumed earlier. With that, he would be able to act like he had drunk the entire glass of wine.

Before coming into this dungeon, Zhang Heng possessed the Lv1 herbalism skills. Other than that, Dadatis also taught him a thing or two about poisons. Judging by how his body reacted after taking a sip, Zhang Heng figured that his glass of wine most likely contained Scopolia.

The ordinary person might not know what Scopolia was, but most people should have heard of the name "Truth Serum."

The original Truth Serum was discovered by an obstetrician. It was used to reduce the pain of the parturient women. He injected some alkaloids extracted from scopolamine into the parturient women's bodies. After that, with no opposition whatsoever, the parturient women would subconsciously answer all the questions truthfully. There was also a precedent for using Scopolia to treat mental illness and relieve pain for Chinese medicine.

Scopolia affected the respiratory center, causing those who had consumed to have dilated pupils and a significant inhibitory effect on the cerebral cortex. It matched Zhang Heng's previous body response. The smell of it was covered by something else. Luckily, the tingling sensation on his tongue would not deceive him. In addition, Scopolia itself was highly toxic. Logically speaking, if one directly consumed Scopolia to achieve the Truth Serum's effect, the dosage should be enough to kill them. However, Zhang Heng's sixth sense told him that drinking the entire glass of wine should not be enough to poison him.

In other words, the other person's purpose was not to take his life. The culprit had somehow found a way to eliminate the poison.

The above was the information Zhang Heng got during this period of time.

After that, he heard someone calling his name.

Zhang Heng then opened his eyes, but he did not see anyone sitting on the opposite chair. The voice came from behind him.

"Don't worry. I just want to ask you a few questions," the person behind him said.

"Who are you? What's wrong with me?" Zhang Heng muttered. He tried, but he could not seem to turn his neck.

"You drank too much wine. I think you should take a good rest. Don't worry. I will take care of you. As for me, you should have heard of my name before. I am Altrus. Just like you, we are the emperor's advisors."

"You are Altrus, the mysterious man that everyone talks about? You have never shown your face to anyone before."

Altrus smiled when he heard what Zhang Heng said. He did not seem to be bothered by Zhang Heng's offensive comments. He then responded, "Yes, I know about what others are talking about me. I don't care. Both you and I are the advisors. We should know that our work serves the emperor. As long as the emperor trusts us, the opinions of others are not important."

Altrus paused and then said, "Well, enough chit-chat. Let's get to the topic."

"What's the topic?"

"As I said, I want to ask you some questions. You just have to answer me truthfully. Let's start with the southeast city. You have done a beautiful job there, but I want to know what agreement you made with the Jewish gang? I know Lockheed is not afraid of us sending one-thousand imperial guards over there. So, I want to know what you promised Lockheed. Did you promise him that he could run the place without the interference of the higher authority or something else?"

Lockheed's desire to get rid of senator Divo Braille was supposed to be classified. Only the four people present at the time knew that Lockheed had made Zhang Heng swear that he would never tell anyone. Otherwise, with Divo Braille's power, he would cause a lot of trouble to the southeast city.

Initially, Zhang Heng wanted to make up a lie to deal with Altrus, but in the next moment, he suddenly remembered what Lucilla said to him before he left. At the time, it sounded like a threat that came from

her frustration. Especially the first half of the threat, she told Zhang Heng that some people knew what he was up to.

But now Zhang Heng suddenly realized that Lucilla was probably reminding him, especially since a man from the Beehive called Cornu was also there. And Zhang Heng did not know whether he was someone from the Hounds or Balance Blade.

Zhang Heng realized that he had to make a choice here. If Altrus was testing him with this question and he answered incorrectly, Altrus might soon discover that Truth Serum was not working. After a moment of silence, Zhang Heng answered, "They asked me to deal with someone."

"Who?"

"Senator Divo Braille. He is too greedy. Lockheed doesn't like him. I shouldn't tell you about it. I promised Lockheed that I would keep it as a secret."

Altrus snorted, and Zhang Heng tried to judge from Altrus's tone whether he had known about it a long time ago. But unfortunately, Altrus did a good job at concealing his emotions. After hearing Zhang Heng's answer, he said softly, "It doesn't matter. I will keep it a secret. Are we friends?"

Chapter 875: Gift And Trouble

"Are we friends?" Zhang Heng asked in a daze.

"Of course, we are advisors of the emperor. So, that makes us friends." Altrus's voice sounded as sincere as a man could get. Making someone believe him would be a breeze. Coupled with the Scopolia alkaloids, an ordinary person would have opened up to him immediately.

At the same time, Altrus was also very satisfied with Zhang Heng's current reaction. He continued asking, "I heard that you come from a faraway Eastern empire, and there are rumors saying that you are a nobleman there. Why didn't you enjoy your comfortable life over there? Why did you leave your home and come to Rome, a land thousands of miles away?"

"Oh, that's a long story. I was from a once prominent family. My father was a general of the empire, but he was accused of something that he didn't do. He was imprisoned by the authorities after that. In the next political warfare, my family was completely defeated by our political enemies. I lost all the people and things that I cared about. In the end, I was the only one left alive. I was forced to leave my country and head west. I didn't know where I would end up. I just needed to... escape from there. The past is like a nightmare to me. I didn't know that I would come to Rome at that time, and I don't want anyone to know about my previous life."

