

Chapter 17

The Blackwater

Black did not return to the cabin until morning. Sivan looked up from the table to find the man carrying yet another silver platter. It presumably contained his breakfast, given the eager grin the pirate was giving him.

“Please do not tell me you made me breakfast after spending the entire night out there,” Sivan chided.

Black’s smile only grew a fraction wider. “Then I will not tell you that, my lord.”

Sivan sighed and set his pen down. Nereus had been a good attendant long ago. Hardworking, took instruction well, eager to please. But Black took it to an extreme, sacrificing both his health and status among his own crew in order to care for Sivan.

“This has to stop.” Sivan tried to start the topic with a gentle tone, but Black ignored him as he continued to set up his breakfast. He swore the man had extremely selective hearing. “Black, please just —“

“Please tell me what you think of your breakfast, my lord,” Black interrupted him with.

Sivan, ever weak to the delicious smell of the man’s cooking, looked at the breakfast. The spread had at least been scaled back this morning. Sivan rarely finished what he was served, and Black was finally beginning to modify the quantities in response. The main dish today was a peppercorn halibut, decorated in lemon wedges and sage. Sivan couldn’t even imagine what kind of sorcery was happening in the kitchen to allow Black access to fresh herbs while out at sea.

He took one look at the pirate’s expectant face and sighed again. Sivan knew that there was no moving the man after he had served him his meal. He was going to have to eat it before Black would even consider discussing something serious.

Sivan took a fork and dug in. It was delicious, as always. It tasted like the most perfect memories he had. The long, golden days of the *Spear* where he had few worries and much to keep himself busy with. There was no war, no fiancé, no haunting nightmares. Just Nereus and him, spending every day together.

Sivan set his fork down, suddenly too emotional to eat another bite.

“Is there something wrong with it, my lord?” Black asked, sitting down next to him at the table.

“No, no.” Sivan looked at the fish. Few Grenaldian chefs cooked like this. “I should have known it was you from the first meal you made me.”

Black was silent for a moment before he responded. “Well, I do look quite different. It is understandable you would not recognize me right away.”

He smiled, to try to put Sivan at ease. It was a brilliant smile, and despite the sharp teeth and the tattoos, the man still bore a resemblance to the youth Sivan had once known. Had Nereus

always been this beautiful? Sivan had always remembered him as a good-looking boy, but he never really paid much attention to it. Now, being near Black was like being near the sun. Too brilliant to look at directly, but you could not help but be drawn to his heat.

Sivan's heart skipped a beat, and he realized he was staring. "A-anyways, for the last time, you really don't have to do any of this for me. You have a ship to captain. You're no longer my attendant."

"That's not entirely true," Black chuckled. "You never officially dismissed me."

Sivan's mouth pursed, trying to find an answer, but he realized he couldn't find one. "I guess that's true," he allowed. He fiddled with his sleeve, looking for something to distract him from the beautiful man seated next to him. "Although, I have to say you've been a rather poorly behaved attendant in recent weeks."

Black took his right arm, the one he was fiddling with. Sivan's heart jumped, but he made himself calm down when he realized the man was examining his scar. "I am sorry for this," he said, tracing the line of the black handprint on his copper skin.

"Oh," Sivan breathed. "It's quite alright. It hides the scar."

"It's not alright." Black looked up at him, his light green eyes intense. "You saw how I'm not in control of my powers when I let my emotions get the better of me. Seeing you after so long... rattled me. But it was not an excuse for me to mark you like this."

"Mark?" Sivan couldn't understand any of this. Rattled? Was his anger so bad at the time?

"It's something sirens can do," Black explained. "It leaves an imprint on the person. So the one who marked them will always know where they are."

“Oh,” he breathed again. Black was tracing the outline of the handprint, and it was sending Sivan’s senses into a frenzy. He was reminded of the tavern in Lissandry and of the tentacles in the hold any time the man touched him. Black did not let on that he remembered either of these, and he continued to touch Sivan like it did not hold any meaning.

It was driving him mad.

“Like I said, it’s quite alright,” Sivan muttered and pulled his arm back.

“Of course, my lord,” Black said, his voice low.

Sivan couldn’t take the title any longer. It sounded strange coming out of the Blackwater captain’s mouth, and for some reason made Sivan feel a burning sense of shame. “You really shouldn’t call me that anymore,” he mumbled.

“Call you what, my lord?” the pirate asked innocently.

“That.” Sivan swallowed. “‘My lord.’ Such formalities don’t befit a pirate lord.”

Black chuckled, and the sound danced across Sivan’s skin. “Oh, we are both lords now, aren’t we? Then, what do lords call each other?”

