

Chapter 20

calloway cay

Once again, Sivan woke to an unfamiliar ceiling. He had always been accustomed to sleeping on his back, so the ceiling was usually the first thing he was aware of in the morning. This view had changed so frequently in the last few weeks; Sivan was surprised he still found it jarring.

There was a weight on top of him, and Sivan looked down to see a sleeping pirate. Black's breathing was steady and slow, indicating he was still within a heavy slumber. The man had not slept the night before, so it was no wonder Sivan woke up before him. Black's arms around him had relaxed during the night, but they were still a warm presence against his body. Sivan was content like this, and sleep threatened to claim his consciousness once more.

He played lazily with Black's hair, wondering what the pirate would do if he woke to find them in such an intimate position. Sivan was still unsure of what the man wanted from him. He

suspected it was more than a desire to return to simpler times of just being a young lord's attendant. Black's forwardness did not go unnoticed by Sivan, but he couldn't tell if there was more behind it.

Even if there was, could he really accept it?

He longed to do so; he knew he desired this man deeply. If he were still in Varis with his father there would be no choice in the matter. Propriety forbade him from seeking out pleasure with commoners, let alone a pirate. Propriety also forbade him from engaging with his old attendant in the same way.

But Sivan was not in Varis, and the only person who was enforcing these rules of propriety was himself.

Black shifted against him, nuzzling into his chest. He let out a low noise when Sivan's thigh slid against the half-hard cock between the pirate's legs.

Sivan stopped breathing. A flurry of memories descended upon him, forcing him to remember that same cock between his thighs in Lissandry and the shadowy tentacles caressing him in the hold of the Blackwater. He shuddered, desire pooling in his gut at the feel of the large man atop him.

But Sivan had gotten so good at compartmentalizing that all of those memories were immediately followed by his brain frantically stuffing them back inside their boxes. He just as frantically tried to squirm his way out from the pirate. It took some doing, but he managed to shove Black hard enough that he flipped over and off of Sivan.

The mildly panicked lord escaped the bed, clutching at his shirt as if he were clutching at a strand of pearls. He refused to acknowledge how he was still shaking with desire, and he refused even more adamantly to not give Black another look.

With the grace of a man trying to escape a lover before they woke up, Sivan dressed in his clothes from the day before. They

were dry now, and he considered that good enough. Plus, he wouldn't have to spend longer in the room to try and find suitable clean clothes.

Once out in the hall, Sivan was startled to find a golem waiting for him.

"Please come with me, my lord," it said, its crystalline face expressionless.

Sivan nodded and followed the strange being apprehensively. He knew the golems served Eliza, and he hadn't been able to ask Black about where the two of them now stood with her.

As they walked through the castle, Sivan was shocked by just how large it was. Every turn seemed to give birth to a new cavernous hall carved from sea glass. Every inch of it was beautiful, but Sivan once again felt like he was trapped in a desolate cavern of ice. It felt lonely in all its splendor.

The golem led Sivan to a large door made of glass. Inside was what Sivan instinctively wanted to call a greenhouse, but it was a far cry from the humid environment needed for plant life. Huge crystals were growing in rows, branching out like trees and ferns. They varied in shapes and colors, and some were even emitting faint glowing lights from within. The walls were made of glass panels, and the light that filtered through them seemed too cold to be the sun.

In the center of the room stood Eliza. She was holding a hand over rows of smaller crystals suspended in water. Purple magic flowed from her palm, and it sprayed over the crystals evenly.

"Did you sleep well, my lord?" Eliza asked without looking up.

"Yes, thank you," Sivan said politely. The woman seemed like she was in a much better mood today, and Sivan silently thanked Black for whatever he had said to her.

"Good, good," she hummed. "I would be ashamed to fall

short of your noble expectations of comfort.”

Eliza’s tone was relatively bland, but there was a trace of bitterness in her voice. Sivan couldn’t think of anything to say. He had abandoned this woman on the Spear just as he had with Nereus. Unlike Black, who had spent the last nine years obsessing over that promise to return, Eliza no doubt hadn’t put as much hope in his words. However, accepting him with open arms after so long was likely a tall task for her.

The purple magic coming from her palm dissipated, and the crystals she had been tending to grew visibly. She then walked over to a much larger crystal, one that rose well above Sivan’s height. It glimmered softly from within at her approach, as if it could sense her presence.