Zhang Heng knew that Altrus could never verify any story he would tell him. Hence, he could make up a story like this with confidence. At the same time, the tale doubled up as an explanation as to why he had such outstanding skill and political experience.

"Understandable," Altrus nodded, "You are a citizen of Rome now, and this city will be your new home in the future."

"I hope so."

“Let’s continue to talk about what happened after you arrived. When did you first meet His Majesty?” Altrus asked.

“The first time I met His Majesty was at the dinner at Dior’s domus,” Zhang Heng said.

“I heard about what happened that night. You provoked Sartonos and attracted His Majesty’s attention. Did you do this because someone wanted you to do it?”

“No, I did this because I wanted to be free and enter the upper class of society,” Zhang Heng’s voice began to waver, sounding a little murky. “Trust me, my background makes me no stranger to this kind of thing. If I’m looking for someone that I can lean on, of course, I have to choose the most powerful one I can find.”

“A wise choice,” Altrus paused. He then asked another question, “What do you think of Lucilla?”

“Who?”

“The emperor’s sister, Augusta Lucilla of the Roman Empire.”

“She wants to sleep with me,” Zhang Heng blurted without hesitation.

Altrus seemed amused, and he laughed out loud. “You are right! Lucilla behaves just like her mother in private. Men are like her trophies. You are the gladiatorial champion of the Amphitheatrum Flavium. You are still very interesting to her. I’m not surprised that she is interested in you. However, this is not what I wanted to ask. I want to know, what is your opinion or impression of her?”

“I can’t see through her,” Zhang Heng said truthfully, “I heard some rumors about her. Her relationship with His Majesty the Emperor is not as good as it seems on the surface. Hence, I have been trying my best to stay away from her. No one likes a man that sits in the middle of the wall.”

“You are smart, smarter than most people,” Altrus raised his eyebrows. “Last question. Have you heard of the Balance Blade?”

“Balance Blade? What is that?” Zhang Heng wondered out loud.

“An ancient assassin organization that believes in Kreis. Its members believe that they are responsible for maintaining the balance of the world.”

“Kreis, I seem to have heard this name somewhere.” Zhang Heng showed a thoughtful look. “There is a person that goes by the nickname Cornu that seemed to have mentioned Balance Blade and other things to me. But I don’t really care about these things. I just want to mind my business, and I don’t want to cause any trouble. Wait... Am I in any trouble?”

“For now, no,” Altrus said. “I am quite satisfied with this conversation. I like honest people. I hope you can continue to maintain this precious quality. Please forgive me for being cautious. It has been quite eventful recently. As the emperor’s most trusted advisor, I have the responsibility and obligation to find out about everyone’s background. Since this is the first time we are meeting, let me present you a gift.”

“What’s the gift?” Zhang Heng yawned.

“You will know soon.” Altrus smiled when he heard Zhang Heng’s question. However, he did not elaborate on it. He then said softly, “You are very tired tonight and have drunk too much wine. Why not have a good night’s sleep?”

“You’re right. I’m going to sleep now,” Zhang Heng muttered sleepily. His eyelids were getting heavier and heavier. And he finally fell asleep on the chair.

Altrus waited for a while and clapped his hands to signal the waitress waiting outside the room to come in.

Altrus then said, “Take care of him. And when he is a little more awake, send him home safely.”

“That’s it? What if he wakes up and remembers that we drugged him and wants us to pay for what we did?” The maid frowned.

“No, he won’t remember a single thing after he drank that glass of wine,” Altrus said confidently. “Besides, even if he remembers it, he will dare to do nothing to us. That’s because I know a lot of his secrets now.”

“What about Clint? He doesn’t like you, right? You two appeared by Commodus’s side at almost the same time. However, you have always managed to gain more of Commodus’s favor. Clint was jealous of you. He was willing to let this Easterner become Commodus’s adviser because he wants to work with him to deal with you. Don’t you want to solve this problem?”

Altrus still remained indifferent when he heard the concern. “Clint’s is insignificant. He treats me as his biggest competitor that stops him from climbing up the ranks. However, I have never treated him as an opponent. He is just a self-righteous fool. I’m never worried about him.”

The maid fell into silence when she heard Altrus’s comment. Altrus then reminded the maid, “I will do my part, and you’d better do yours too. Let’s deal with the Balance Blade first.”

“We are fully prepared this time,” snorted the maid. “It’s time for the people from the Balance Blade to pay off the blood-debt they owe us. This time, we don’t plan to let any of them live.”

“Very well. This assassin organization is too dangerous. There is no need for it to exist. It is better to destroy it.” Altrus also agreed, “And now they are trying to get rid of me. If that’s the case, we need to make a move to get rid of them first.”

Chapter 876: Speculation

The unexpected meeting with Altrus that night didn’t last too long. From the beginning to the end, Zhang Heng did not see Altrus’s face. This however did not stop him from collecting information about him through other means.

Although Zhang Heng was also affected by Scopolia, he could still control his body well. All five of his senses were still working. At the same time, his calm mind also provided him with an objective and accurate analysis.