The pirate looked at him with a grin that was borderline salacious. The man had to be doing this on purpose. Sivan’s breath caught in his throat, and it made his next words come out small. “Just—Just names are fine.”

Black’s grin went wider, sharp teeth glinting in the morning sun. “Sivan,” he tested, his voice almost a whisper.

A shiver wrapped itself around Sivan’s spine at the sound of his name on the man’s lips. It somehow sounded more profane than his title. He instantly regretted his choice to berate the man for this. Hearing his name said through the filter of an utterly bewitching pirate captain was far worse.

“A-anyways, I’ve been meaning to ask-“ Sivan cleared his

throat, forcing himself to look away from the pirate. “Whatever happened to Eliza? Did she make it off the Spear as well?”

Black’s face soured at the mention of the woman. “She did. She’s out there somewhere. I try not to think about her.”

“Why not?” Sivan found that strange. As hard as the chef had been on Nereus as a boy, Sivan did not doubt that he viewed her as a mother figure.

“We didn’t part on good terms,” Black muttered, his face darkening.

And that was it. Black turned away from him, closing off the line of questioning.

Sivan suddenly realized that even though he thought he had known Nereus well in the past, he knew little about what happened to him after. Glimpses were being fed to him through a sieve. The man was trying to only show him the parts he wanted Sivan to see, but he was still getting hints of the hard life he’d led after leaving the Spear. It pained him that the man no longer trusted him enough to divulge everything to him. But if Black wouldn’t open up to Sivan, he would simply have to connect the dots from what he was given.



Sivan finished his breakfast, and Black cleared away the table so Sivan could clutter it once more with translation notes.

“I think I’ve done it,” Sivan breathed, looking over the papers spread out before him.

“Really?” Black rushed to his side, peering over him to see for himself. Sivan could instantly feel the heat from the man, even at this respectable distance.

“It’s not perfect—gods, this language is complicated—but I should be able to get the gist of whatever your map says.”

Sivan looked up and saw Black smiling at him, his eyes bright and filled with delight. Before Sivan’s heart could even respond he was pulled out from his chair and swung around, one of Black’s hands gripping his own, the other at his back.

“I knew you could do it!” The pirate praised.

Black’s hand was warm and pleasant on his back, so Sivan could barely remember what they were celebrating. He could only smile along, feeling a little like he was being swept up in the moment.

“Did you really?” Sivan asked, his voice a little high at being swung around the cabin.

“Of course!” Black turned the clumsy dance into a simple waltz, leading Sivan with his steps. “As skilled as you are with a sword, I’ve always admired your talent with language just as much.”

Sivan couldn’t stop the laugh that bubbled out of him. “So that’s why you kidnapped me, hm?”

The dancing stopped suddenly, but Black did not let go of him. In fact he brought Sivan closer, the hand on his back giving him a warm push towards the pirate’s chest.

“I stole you away from Varis because I wanted to see you, after so long,” Black said quietly.

Sivan’s heart stuttered. Surely the man had to be playing with him still. Renalt had suggested Black had an ulterior motive for kidnapping him specifically. Now that he knew who the pirate lord really was, he could not deny that fact. But was it really for such a superficial reason as Black no longer being able to stand how much he missed him?

“I-If you wanted to see me,” Sivan breathed, “you could have done it in a more proper way.”



Black's hand on his back grew warmer, and he leaned in a fraction more. "There's nothing proper about my desire to see you, my lord."

Sivan's heart was working at fevered pitch. He couldn't stop himself from parting his lips, was barely able to stop himself from swaying forward. Black's hand on his back twitched at the sight of Sivan's lips, open and panting. His breath was coming in shallow puffs. His knees grew weak.

Then the burning on his arm began.

The pain was far worse than anything he'd experienced in his nightmares. Sivan buckled under the might of it, crumpling to the floor. Black came down with him, concern clear on his face, but it did nothing to stop the screams coming from Sivan now.

Flashes of visions appeared behind Sivan's eyes. Never before had he been plagued with nightmares during the day. Yet these images were too real for them to be dreams. He saw a castle on the ocean floor. White spires of glass shooting up from a trench made of pitch. It was surrounded by Uncharted. Inside the castle was a room, an atrium for any commoner, but a mere study for royalty. The room housed a perfect sphere of obsidian. The orb hummed with magic, an ominous red glow radiating from it. A man held a hand to the obsidian ball, a wild grin on his face, illuminated by red sparks of magic. But it was not a man.


It was a siren.

It was Jhaeros.