“Hm, this one’s ready, “ she hummed. Eliza raised her hand and gently drew a line of light down the front of the crystal. It shuddered and cracked, unfolding like a flower, petals delicate layers of crystalized sea glass. Inside was another golem, nestled into the crystal cocoon like a fetus. It blinked open its blank eyes and stretched out, looking somewhat dazed. Two other crystal golems approached and helped their new sibling out of the pod. Without another word, they led the new golem away.

Sivan was stunned. Just how many of these things did Eliza have? How much power would it have taken to grow even one? He didn’t know much about magic, especially dark magic, but he understood its basic transactional principle. For the woman to have become the sea witch Calloway, feared by even pirates... just how much had Eliza exchanged for that kind of power?

“I didn’t know they taught dark magic at the culinary academy,” Sivan said hesitantly.

She gave him a dry look. “I didn’t go to the culinary academy.”

“But-but it was on your resume-“

"I lied," Eliza snapped. "My first husband was a sorcerer. He started teaching me casually, but by the time I found out he was cheating on me I was more powerful than him."

Sivan could guess what ill fate that first husband had met. "So why did you become a cook then?"

"Supply and demand." She grazed a hand over the open crystal cocoon. "Back then there wasn't much need for dark magic other than the occasional petty curse. Cooking paid better."

"I see," Sivan said.

"Once the war started that changed. Curses, protections, power. I suppose I should thank your father for starting that war. It made me a very rich woman." Eliza grinned, but once again there was no real mirth in her eyes. "Even if it lost me my leg."

"I am sorry for failing to return like I promised—" Sivan tried saying, but was cut off when Eliza struck him down with a steely blue glare.

She sighed after a moment, seeming to recollect herself before she could spiral back into anger. Sivan wondered how Nereus had become such an angry person after the Spear, and he suspected it was a reflection of this woman's natural rage.

"The boy explained to me how you were forced to join the war. How you tried to return for us, but were stopped by Uncharted." Eliza faced him, looking at him coolly. "Of course I take everything that boy has to say with a grain of salt when it comes to you."

Sivan once again did not know what to say. He had questions for her, but he felt that if he just started asking them she would cut out his tongue.

Eliza seemed to sense his nervousness and tamed her expression once more. "Regardless of our unsavory past, we are on the same side of this war. Jhaeros must be stopped at all costs."

Sivan was a little surprised she felt that way. The sea witch

was known to be an independent wild card in this war, appearing to take neither side and do whatever she wanted as long as there was money in it. Although, the same was said for the pirates, and Black had proved him wrong on that. "I did not realize the sea witch had decided to side with us," Sivan said cautiously.

"Side with you," Eliza repeated, her smile flat and disingenuous. "I suppose Grenaldia is the lesser of two evils. I have no love for this country, but I do not wish to live in the world Jhaeros wants to make."

"And what world is that?" he asked.

"Ah, I suppose you were not there when the Uncharted king made his address to the survivors of the Spear," she said blandly. She approached Sivan, holding out two fingers which glowed with purple light. "I will show you," she said before pressing the tips of her fingers to Sivan's temple.



Sivan was suddenly transported to the Montgomery manor on the Spear. Except it was a far cry from the elegant and pristine home he had known. The walls were cracked, pillars crumbled, roofs caved in. This was after the attack all those years ago. This damage was not from age. It was from a battle between Uncharted and human.

Therefore, it took him a moment to recognize the hall he was in. This was the exterior hall to his bedroom in the manor.

A rhythmic clacking sound resounded from behind him. He turned to find a younger Eliza marching down the hall towards him, a wooden peg leg snapping on the tiled floor. She looked severe as ever, but despite her younger appearance, she looked

far more drained than she had a few moments ago. Her pale skin was sallow and beginning to show signs of blackening veins, the telltale mark of a human practitioner of black magic. Black magic users were rare, not just because it was a taboo form of sorcery, but also because the dark arts almost always consumed the life force of the practitioner. From the look of her here, Eliza was well on her way to an early grave at the hands of her own magic.

Sivan realized he was being shown a memory as the woman stormed past him without detecting his presence. This was the Eliza from many years ago, back when she and Nereus had been stuck on the Spear. The real her, the her of the present, was still in that crystal greenhouse.

The her in the present also did not show any signs of blackened veins despite her heavy use of dark magic. Sivan wondered if she had cast some kind of glamor on herself to conceal them.