Judging from Altrus’s voice, Zhang Heng knew that Altrus was not that old. He was estimated to be as young as him or Commodore, which was around twenty years old. Zhang Heng was a little surprised by

how cautious Altrus was. Zhang Heng thought he should be at least 27 or 28 years old in terms of maturity, but he did not expect him to be so young.

Unlike the rumor, Altrus was different from someone like Clint, who had climbed from the bottom of the pit to where he was today. Although the latter was now a nobleman and he had learned their manner of speech and way of life, his choice of words and how he constructed his sentences still contained traces of bad habits he cultivated when he was a child. Clint would roll his tongue when he pronounced some words because his former elementary school teacher was a Cappadocia.

However, Altrus did not have a problem like this. His accent was pure, and he could show that he was a true noble from his word choices and how he constructed his sentences. Zhang Heng had strong reason to believe that he had grown up in a very decent environment. The possibility that he grew up in a large family couldn't be ruled out too.

But in this way, he could not explain why Commodus trusted him so much.

Judging from Commodus's attitude towards the Senate, it was apparent that he was not that stupid. From the moment he inherited the throne, he had always guarded against the nobles and was also why he was dared to use newcomers from a humble background like Clint and Zhang Heng. If that was the case, he should not allow the descendants of a great noble family to enter and leave his study room freely.

Other than that, Zhang Heng also noticed how Altrus's footsteps sounded unique. They seemed feathery and light. If he hadn't gone through stealth training as Zhang Heng had, it would indicate that his weight was also very light. Zhang Heng estimated that he weighed only sixty to seventy catty. Even for a lady, he would be too light, not to mention that Altrus was a man.

Zhang Heng figured that Altrus might have some kind of disease and it was incurable in this era. The latter was also dragging his right foot on the ground when he walked, which also proved Zhang Heng's deduction. Other than that, Altrus also held a cane to assist him in walking.

Judging from that, Altrus had not shown his face because he did not want others to see his current physical condition, apart from the fact that the Balance Blade wanted to assassinate him. It was interesting to know that the most mysterious and trusted advisor of Commodus had some physical disabilities. A great many people would be shocked if he were exposed.

Zhang Heng also learned Altrus's identity from the subsequent dialogue between Altrus and the maid. The maid who helped him was probably from the Hounds. Coupled with the previous encounters that Zhang Heng experienced, Cornu, from the Beehive, was suspected of being a Hounds member. In other words, the influence of the Hounds in the city of Rome was probably quite insignificant.

It was very likely they had secretly mobilized their men to the city of Rome. And it was very obvious that Altrus was working with the hounds, and the two sides planned to join forces to deal with the Balance Blade.

And that wasn't even the worst-case scenario yet. The worst part was that it seemed like the tragedy that happened to Balance Blade during the Caesar era was likely to happen again. And Zhang Heng now had enough reason to suspect that there is a traitor in the Balance Blade. It was not only because of how

much Altrus and the Hound knew about Balance Blade; more importantly, Zhang Heng was more concerned about the attitude displayed by the Balance Blade's priestess.

There was no doubt that she or the political forces behind her wanted to get rid of Altrus. Otherwise, she would not issue an oracle like this. After that, she found Zhang Heng through Dadatis and reached an agreement with Zhang Heng privately. She wanted Zhang Heng to hand over Altrus to her first before he killed him.

Zhang Heng suspected that the Priestess might have also discovered the traitor not long ago. On the other hand, Altrus had probably identified the traitor as well, or at least the information related to the traitor's identity. With that, everything could be explained perfectly now.

The oracle that the Priestess issued to kill Altrus could not be withdrawn. Hence, she was forced to come up with a contingency plan. She wanted to get the traitor's name from Altrus first before letting Zhang Heng kill Altrus.

Zhang Heng was originally not interested in the war between the Balance Blade and the Hound. However, with how the current situation developed, the Balance Blade was in a tough spot. Although Zhang Heng did not get any sense of belonging from the Balance Blade, he had to consider the problems that might drag him down after the Balance Blade fell from its grace.

So Zhang Heng decided to remind the Priestess about it.

Early the next morning, he traveled to the southeast city and went through the complex terrain to get rid of the possible people that followed him. After that, he used his Lv2 makeup skill to come up with a new disguise for himself. Once that was done, he left the southeast city and came to Perfume Street. As promised, he looked for a perfume shop with irises outside.

Zhang Heng told the shopkeeper that he was going to buy a bottle of perfume that had a very light smell. After that, he paid a Sestertius to the shopkeeper. The shopkeeper felt a little surprised initially. After he heard about the perfume that Zhang Heng requested, he thought that he was here to mess with him. However, after he received the copper coin given, his expression changed, and he quickly led Zhang Heng to the storeroom at the back of the perfume shop.

After a while, a woman with a veil on her face appeared and said, "Have you found the whereabouts of Altrus?"

"Not yet, but I have a clue. As long as I'm in the right direction, I should be able to locate him soon." Zhang Heng said.

However, the woman wearing the veil was indifferent when she heard Zhang Heng's update. She frowned and asked, "Since you haven't found Altrus, why are you here?"

"Because I want you to pass some words to the priestess."

