Chapter 19

calloway cay

When they exited the pillar of light, the tiny island was nowhere to be seen. Black's portal had transported them inside the great entrance room of a castle. The walls were crafted from huge panels of frosted sea-glass, arching up to the zenith of a domed mosaic ceiling. Daylight shone in from the ceiling through the smaller tiles of sea-glass which created the mosaic. It filled the room with an unearthly green and blue glow. Sivan gasped quietly, awed by the splendor of whatever castle they were in.

"Be on guard, my lord," Black warned as he set Sivan down on the ground. "Calloway and I did not part on the best of terms, so I'm not sure if we will be entirely welcome here."

Sivan used Black's arm to steady himself, finally regaining enough of his strength to stand. "Not welcome?" he hissed. "Why didn't you tell me this before we came here?"

Black looked at him sheepishly. "I'm sorry, my lord. There wasn't time."

Sivan let it go, but he couldn't help but wonder what the nature of the pirate's relationship with the sea witch was. "How do you know the sea witch anyways?"

"I think I have you to thank for that, don't I, Lord Montgomery?" A woman's familiar voice called out to them.

The voice belonged to a busty woman who was well into middle age. She wore a finely tailored blue robe and held herself in a manner that exuded power. Her hair was a brilliant shade of red, tied up on her head in perfect coils.

Sivan's eyes widened when he recognized her.

"Eliza Day?" He croaked.

Eliza smiled, but it did not reach her eyes. "I haven't heard that name in many years. It's Calloway, now. I remarried after you left us on that fucking rock."

Looking more closely at her dress, Sivan realized one of her legs was made of enchanted crystal, just visible from the slit in her hem. "I-I'm so sorry—"

Black slid in front of him, shielding him from the woman with nothing but his bare hands. "Master! If you have any affection left for me, please hear me out."

Master…? It all clicked into place. The Montgomery's old cook had turned to dark magic and taught Black about the craft. Her face twitched at Black's defense, the sight of him stoking her anger. Her open hands crackled with purple magic, the light of it dancing off the polished floor. "How dare you call me that, you ungrateful brat." Eliza's voice was low, full of a threatening rage.

"Eliza, please, we've come here to seek refuge," Black tried to reason with her.

"You will not find it here," she spat. "You stole my ship!"

With that, Eliza hurled a flaming purple fireball at them. There was no time to dodge, Black could only block the attack with a hastily crafted shield of his own green magic. The force

of it knocked them back, Sivan colliding with Black's still damp back. Sivan tripped on the tail that had coiled itself behind him, and he fell between the siren's fins. Black looked behind him, needing to make sure Sivan was safe. While he was distracted, another purple fireball hit him square on the chest, sending him flying across the room.

"Black!" Sivan cried, fear gripping him as he watched the man hit a glass wall. The glass was thick, and it merely cracked where the large man had been thrown against it.

Eliza laughed. "He calls you by your silly little pirate name? I guess that is all you are now, Nereus. A thief!" She threw another bolt of magic at him as he crumpled to the ground. It hit him, forcing him to cough up blood. "You're just a common criminal. My map. My ship. What do you plan to steal from me next?"

Black smiled at her despite the obvious disadvantage he currently had. "The Blackwater was never yours."

This seemed to anger her further, and she began collecting magic in her hands once more. "No matter what you call her, she was always mine!"

She unleashed the attack, but Black dodged, hitting her low and knocking her to her knees. He attempted to slip away, but Eliza was relentless. Purple magic crackled and elongated, twisting until it formed a deadly looking axe. The points of the axe blade curved upward into spikes, creating a U-shape. Eliza drove the tip of the axe into the ground where Black's head was.

Sivan cried out, his heart lurching at the sight. It took a moment for him to realize she hadn't killed him. Either spike of the axe was embedded in the ground, trapping Black's neck in the U that it created. The siren's tail writhed as he struggled to free himself, his hands scratching at the axe despite its firm position.

"Give me my ship back, and I might let you live," Eliza hissed from above him.

Sivan wanted to help him. He wanted to fight back, but he had no sword. No means of saving him. Even if he had a weapon, Sivan doubted it would have done any good against the sea witch. Eliza looked furious, but her hair was just as tightly coiled as it had been when she first appeared. Not a strand was out of place. Meaning that brutal battle she just had with Black hadn't been much of an effort for her. Sivan stood no chance on his own.