He felt a tug towards Eliza as she continued her march down the hall. The memory wanted him to witness what she was about to show him. Sivan followed her until she stopped in front of the door to his bedroom. Eliza paused at the door, seeming to collect herself. She gripped the thigh of her peg leg, face contorting briefly into a grimace of pain.

“This damn leg,” she hissed under her breath. She fished out a small tin from a pocket and popped a few pills from the tin into her mouth.

Sivan knew what they were right away: willow bark pills. He had relied on them quite heavily while he had been recovering from his fight with Jhaeros. They helped with the pain, albeit not by much.

Eliza tucked away the tin and threw the doors open, entering Sivan’s room without even knocking.

“Nereus! If you’re in that fucking bed again I’m going to skin you alive!”

Sivan winced at her threat. Black's anger certainly came from the time he spent with this woman.

"Go away," a miserable and muffled voice came from Sivan's bed. For the most part, his room looked the same. Someone, likely Nereus, had been maintaining it and keeping it clean even when the manor had been falling apart. Yet there was a strange mountain of clothes and blankets on his bed. The mountain moved, as if something was underneath all of it.

Eliza shoved her hand into the mountain and pulled out a hand. "Get up. You're useless to me if you spend all day moping like this."

The mountain of fabric shuddered, clothes and blankets slipping out of place as a rather beautiful but forlorn looking face emerged from the pile. It was Nereus, one year older than when Sivan had last seen him on the Spear. He had finally started to lose that boyish softness his early teens stubbornly clung to and was beginning to look more like the wicked pirate Sivan knew presently. Seeing this, he felt even more foolish at not having recognized Black sooner. He had changed considerably, but if Sivan had just observed his face more closely he would have seen the resemblance.

"I don't need to be useful to you," Nereus whined. "I'm saving my usefulness for when my lord returns."

Sivan's heart dropped. Even after a year, the boy still kept hope that he would return. Nereus attempted to recede back into the pile of fabric, clothes falling off in the process. Sivan then realized the clothes were in fact his, including the vest with green floral embroidery he was currently wearing. The lord's face turned red, and he mentally cursed this impudently shameless boy.

This was beginning to form a pattern. He'd feel bad for the hard life he'd left Nereus to, then it would be followed with blind

embarrassment at whatever Black ended up teasing him with.

Eliza let out a frustrated groan. “This has to stop. If that lord of yours even managed to outrun the Uncharted legion, he is likely caught up in whatever war that has started after it. He is not coming back.”

Nereus sat up, clothes and blankets flying off the bed. “Yes he is! He promised...” His face had contorted into rage, but quickly melted into defeat after Eliza did not respond. This argument must have taken place many times over for the once dedicated attendant to give up like that. He slowly started gathering the clothes that had fallen off the pile, taking the vest with the green embroidery in his hands with care. “He promised. He’ll come back for me.”

Sivan’s stomach churned at the guilt that washed over him once more. Eliza was cruel, showing him this scene. Nereus had believed him so thoroughly, and Sivan’s failure had utterly crushed the boy. He supposed he deserved to witness this. If Sivan had only been able to break through the Uncharted forces he could have saved him from this pathetic state.

Eliza marched forward, wooden leg snapping on the ground loudly. She grabbed Nereus by the collar and slapped him clean across the face.

Nereus clutched at his cheek, shocked and a little afraid of her. The woman was severe, but she never struck him like that before. “That hurt! Why did you — ?!”

“Aren’t you tired of waiting for him?” Eliza asked, glaring down at him. “You wallow in here, but you do nothing to try and leave this island. You know you have the power to do so. You could swim away before they even notice you.”

Nereus’s face darkened and he shifted his eyes elsewhere. “I won’t turn into one of them again. I won’t.”

So Eliza had already cast the siren curse on him. Had it not

been done willingly? Nereus seemed so disgusted by the prospect of turning into a siren.

“Then find another way. If he can’t come to you, then find your own way to him,” Eliza said, softer.

Nereus froze. He froze like he had never actually contemplated that idea. His trust in Sivan was so great that he didn’t even bother to try and find a way off an island invaded by an Uncharted legion. “H-how?” His voice was rough, like he had just found it again.

Eliza slapped him on the shoulder, much more gently this time. “You can start by helping me solidify the protection on the manor. The number of Uncharted out there have increased today. I don’t know why, but I don’t have a good feeling about it.”