"Sorry, this is not within my responsibility. But I can help you make an appointment with her," the woman wearing the veil said coldly, "You can talk to her in person when you meet her."

“We didn’t get along well when we met for the first time. I don’t think it is necessary for me to meet her again. Anyway, let me tell you something important. As for whether you want to tell her about it, it has nothing to do with me” Before the woman could say anything, Zhang Heng continued to talk.

“Altrus is working with the Hounds. I guess they have most likely moved their core members to Rome. And they may attack us at any time soon. As for the traitor, I think you should have known about it a long time ago. I hope all of you have prepared to handle this trouble.”

The woman wearing the veil seemed a little surprised when she heard what Zhang Heng said. She was not surprised by the news that Zhang Heng told her but the fact that Zhang Heng knew about the traitor shocked her. This changed her attitude toward Zhang Heng slightly because she now discovered that Dadatis did not make any exaggeration. There was something special about the oriental man in front of him.

So her tone also eased up a little. “We knew about what you just told us quite a while ago. You can rest assured that we are different from two hundred years ago. Now, except for the speaker and the Priestess, the members of the organization do not know each other’s identities. Hence, the damage that the traitors can cause is also limited.”

Zhang Heng was noncommittal when he heard what she said. “Better be. Altrus and the Hounds seem to be very confident that they can destroy Balance Blade this time. If I were you, I wouldn’t talk too soon.”

“Don’t worry. Strictly speaking, you haven’t fully joined us yet. So you don’t know how powerful Balance Blade is. We have faced many enemies throughout history, but we are still standing here.” The woman wearing the veil said confidently, “There will be no exceptions this time.”

Chapter 877: You Might Need To Travel Somewhere Far Away

Zhang Heng contacted the lady in the perfume shop according to how the priestess instructed him. As a result, he gained nothing other than the lady telling him that the Balance Blade was confident that they could deal with their enemies this time. It left Zhang Heng with a bad feeling.

The woman wearing the veil was right. It was a fact that Zhang Heng did not know the true strength of the Balance Blade. However, he had just come into contact with Altrus not too long ago, and he knew that people like Altrus were not easy to deal with. What more, Altrus had now made it clear that he was teaming up with the Hounds, preparing to take down the Balance Blade together.

In Zhang Heng’s initial prediction, the battle between the Balance Blade and the Hounds lasted for more than two hundred years. In other words, telling who would win this time would be pretty challenging. Through this, the candidates of the Balance Blade would get to observe their opponents before the battle of the century began.

Zhang Heng felt like he might have overestimated the Balance Blade’s leader’s abilities. At the same time, he also underestimated the comeback of the Hounds. If Cornu was indeed from the Hounds, that could mean that Beehive was probably the Hounds’ peripheral organization.

And this also meant that the Hounds had probably been operating in Rome for quite some time. The previous assassination in Britannia was probably just the Hounds’ way of diverting attention. The Balance Blade knew nothing about the powerful opponents that grew under their noses. And as we

know, this made it hard for Zhang Heng to believe that the Balance Blade had the upper hand in this battle.

And once the Balance Blade was defeated, it would be hard for Zhang Heng to survive alone. Zhang Heng knew that some preparations had to be made to prevent the situation from deteriorating further. According to Dadatis, only four people in the Balance Blade, himself included, knew Zhang Heng's identity. But from that moment on, Zhang Heng also needed to prepare a backup plan if his identity was leaked.

However, he did not intend to give up his plan of assassinating Altrus. In addition to his need to enter the secret library of the Balanced Blade, eliminating Altrus would allow him to lessen the Balanced Blade's burden.

With Altrus's cautious character, there were few opportunities for him to reveal his flaws. This time, he did not expect that Zhang Heng hadn't actually finished the glass of wine and that he could still stay awake to answer his questions. He was obviously not expecting Zhang Heng to extract so much information by simply listening to his tone, diction, and pace. If he knew Zhang Heng was capable of something like that, he would have never come to meet him in person.

Next, Zhang Heng might have to race against time.

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"What? You've gotten your fief? And it's in the province of Mesopotamia! Where is that place?" The slave girl was taken aback. She had been a slave in Rome since birth and had never left the place. She had heard of the nearby provinces, but not the places further than that.

"Well, the province of Mesopotamia is located southeast of Rome. It is thousands of miles away from us. You have to travel by carriage, then a boat, and go on another carriage to get to the final destination. It is probably going to take a few months to get there," Zhang Heng said.

"That's far. But I thought you couldn't leave Rome?" The slave girl was puzzled. "Then how are you going to manage your fief?"

After she finished speaking, she noticed Zhang Heng looking at her. The slave girl was bewildered for a moment. After that, she understood why he was staring at her. Her face turned pale immediately, "Are you... Are you trying to ask me to go there to take care of your fief?!"

"Yes. I might need your help."

"But... But, didn't you say that it is thousands of miles away?" The slave girl was completely terrified.

"Nothing to worry too much about. I'm in no rush anyway. Take your time and enjoy the scenery along the way and have a taste of the delicacies from abroad. I will give you enough money for your expenses. You haven't left Rome before, right? This is your best opportunity to check out some other place."