"I can't-" Black rasped from underneath the axe. "The Blackwater isn't here."

"Of course it's not here. But that ship is loyal to you for some unknown reason. Call out to her and she will come."

"I can't. I...I'm no longer the captain. There was a mutiny." Black shut his eyes tightly, as if the shame of it were worse than the axe bearing down on him.

Eliza's frown deepened. She seemed to calm down to a degree. "So she abandoned you too."

"Jhaeros is hunting us. Lord Sivan bears his mark. I sealed it before coming here, but...but—" Black trailed off, losing his ability to speak as the axe cut off his windpipe.

"Please, Eliza!" Sivan pleaded. "I may have failed to save you from the Spear, but Jhaeros is the one who sent the legion in the first place. He is our mutual enemy."

An excruciating moment passed as the woman considered her options. Finally, she relented and pulled the axe out of the floor, releasing Black. He rolled over and began coughing violently, blood splattering the polished floor. Sivan rushed over to him, helping him sit upright.

"Are you okay?" Sivan whispered, his hands tight on the man's shoulders.

Black smiled at him despite the obvious pain he was in. "I will be fine, my lord, but thank you for your concern. Sirens heal

much faster than humans."

Eliza clicked her tongue, drawing Sivan's attention away from the pirate. "You, my lord, are the reason he's like this."

Sivan glared at her. "Like what?"

"He's weak, because you always coddled him." She walked over to the entrance to a long corridor. "I will help you, but I want both of you out of here as quickly as possible. Come with me, Nereus. One of my servants will escort Lord Montgomery to a room."

Black raised himself with the support of Sivan. "I will not be long, my lord, I promise."

"But—but your injuries…" Sivan was loathe to leave him like this. He had just been attacked by Eliza, and now she wanted him to go with her?

The pirate seemed to sense Sivan's concern and stood straighter, appearing healthier than Sivan would have guessed. "I told you, sirens heal quickly. I will be good as new in a few minutes. Do not worry about Eliza. We are always like this. This was actually one of the less violent homecomings I've had."

Sivan had no choice but to let him go. He watched as Black's tail disappeared into the corridor, winding behind him into the dark.

"Please come with me, my lord," a neutral but elegant voice called out to him. Sivan looked to its source to find a golem made out of the same sea-glass that comprised the castle. It was vaguely human; its facial features were augmented with shards of crystal glass. It wore no clothes, and its torso was seamless glass, revealing a hollow chest. It was beautiful in a way, but Sivan felt that it was a far cry from actually rivaling a true life form.

Sivan followed the golem. The rest of the castle was just as grand as the entrance room, all of it built in mosaics of sea-glass. It bore a similar strange beauty to the golem, but it also bore the

similar shortfall of missing something essential to life. The castle was cold, lacking the touches that made a place home.

The golem led Sivan to a room, depositing him inside before leaving without a word. The room looked much more livable than the rest of the desolate castle. In contrast to the empty halls Sivan had walked through, this room held a great collection of trinkets. A large bed stood against a wall, and a white porcelain tub sat behind a wooden divider. The trinkets were lined up neatly on shelves, on the windowsill, on any surface that was flat. They were meaningless baubles: hand mirrors, gold statuettes of horses, a broken conch shell. This was clearly someone's bedroom, although Sivan didn't know whose.

He went to the window and looked out. He saw the ocean, vast and wide as ever, but as Sivan looked towards the shore he realized with a gasp that the island the castle was built on was moving. The water rushed by as if they were on a ship with all sails open and a strong wind at their back. Yet the island did not disturb the water. It was hard to tell from Sivan's perspective, but it appeared that Calloway Cay actually hovered above the water as it moved.

So this was why the sea witch had never been caught by the Royal Navy or the Uncharted legion. Her power was so great that she could enchant her castle like this, making her impossible to locate and even more impossible to stop.

Sivan drew the curtains, closing out the setting sun. He hadn't realized so much time had passed since they escaped the Blackwater, but taking the portal to get here must have warped his sense of time.

He was tired, but he could not resist the temptation to bathe after the day he had. Black had a bathtub in his cabin, but Sivan rarely felt brave enough to use it when he shared the room with the man. The pirate would have evacuated the room to give him

privacy, but Sivan preferred to avoid such conversations alto-
gether.