In reality, Sivan's body convulsed. "My lord! Sivan!" Black tried to bring Sivan back to his senses, but at the moment the man was utterly lost to his voice. His bones felt like they were being splintered. The scar on his arm began to glow an inhuman red, so bright it appeared to be molten hot.

Seeing the scar burn so brightly, Black realized what was happening. He quickly placed his own hand over the scar, over the black handprint he had burned into Sivan's skin. Green sparks of magic poured into the mark, Black concentrating all his energy on bringing Sivan out of this alive.

Slowly, the fear and the pain faded away. Sivan stopped convulsing in Black's arms, his body going limp.



When Sivan came to, he was in Black's bed. Not in the daybed, but in the curtained off mattress that the pirate slept in. Black was once again at his side, and he instantly noticed when Sivan opened his eyes.

"My lord," he croaked. His voice was strained, as if he had been holding back tears.

"I am fine," Sivan lied. His whole body felt like it had been battered. Every muscle felt worn to shreds. He was not even sure if he could walk. But it hurt him more to see those green eyes marked with worry.

"He's awake? Now are you going to explain what that was, Captain?" Vivianne's sharp voice cut in from behind him. "It's not everyday red lightning almost hits the ship."

Black's face darkened, but he did not turn around to face her. Sivan realized that they were no longer alone in the cabin. Vivianne, Hayes, and several other pirates had filled into the room while Sivan had been unconscious.

"What did you see?" Black asked him quietly, continuing to ignore the crew behind him.

Sivan hesitated. He was wary of sharing his strange nightmares with anyone, let alone most of the Blackwater crew. But Black's eyes were so full of concern, pleading with him to share. So Sivan did.

"I saw a castle, white as snow, on the ocean floor."

A few of the Uncharted pirates gasped.

“Was Jhaeros there? Did he have an obsidian ball of some kind?” Black asked.

Sivan’s eyes widened. “Yes. How did you know that?”

Black stood up suddenly, turning to Hayes. “We need to leave immediately.”

Hayes’s face had grown serious, and she nodded at Black in agreement. Sivan had no clue why his visions had brought this on.

“Hold on, hold on,” Vivianne stepped forward, holding her tentacle-wrapped arms up to keep both Black and Hayes at bay. “What’s the rush? Why did he see the Siren Castle?”

“He’s marked,” an older Uncharted woman spoke up from the crowd. She had one eye, the other gauged out with a thick scar running diagonally across her face. Her remaining eye was black as the night sky and full of fear. One of her hands looked vaguely human, but the other was a rather sharp looking claw. She raised her claw at Sivan, pointing at his arm. “That scar. I saw it glowing when we came in. King Jhaeros gave it to you, didn’t he?”

Sivan’s wide eyes gave him away.

“His screams were from Jhaeros calling to him. The king knows where we are, and he’s coming for him!”

The pirates began arguing all at once. Sivan heard motions to throw him overboard right then. They’d gladly give up the Grenaldian noble to save themselves the fate of facing the tyrant Uncharted king. A few offered to kill Sivan, hoping that ending his life was a surefire way to break the connection he had with Jhaeros.

“No one is going to touch him,” Black roared. His imposing stature cut down the rising mob, but they did not disperse. “I sealed his mark with my own just now. Jhaeros will not be able to track him anymore.”

“But he already has our location! It’s too late!” Vivianne argued. She had stubbornly not stepped back when Black had shouted at them. The defiance on her face was plain to see.

“We cannot escape Uncharted legions, Black,” Hayes confirmed.

Black was quiet for a moment, considering his options. Then he landed on a solution. “We will go to Calloway Cay.”

There was more upset from the pirates. “Are you insane? The sea witch wants us all dead. We’re better off making a run for it now,” Vivianne snapped.

“She’s the only one who can protect us from Jhaeros,” Black said decisively.

The sound of a sword being unsheathed rang out. Vivianne had the tip of her blade pointed at Black’s throat. Sivan’s heart jumped, fearing for the man. He had no sword of his own, no means of protecting himself.

“Undo your seal. We’ll leave the lord on an island for Jhaeros to find,” Vivianne ordered.

Black glared at her firmly. He did not fear the sharp sword at his neck. “I will not,” he said simply.

“You will!” Vivianne shouted, her blade trembling slightly. “I will not die for some Grenaldian noble you took a fancy to!”

“I am Captain of this ship. You will do as I say.” Black’s words were cold, his tone a threat.

Vivianne seemed to lose her temper and suddenly thrust the sword into the floor between them.

“I call for a vote!” She declared. “Get everyone up deck.”

“Fuck,” Hayes muttered, quiet enough so only Sivan heard.