"But I don't want to leave... Rome." The slave girl almost blurted out that she did not want to leave Zhang Heng. Fortunately, she quickly replaced the word "you" with "Rome" at the last moment.

"I know. Just consider it as doing me a favor. I don't have anyone else I can trust now."

“But I’ve been a slave since I was a child. I don’t know how to manage a fief!” The slave girl finally came up with another valid reason to not travel to the fief. She then quickly added, “I’ll stay by your side. I’ll wash and cook for you, take care of your daily life. I’m the best at this.”

But she did not expect Zhang Heng to react colder than she thought. After that, Zhang Heng heard what she said. He replied, “It’s okay. If you lose money in the business, just write me and ask for more money. If you make money, you can spend it on yourself.”

“That’s okay?” The slave girl was completely stunned by Zhang Heng’s open-mindedness. Later, she wanted to tell Zhang Heng that that was not the point. However, before she could say anything, she heard Zhang Heng saying in an incontrovertible tone, “You should go and clean up, leave the day after tomorrow, and get on the road early. Otherwise, it will be winter when you arrive in Mesopotamia.”

The slave girl fell to the bottom of her heart when she heard Zhang Heng’s reply. There was nothing else she could say after hearing that Zhang Heng wanted her gone as soon as possible. She then walked away with her head bowed low.

Zhang Heng knew that the slave girl would return to her room and cry.

But this wouldn’t change any of his decisions. Commodus had initially wanted to choose a fief near Rome, but Zhang Heng requested his fief to be located somewhere remote. He mentioned that he wanted more land. However, that was just an excuse he used to send the slave girl on a long trip.

There was no mobile internet or telegrams in this era. When someone traveled to a faraway place, they would be unable to contact those back at home. No matter what happened in Rome, the slave girl would not be affected. In other words, Zhang Heng had just sent the person closest to him out of the whirlpool.

As for the farewell, it would happen sooner or later. Even if nothing happened, Zhang Heng would leave this dungeon after one year. Instead of separating after one year, it was better for them to part ways now before they spent more time together. Zhang Heng also gave all the money he made during this period to the slave girl. After sending the latter away, he was finally able to do as he wished.

That night, with the help of Kreis’ Heart, Zhang Heng sneaked into the temple where the citizens’ archives were stored and found the list of nobles born twenty years ago. He was a little surprised, though, by the results. After taking about a week to go through the list, he realized that Altrus was not among them.

This was a little strange. Either Altrus had taken away his files, or Zhang Heng was looking in the wrong direction. As the rumor said, Altrus was not a nobleman. However, this couldn’t explain the habits that he got from the noble family. Secondly, there were more nobles compared to civilians. It was not possible for Zhang Heng to collect each and every file of civilians that were born twenty years ago.

Zhang Heng felt that he might be missing out on something.

Chapter 878: Altrus’s Gift

While Zhang Heng was still investigating the true identity of Altrus, he did not expect to receive a gift from him. Earlier, when the two met for the first time, Altrus promised Zhang Heng that he would give him a gift.

However, he did not receive anything from Altrus after waiting for a few days. Zhang Heng thought that he must have forgotten about the gift. After all, Altrus mentioned that Zhang Heng would not remember a single thing after he drank the glass of wine that contained scopolamine alkaloids.

Technically speaking, no one would know whether he had fulfilled his promise. However, someone as noble as Altrus would never break his promise, even if the person might not remember it. Around two weeks later, Zhang Heng received a card at noon. There was no signature, and there was only a sentence written on it.

[Your gift has been delivered; I hope you like it.]

In the afternoon, a piece of shocking news broke out from the Senate, saying that senator Divo Braille was suspected of accepting bribes and involving a tremendous amount of money. Accepting bribes was a severe crime in Rome. The amount of money a person took determined their punishment. The offender could receive the death penalty or exile from Rome. Usually, such a crime would only be committed by lower-level officials.

The nobles usually had a way to clear their names after accepting bribes, let alone a powerful man like Divo Braille. He would never come forward to take the proceeds in person, so even if something went wrong, the authorities could only trace it back to the men that worked for Divo Braille. Otherwise, Lockheed would not need to worry that Divo Braille was getting greedier and greedier.

There was nothing that Lockheed could do about it, which was why he agreed with Zhang Heng. He was willing to let the patrol team and Soap continue to expand their power, but in return, Zhang Heng had to help them to deal with Divo Braille.

But this time, Zhang Heng learned that Divo Braille was not in a good spot. The authorities collected detailed evidence, more than enough to expose Divo Braille. Besides, there were many witnesses. At the same time, most of the bribery offenses were carried out when Divo Braille was a financial officer.

This amount of money was also closely tied to a new park in the city of Rome.

The park was built by the former emperor Aurelius to commemorate his deceased wife. The royal family was responsible for most of the fundraising. Other than that, the former emperor received a lot of donations from the nobles as well. According to the latest news, Divo Braille had embezzled one-third of the money. When he used the money for his personal gains, it meant that he had offended all the nobles that donated their money to the former emperor. The situation was not looking good for him.