He undressed as the porcelain tub filled. As Sivan took off
the embroidered green vest he'd picked out the day before he
noticed that a breast pocket was now missing a button.

Sivan sucked in a breath and realized that it was the pock-
et he'd put Black's vial of light in. His fingers scrambled to feel
inside the opening, but he could tell that it was empty just from
the weight of it.

'It's yours now.' Hayes had told him.

Whether through coincidence or fate, Sivan had become the
owner of this precious vial. Black had cast it out into the sea for
gods knew what reason, and it had found its way to Sivan. Black
didn't even know he'd taken the vial, but somehow Sivan felt
that he had become its protector.

And he'd failed to keep it safe, just as he had with Nereus.

Sivan took off the rest of his clothes in a daze. The tub was
now full, and Sivan slipped into it automatically. The water was
warm and pleasant, and it would have been a blissful experience
if Sivan had let himself feel it. The dread of losing the vial out-
weighed the comfort of a good bath.

His muscles still ached from when Jhaeros had called out to
him. The vision of the Uncharted king's beautiful but cruel face
in his mind haunted Sivan, but it was a burden he had grown
used to in his nightmares. The physical effects of it were new,
and he wished they would pass quickly.

The scar on his right arm had turned from a neutral, pinker
shade of his copper skin to an angry crimson burn. It did not
hurt currently with Black's seal on top of it, but it looked like
it should hurt. The mark appeared like it was currently in the
process of burning his skin, like there was hot iron being pressed
into his arm right then.

Sivan submerged his arm in the water and continued to bathe himself. When he was done he dried off and dressed, continuing to squeeze water out of his hair with the towel. As he was absentmindedly drying his hair he took another look at the trinkets gathered on shelves. He noticed two twin swords laying between everything. They seemed decidedly out of place as they were much longer than anything on the shelves.

The swords also seemed strikingly familiar.

Sivan hesitated, not believing what he saw. He carefully plucked out one of the swords, turning it over in his hands.

The weight of it was even the same.

He quickly turned over the sword to look at the golden hilt. On the tip of the hilt was engraved "S.M." He frowned, not understanding how these sabers were here in this room.

Sivan had dropped these two swords during his battle with Jhaeros.

He had been knocked unconscious at the end of that fight. Presumedly the Siren king left him to die, and the ocean had performed a miracle and spit him out on Grenaldian shores.

But what if it hadn't been a miracle at all?

The door opened, and Sivan turned around to find Black walking in. He had dried off enough to return to having human legs, and was now wearing different clothes.

"M-my lord! What are you doing in here? Oh no, did those useless golems misunderstand and put you in my room?" Black was so flustered by Sivan's presence in what was apparently his bedroom that at first he did not realize what Sivan held in his hands.

"Are these…are these my swords?" Sivan asked, unable to contain the emotion in his voice.

Black froze upon seeing what Sivan held. There was a long moment before he swallowed and walked over to Sivan. He

plucked up the second saber and joined it with its brother in Sivan's hands. He sighed, tired and tense. "Yes, they are your swords."

Sivan clutched at them, his hands trembling. "I-I don't understand. I dropped them into the ocean when—when—"

"When you fought Jhaeros," Black finished for him. "I was there."

"What?" Sivan's eyes widened, searching for falsehood in the man's face and finding none there.

"I learned of the Uncharted attack on your unit, but I arrived too late to help you fight him. I only got there after he had marked you and dropped you in the ocean." The pirate's face darkened as he recalled the memory. "I found you and escaped before he could finish you off. I returned to the wreckage later to find your sabers. I planned to return them to you when we were reunited."

Sivan's voice caught in his throat. Black had been watching over him all this time. He brought Sivan back from the precipice of death, and Sivan had thought it had simply been the ocean's miracle. "So you were the one who brought me to land."

"Yes." Black nodded. He made a gesture to touch Sivan, but stopped himself.

Sivan dropped the swords and surged forward to hug the man. The weapons clattered to the floor, and Sivan wrapped his arms around Black, burying his face in his chest. "Why didn't you reveal yourself then?" he sobbed, shaking with emotion. "Why did you make me wait another year?"