Nereus got out of bed, and Sivan realized just how tall he had grown in that year. He was nearly as tall as Black was now, just not nearly as muscled yet. Lifting the same vest Sivan wore now, Nereus inhaled into the fabric, murmuring softly. “I will return to you, my lord.”

Turning red again, Sivan resolved to burn the vest he was wearing.

He followed the two of them through the manor. They passed a small group of haggard sailors and merchants who were also using Sivan’s old home as a shelter. These people nodded respectfully at Eliza as she passed, but Sivan could see the fear in their eyes as they saw Nereus. The boy ignored them, but Sivan could sense the tension that arose in him. Nereus had experienced disdain and rejection at the hands of these same people years ago, before he had become Sivan’s attendant. He never admitted it, but Sivan knew the boy had always had a sore spot whenever others looked down on him. It was probably why Nereus had become so devoted to Sivan after he had showed him an ounce of

kindness and respect.

Now those looks of disdain had turned into anxious glances of fear, but they still had the same effect on Nereus. Yet this time Sivan was not there to make things better for him.

Once they entered the courtyard Sivan got a good look at what the manor had turned into. Many tents and makeshift shelters had popped up on the large expanse of grass, like they had just started growing from the earth after the Montgomerys had left. More commoners nervously loitered around, watching the sky with anxious whispers.

Looking up, Sivan could see a thin shimmer of purple light fluctuate above them. This was the protection Eliza had mentioned. lightning cracked across the sky, bouncing off the barrier with an electric snap. The crowd of commoners cried out, a few ducking and covering their heads.

“It’s getting worse, Mrs. Day!” a sailor shouted as he ran up to them. “Something’s happening at the port. There are three times the number of Uncharted as there were yesterday.”

Eliza’s frown deepened. “Nereus, help me secure the protection spell. Do not fuck it up. Remember what I taught you.”

He nodded firmly and dashed off to the perimeter of the barrier. Sivan instinctively wanted to follow Nereus, but he was forced to follow Eliza as she headed to the opposite side of the perimeter.

As the protection spell was secured, Sivan got a glimpse of what had happened to the Spear outside of the manor. It was virtually indistinguishable from the island he had once known. The manor had been damaged during the initial attack, but it had been protected once Eliza cast the barrier. Outside was a broken skeleton of a town that had been picked away by the Uncharted forces.

Just as the sailor had said, there was a commotion going

down at the docks. The manor was too far inland to really see what was happening exactly, but Sivan felt uneasy just from looking at sheer number of Uncharted gathering around the shore.

There was a crack of lightning at the docks just as Eliza finished securing the spell. “What the hell was that?” she muttered, glaring at the sea.

Nereus joined her, as well as several commoners who followed behind him. “Was there more lightning?” he asked.

Eliza hummed an affirmation, her frown deepening. “Did you finish securing the protection?”

“Yes.” Nereus nodded, expression firmly confident. “I did not *fuck it up*.”

The woman huffed out a low laugh, but it did not ease the tension in her stance. “Well, we may see your skills tested soon. I do not have a good feeling about what is happening out there.”

“What do you mean —“

A mighty wave crashed into the docks with an unnatural clap of thunder. It tore out remaining docks and buildings, a wall of water racing onto land. A great beast emerged from the wave, larger than any ship Sivan had ever seen. It looked like a giant salamander, with huge spikes growing out of it similar to a lion fish. The scales were white and luminous, bright blue globs of magic light seeming to drip from every spike. It was beautiful but terrifying at the same time.

“What is that?!” a sailor behind them shouted frantically.

Eliza’s face had gone slack, wonder and anxiety mixing in her features. “It’s a leviathan,” she breathed, uncertainty in her voice.

“Those aren’t real,” Nereus said firmly. “The sea gods and goddesses were just stories.”

Sivan knew a little about leviathans. Legends described them as divine creatures of immeasurable power, able to transform

into any shape. They crafted the land from the sea, allowing land creatures to grow and thrive. Humans and sirens alike worshipped them. The legends also told how the leviathans used to walk the shores many millennia ago, but at some point they returned to the deepest part of the sea and have never been seen since.

The leviathan crawled out of the water, groaning loudly. It was so large that the sound caused the island to shake as if there were an earthquake. The beast slowly ambled onto land, growing closer and closer to the manor.