However, those selected to join the Senate consisted of more simple-minded folk. Everyone could see that someone was targeting Divo Braille because the evidence presented by the other party was too perfect and convenient. It seemed like the whole thing had been premeditated. The senators in the Senate had to admit that whoever was targeting Divo Braille had to be indeed very powerful.

Even if all those pieces of evidence were fabricated, the person would have to be of great influence to execute such a complicated plan. Generally, the senators from the Senate would choose to stand by Divo Braille's side. After all, if the person could do such a thing to Divo Braille, it meant they could also pull the same trick on other senators. No one was squeaky clean in the Senate. Besides, Divo Braille had always been neutral, and he rarely offended the people around him. His character made him a very popular and likable person in the Senate.

To everyone's surprise, none of them expected that only a handful of people would step up to support Divo Braille this time. On the one hand, the incident happened so suddenly that no one could receive any news beforehand. The evidence and allegations were brought forward by a young senator who had no sense of existence in the Senate. Everyone had yet to figure out the powerful people that supported him secretly. On the other hand, nobles who had donated their money to build the park fell into a foul mood when they learned that their money had fallen into Divo Braille's pockets. It made no sense for them to support him right now.

Other than that, Divo Braille chose to side with Commodus during the Binota mine incident, causing others to resent him. The neutral image that he worked hard to build had now been weakened. At that time, they did not have enough evidence to put him under the spotlight. Hence, no one came forward to trouble him.

On the contrary, senators who were close to the royal family stood up and defended Divo Braille. It seemed the rumors of Divo Braille siding with the royal family were further confirmed with their support.

Now, there were not many options left for Divo Braille. With the previous relationship that he built in the Senate, no matter who made the waves, he could always get insider news in advance. The waves were clearly targeting him this time, and he did not receive anything in advance. Completely kept in the dark, he was indeed terrified.

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Zhang Heng might be one of the few people in Rome who knew the person targeting Divo Braille. At the same time, he also knew that Altrus showed kindness to him while simultaneously sounding a fair warning. Altrus played the whole thing perfectly. While fulfilling his promise, he had also used this opportunity to show Zhang Heng what he could do.

In just two weeks, Altrus was able to unearth most of Divo Braille's dark secrets. It made a powerful senator lose almost all of his reputation overnight, and the incident had surely embarrassed him. His ability to plan and execute was top-notch. He deserved to be the chief adviser of Commodus. Clint had always regarded Altrus as his competitor. However, Zhang Heng thought that the gap between the two parties was probably bigger than he expected. Both of them were not on the same level. Although the outside world called the two of them the right-hand men of Commodus, the influence they had on the emperor was very different.

When Zhang Heng thought of this, his expression suddenly changed, and he realized what he missed out on earlier was. It was actually something self-evident. However, Zhang Heng's understanding of Roman history caused him to rule out this possibility immediately.

There could be only one explanation to how he was born a nobleman, and Commodus still trusted him unconditionally.

He must be Commodus's relative!

And Altrus was not just some distant relative of Commodus. Instead, they shared the same father and mother as Lucilla. At the same time, unlike Lucilla, his physical disability would never allow him to walk on the stage like Commodus. Hence, he could only assist him in the dark.

Only after all the above conditions had been met did Commodus trust Altrus unconditionally.

Zhang Heng soon thought of someone: Commodus's twin brother.

Chapter 879: Trap

In written history, Commodus's only family member after he inherited the throne was his sister, Lucillia. But this did not mean that he had no other siblings. In fact, Aurelius had many children, but most of them failed to reach adulthood. And eventually, only two children were left after his death.

If Aurelius's dead children were included, Commodus was supposed to have many brothers. And among them, the one closest to Zhang Heng's age was Commodus's twin brother who died at the age of four. Aurelius held a funeral for him, and the Senate stopped working for a day to express their grief.

The ordinary citizens in the city of Rome still remembered it fondly until today.

As far as everyone knew, Commodus's twin brother had indeed passed away.

This was also the reason why Zhang Heng did not think of this in the first place. Of course, these were just his speculations. If he wanted to prove that Altrus was indeed Commodus' dead twin, more evidence needed to be collected.

Considering the special nature of the palace, almost all the political forces would secretly plant their men here. Hence, there were no secrets in this building. It was obviously impossible for a prince to keep living in the palace for so many years and not be discovered by anyone after his death. So if Aurelius wanted his child to continue living hidden from the world for whatever reason, he could only send him away from the palace. The safest option was to send Altrus out of the city, and the farther away, the better.

It was like Zhang Heng sending the slave girl away on a long journey. The good news was with the disability that Altrus had; it was impossible that the people at the place where he lived and grew up hadn't the slightest impression of him. As long as he could find who Aurelius's most trusted person sixteen years ago was and the nobles that possessed the most remote fief, Zhang Heng would be able to confirm his conjecture when he visited the place.

But the bad news was that Zhang Heng realized that he did not have the time to do so.

After that, Zhang Heng went to the perfume shop again. He discovered that the shop had a new owner and the shopkeeper he had previously talked to was now gone. It was then that Zhang Heng knew that he had been abandoned.

It did not mean that the Balance Blade had thrown him to the Hounds. Instead, the war between the Balance Blade and the Hounds was likely to break out soon. The situation on both sides was extremely tense. Besides, the Balance Blade found it hard to place their trust in Zhang Heng as their backup core member. Coupled with the fact that there were traitors in the organization, they decided to put aside the volatile factor during this critical time.