Black froze when Sivan embraced him. As Nereus, he had been close with the lord he served, but propriety never allowed them to be intimate, even like this. The Grenaldian man was warm against his chest, a comfort Nereus had always longed for but was never allowed to have. Now his most precious person

was here, holding him of his own accord, and Black felt like he had cheated the world to be blessed with such fortune. Finally, he returned the hug tightly, shuddering at the weight of this simple gesture. "I wasn't ready. I had to come up with a way to kill Jhaeros before I could face you."

"Why?" Sivan looked up, and Black was astonished to find tears in the lord's golden eyes. "Sure, I want to kill the man and end this war, but that has nothing to do with you and I."

Black frowned sadly and brushed a lock of silver hair out of Sivan's face. "It has everything to do with us. Jhaeros has marked you, and he wants me dead as well. There's no escaping him. If either of us wants a future worth living he has to be stopped."

"I understand that, I just…" Sivan sniffed, wiping tears from his eyes. "I just wish you had returned to me sooner."

"Please forgive me then, my lord," Black said dutifully and stepped back to give him a slight bow.

Just like that, the man had gone from pirate to friend to attendant. Sivan swallowed back another swell of emotion as his own heart battled amidst the confusion. Nereus had been an entirely different person on the Spear. He had changed into the dreaded pirate named Black, but Sivan's attendant was still in there at times. The pirate's recent behavior made it impossible to tell where Nereus ended and Black began. Sivan cared deeply for Nereus, and he lusted after Black. Striking a balance between those two was proving to be a difficult process for him.

"You may have this room tonight. I will sleep elsewhere," Black said, gesturing towards the door.

"But it's your room-"

"And I want you to use it, if you find it suitable," the pirate cut him off with.

Sivan sighed and watched as Black picked up his sabers from

the ground and leaned them against a wall. Then he extended a hand towards Sivan's marked arm. "I'll refresh the seal for you now. It should last through the night."

Black gently took his arm as Sivan extended it out towards him. The feeling of the man's hand encircling his arm was starting to become a regular experience, but Sivan knew his heart would never stop racing no matter how familiar it became. Green sparks flickered where their skin met as the seal was remade.

Sivan stole a glance at Black, hoping to glean some kind of insight into his heart. Did it stutter fervently when they were close like this, as it did with Sivan? He sucked in a breath when he realized Black was staring at him, eyes half lidded. Sivan flushed furiously. Did he intend to kiss him goodnight?

Black leaned in, getting closer and closer to Sivan's face. The green sparks finished making the seal, and his hand fell from Sivan's arm. Sivan's heart was in his throat. He wasn't sure if he should stop this pirate or pull him closer.

In the end, Black fell on top of him, unconscious.

Sivan caught him instinctively, grunting at the weight of the large man. "Black?" He shook him lightly. The pirate remained unresponsive, his breathing steady.

He was asleep.

Black had fallen asleep standing up as he gave his last ounce of energy to remake the seal on Sivan's arm. "Holy heavens, you're heavy," Sivan grumbled as he struggled to keep Black from toppling over. The bed was fairly close, so Sivan decided to dump him there. It was a difficult task, to put a man much taller and broader than you to bed. Sivan succeeded in backing up into the bed, but when he got there he lost his balance and fell backwards, accompanied by one unconscious pirate.

He roused somewhat at the fall on top of Sivan on top of the bed. Black groaned quietly and blindly pawed at Sivan's sides

until he found room to wrap his arms around him. He snuggled into him, giving a contented sigh as he got comfortable.

Sivan was reminded of how the man had hugged the bolster pillow before Sivan escaped the curtained room on Lissandry. It had almost made Sivan want to stay then, and he was really in no fit state to resist that temptation now. Lying in the bed with Black was comfortable. Sivan was still tired from Jhaeros's call, and his heart was weary from resisting what it wanted most. He carded a hand through Black's long, silky hair, careful to not let his fingers snag on any of the tiny gold beads tied within it. The pirate gave a contented sigh, hugging him just a fraction closer.

There was no way to extract the comforter on the bed with Black dead asleep on top of Sivan, but the quilt on top had been shifted in their fall. He managed to tug it out from under their bodies and draped it over Black. It barely covered him, so Sivan resolved himself to keeping the man warm for the night.