“Nereus,” Eliza said, quietly enough so the commoners behind them would not hear. The boy stood closer to hear her. “We are leaving. I’ll ready the portal.”

“But-!” Nereus protested, but lowered his voice when he realized the people behind them would hear. “You said that spell wouldn’t be able to transport more than two people. What about them?”

Eliza was silent for a moment, tension clear in her shoulders. “At this point all we can wish for them is a quick death.”

Nereus look distraught by her words, but the rumbling caused by the leviathan drew his worry back towards the threat. A bolt of red lightning struck the beast, causing it to scream in pain. The leviathan opened its mouth, and blue light started to form at the back of its throat. With a snap that seemed to pierce the air, a beam of blue light exploded from its mouth. The beam tore through the land like a hot knife through butter, carving up dirt and rock with ease. The leviathan closed its mouth as the beam dissipated and groaned again. It shook violently, like it was trying to shake off something.

As it got closer Sivan could see a figure on the head of the creature. Red bolts of magic danced around the figure, occasionally striking the leviathan when it resisted its orders. A long

white siren tail wrapped around the beast's spikes.

It was Jhaeros.

Sivan's chest constricted automatically at the sight of the man, even from so far a distance. So Jhaeros had actually come to the Spear himself, and with a leviathan no less.

"He's controlling it," Eliza said, disgust clear in her voice.

Jhaeros brought the leviathan to the edge of the protection barrier. Sivan wondered if it would actually do anything against such a powerful beast. His fear was overridden with another worrying thought. If Jhaeros still had this leviathan under his control, why hadn't he used it in the war? It had been eight years since this memory, yet the Uncharted forces had never unleashed this ultimate weapon upon them.

Maybe Jhaeros held back just to keep the war going for longer. To draw out their suffering.

The leviathan settled in front of the manor, and the Uncharted king gave his address.

"People of the Spear! I commend you for lasting so long during our little seige. Whoever is protecting you has quite the talent, although I imagine their power is dwindling at this point."

Sivan's stomach grew queasy at the sound of the man's voice. His head started to throb, but was startled out of his panic when Eliza suddenly threw a purple fireball at the siren. Jhaeros didn't even bother to dodge. He caught the attack easily and dissipated it into the sky with a crackle of lightning.

He laughed, narrowing his unearthly blue eyes on the woman who had attacked him. "Impressive! How would you like to join our cause? We can always use good sorcerers."

Eliza did not drop her guard, but did not ready another attack. "And what cause would that be?"

"Ah, you must think me a tyrant, flaunting all his power. In reality I'm seeking to make the world a better place. By uniting

the land and sea once more.”

Now that he was closer, Sivan could see the siren was holding a red whip in his hand. He rose it, lightning twisting around it as it snapped against the back of the leviathan. It roared and reared back, gathering blue light in its mouth once more.

“The old gods created the land from the sea! And now the leviathans will bring the land back to its rightful place!”

The bolt of immeasurable power pierced the length of the island, driving through the earth and into the sea. Water rushed in through the crevice it created, instantly forming a massive inlet where there had previously been land.

Jhaeros pulled back his whip again, but this time the leviathan did not scream when it struck. It growled, deep and more menacing than anything Sivan had ever heard. It started flinging itself around wildly, trying to get the siren king off its back. Jhaeros held tight, continuing to whip the divine creature, but it would not settle. It began gathering light in its mouth again and unloaded the beam upon the Uncharted legion behind it. Jhaeros whipped harder, shouting at it, but it did not relent. The leviathan became frantic, shooting bolts of godlike power into wherever it was pointed.

Jhaeros had lost control, and the leviathan was going to tear apart everything around it.

The barrier Eliza and Nereus had erected dissipated the moment the leviathan’s light hit it. The commoners in the manor screamed, yelling at each other to run. Eliza began working quickly. She used a knife at her waist to slice open her arm. Blood began pouring out immediately, and with a snap of her arm, she flicked it onto the ground. Somehow it formed the exact magic circle Black had used to transport them to Calloway Cay. Black had drawn the circle quickly, but Eliza had done it all at once in an instant and with her own blood.

The blood circle shone brightly, purple light shooting up to form the portal. Without so much as a glance at the panicking commoners she had spent a year protecting, Eliza seized Nereus by the collar and entered the portal.