If that were the case, Zhang Heng wouldn't be bothered by it. In his original plan, the only thing he planned to do was observe how the whole thing developed. Hence, it was not a big deal getting ignored by them. Afterward, Zhang Heng had to face a new problem when he heard an order given by

Commodus. Commodus planned to inspect a military camp twenty miles outside the city of Rome. Other than Clint and him, Altrus was asked to accompany him as well.

The politicians in Rome were not unfamiliar with this name. However, no one had seen what Altrus looked like. The owner of this name had been living in the dark for a long time. Altrus was probably the second most powerful person in the city of Rome, second only to the emperor, Commodus.

Under such circumstances, the emperor would be easily jealous of him. Be that as it may, Commodus seemed to have great trust in his chief adviser, and he had never doubted him before. This made Clint and other consultants extremely envious of him. And this time, Commodus had announced in a high-profile manner that Altrus would be one of his companions. It seemed the emperor was gradually pushing the man who worked behind the scenes to the front stage. This caused this routine inspection to attract a lot of attention.

Not only did the nobles and senators want to catch a glimpse of the emperor's chief advisor, but Clint and the other advisers were extremely nervous too, threatened by his presence. Up until now, Altrus had been working in the dark, and they had already witnessed how powerful he could be. Once he stepped onto the front stage, he could begin to use his power and influence to make more friends, form his own forces, control the Senate or even the entire country in the near future.

What Clint and others did not understand was why Commodus allowed such a thing to happen. No matter how much he trusted Altrus, what he might do would undoubtedly damage Commodus's power.

Clint had even assembled a group of people who had a good relationship with him and prepared to persuade Commodus together.

And Clint did not forget about Zhang Heng, the newcomer that Commodus had recently been fond of. The speed of Zhang Heng's rise to fame during this period was something no one had achieved in the entire history of Rome. From slave to civilian to an advisor, to the noble that was given a fief—this usually required three generations to achieve. Zhang Heng, against all odds, completed it in just over half a year. And now Clint regretted introducing him to Commodus so early.

However, Clint now had a more troublesome opponent to deal with. Hence, he had no time to take care of Zhang Heng.

When he left Zhang Heng's domus, his face turned gloomy. Clint did not expect that Zhang Heng would reject his proposal. Although he did not regard Zhang Heng as his political ally, their last cooperation worked out pretty well, and Zhang Heng had shown intention willing to join forces with him to deal with Altrus.

That was the reason Clint agreed to help Zhang Heng using the imperial guards to give the major forces in the southeast city a good scare. Not long after that, Zhang Heng broke up the alliance agreement with him and made it clear that he did not intend to deal with Altrus together.

Clint almost failed to maintain his usual gentle image, slapping the table in frustration before he left. However, he did not want to make a new enemy at this critical time, so in the end, he gave Zhang Heng a cold stare, turned his head, and left.

In all honesty, Zhang Heng had hoped Clint would win this battle. This matter was clearly a trap they had set to deal with the Balance Blade. Zhang Heng was one of the few people who knew Altrus's physical condition. He knew that Altrus would never show up in front of the public. At the same time, Zhang Heng also knew very well that Clint and others had no chance of winning this time.

The final result fell within Zhang Heng's expectation. Clint and others were unable to persuade Commodus not to bring Altrus along. Two days later, Commodus still insisted on bringing Altrus with him, as if he wanted to tell the world how much he trusted Altrus.

And Zhang Heng also realized that he had to meet the priestess before the inspection.

Chapter 880: Enemy

The Balance Blade had unilaterally cut off all connections with Zhang Heng, but that did not mean that Zhang Heng would never find them anymore. A while ago, Zhang Heng was lying blindfolded in the carriage to travel to where the priestess was to meet her. Along the way to the destination, Zhang Heng silently made mental notes about the sounds he could hear on the path that the carriage traveled on and its condition. After that, he reached an agreement with the priestess, and he was busy working as an advisor for Commodus. Hence, he did not look for the secret location at that time.

And now he needed to reconnect with the Balance Blade. The only way to achieve such a goal was to look for their secret location. Later, Zhang Heng looked for Marcus and asked the latter to get a carriage for him. In order to reenact the scene on that night as much as possible, Zhang Heng even ordered a carriage that was exactly the same as the one he had laid in before. Once that was done, Zhang Heng asked Marcus to drive to the arch bridge by the Tiber River in the middle of the night.

This was the spot where Zhang Heng got on the carriage that night. If he wanted to retrace the path he traveled on, he had to start his journey from the exact same spot. After that, he would need to dig deep into his memory and look for the place where he met the priestess.

However, that night's first attempt ended up in failure. This was because it rained in the afternoon and the water had changed the road's condition. Even if there were only a slight deviation, it would greatly affect the location of the bumps and the sound that he heard on the paths. So, Zhang Heng had to wait until the next day to do it again. The day after tomorrow was the day for him to inspect the barracks with Commodus. In other words, Zhang Heng could not afford to fail again tonight. Otherwise, he would not be able to contact the Balance Blade before he inspected the barracks.

Fortunately, he was quite lucky today. Not only did it not rain, but the sun in the afternoon was quite strong as well. Without the moisture, Zhang Heng's memory was no longer affected by external factors. Hence, Marcus drove the carriage, and Zhang Heng lay in the carriage and instructed Marcus at the same time.

But even so, it took them four hours to look for the final destination, accompanied by constant trial and error.

Zhang Heng got off the carriage, looked at the domus in front of him, and asked Marcus on the side, "Do you know whose house this is?"

Marcus had apparently done some research in advance. He immediately replied, "The owner of this domus is Stucas, a young man from the Corasu family. It is said that he rarely comes here for about two years now. There is only an old servant who lives here."

Zhang Heng nodded, "I can do the rest alone. You can go back now."

Marcus did not ask much after that. He turned around and left with the carriage. This was what Zhang Heng admired about him the most. He knew very well what he should be asking and what he shouldn't. While waiting for Marcus to leave his sight completely, Zhang Heng put on a hood.

This was a special time. Let's not talk about whether there were Balance Blade's members in the domus. Even if this place was a secret stronghold for the priestess, Zhang Heng decided it was better he covered himself up after knowing that there were traitors in the Balance Blade.

After that, he jumped over the wall and landed in the front hall.

And as soon as he landed, the hair on his body stood on its ends. He could feel that someone was about to stab his waist with a dagger. Fortunately, Zhang Heng's reflexes were fast enough. Earlier, he had been working hard to improve his footing, and his hard work allowed him to dodge the attack in time. However, the enemy had no intention to stop, becoming even more aggressive instead. He drew another dagger to charge at Zhang Heng again.

And Zhang Heng also drew out his two Persian swords and flicked them backward. They landed accurately on the attacker's dagger. Zhang Heng's response to the attack managed to stun the attackers for a split second. And Zhang Heng did not plan to waste this rare opportunity. When he finally turned around, he and saw the face of the attacker.

There was a veil covering the attacker's face, and although Zhang Heng could not see the other person's appearance, he recognized that it was the veiled woman from the perfume shop.

When the two met for the first time, Zhang Heng knew that this woman was also an assassin. However, he did not expect her to be so skillful. After fighting with her for a few rounds, he realized that her assassination skills were way better than Dadatis'.

Zhang Heng also speculated that she was most likely a core member of the Balance Blade.

The woman on the other side seemed to recognize Zhang Heng as well—not through his appearance but his moves.

"It appears Dadatis values you a lot. He taught you all his unique skills," the woman said. "Of course, you are a fast learner as well. I saw how you fought in the Victor Arena when you were still a gladiator. Technically speaking, you shouldn't have avoided my attack just now."

Zhang Heng immediately thought of something. Dadatis had once told him that there were only four people who knew his identity. The woman in front of him was obviously not the priestess nor Faceless. So, there was only one possibility left. Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows.

"Are you Hyacinth?"

"It seems Dadatis has mentioned about me," the woman wearing the veil said. "I'm very curious. What does he think of me?"

Zhang Heng could sense that Hyacinth and Dadatis had a rather complicated relationship. They were surely more than just friends. Therefore, Zhang Heng decided to help out Dadatis by saying something good.

“He said you are the best assassin ever.”

Hyacinth sneered when she heard what Zhang Heng said. “Save it. I know him well enough that he will never say such a thing. He did tell me about your unlimited potential. You are like an unpolished gem. If someone put in some hard work to train you well, you will surely become the strongest assassin in Rome.”

“Well...”

Zhang Heng was interrupted by Hyacinth before he could say anything. “But now it seems he was exaggerating. You haven’t been able to kill Altrus for so long. Even if you are a talented young man, you are definitely not limitless.

“If I remember correctly, didn’t you guys fail to get rid of him for a long time, too?” asked Zhang Heng. “You don’t even know what he looks like.”

“That was in the past. Now, we have found the opportunity to assassinate Altrus. In other words, you have failed your test. As for whether the organization will accept you in the future, you’ll need to wait for the evaluation after this event,” Hyacinth said casually.

“The opportunity that you are talking about is when Commodus inspects the barracks tomorrow, right? But as far as I know, Altrus’s physical condition does not allow him to appear in public.” Zhang Heng was not bothered by Hyacinth’s sarcastic tone.

“We know that the Altrus, who go with Commodus tomorrow to the barracks, is a fake.” Hyacinth’s answer surprised Zhang Heng. She paused at this point and continued, “Not only do we know that Altrus is fake, but we also know why the real Altrus would do something like this. Other than baiting us, he wanted to cover his true purpose as well.” Hyacinth put away her dagger while talking.

“Anyway, it’s impressive that you managed to find this place. Thank you for the information, especially the fact that Altrus is physically inconvenient. We will verify it when we find our target. Other than that, do you still have anything else you’d wish to talk about?” Although Hyacinth’s tone was still polite, her mannerism indicated that she did not want Zhang Heng to stay here any longer.

It was not because she was unhappy with him or anything. She actually had a more important thing to attend to.

After Zhang Heng saw the reactions from her body, he stopped talking. He just nodded and said, “Then I wish you all the best tomorrow.”