

Chapter 10

Lissandry

The Blackwater lay unperturbed in Lissandry's port along with her reduced number of sister ships. There was naught a sign of the Royal Navy on the horizon.

A dangerous thought crossed Sivan's mind. What if Renalt's message had not made it to his father? Or worse, what if it had made it there, but his father did not care enough to send anyone to rescue him?

Maybe Sivan was on his own. Maybe he was stuck with the pirates.

The thought did not trouble him as much as it should have.

Sivan decided to stick to his plan for now. He slunk down to the docks, making sure to stay out of sight of any patrolling pirates. There were very few keeping watch, and those who Sivan had seen were likely too drunk to actually monitor the area effectively.

He found a small sailing ship docked closer to Black's man-

or. Sivan thanked the gods it was small enough that it could be navigated by one person.

He untied the ship from the dock and pushed off into the ocean. The familiar wave of nausea washed over him as the rocking of the boat stirred up his previous bad memories. But the night was still, and the ocean was calm, and Sivan was determined enough that he managed to swallow down the fear that threatened to take him.

He knew how to sail a ship. That had not left him, even after his battle with the Uncharted king. Sivan navigated the ship onto open water with ease. The Blackwater became less of an imposing presence the further he sailed away from it. After he got far enough out to not be noticed easily from shore, Sivan cast the small anchor attached to the boat and settled down to watch the horizon.

He did not want to be too far away from Lissandry when he noticed the Royal Navy. If the ships were coming from Varis they should be coming from the south, the direction he was facing, but if they had decided to approach from another direction for tactical reasons, Sivan couldn't risk being on the opposite side of the island.

His plan was to intervene before the so-called rescue fleet landed on the island. He'd sail towards them and board the ship, reveal who he was, and depending on who was captaining the ship, either lie or beg in order to get them to not attack the pirates.

There was only one sentence for those convicted of piracy: death.

Sivan would not let Black meet that fate. The strange attachment he'd developed for the pirate since he had been captured was one reason. The other was that deep down he believed Black was their only hope of killing Jhaeros at this stage in the war.

He wasn't certain the *Corseque* of Estes was real, but if it were, Black now supposedly possessed all the elements to obtaining it. Sivan had witnessed the pirate's tenacity first hand. If the weapon were real, he would find it. And he would use it to kill Jhaeros.

It might be a long shot, but Sivan was taking a gamble he felt good about.

A tiny clink of glass against wood alerted him to the port side of the boat. Sivan leaned over carefully, and was astonished to find the source of the noise was a small glass vial filled with a glowing pale green light. He immediately remembered the man who he'd witnessed sending a similar glowing light out from the shore. This had to be that same light.

Sivan hesitated. He wanted to scoop up the strange vial, but that required him to lean quite a ways out of the boat to reach it, and he was not sure if he could do it without passing out. Still, determination had brought him this far onto the sea, and determination allowed him to grip the side of the small ship, knuckles turning white as he leaned over the edge. He plucked the vial out of the water and fell back safely into the boat.

Laying on his back, the ocean hidden from view, Sivan could appreciate the beauty of the light up close. It thrummed in his hand, warm and fluttering. It was not very large nor very bright, but it seemed to grow brighter the closer Sivan held it to his face. He thought to open it, but was afraid that it would dissipate or somehow be destroyed upon touching the air. For some reason, Sivan just knew that Black had been the one who had sent this light out to sea.

Whatever it was, this could be important to the pirate lord, so Sivan leaned back over the side of the boat and reluctantly dropped it back into the ocean.

Reason told him to not give Black a reason to come after him

once he'd escaped, even if his heart told him otherwise.

Turning back to face the ocean, he set his sight on the horizon. He thought a small blip in the distance could be something like a ship, but it wasn't close enough for him to be certain. His golden eyes had adjusted to the darkness, and he focused them onto the blip, trying to discern if his mind was playing tricks on him or not. Sivan was torn out of his focus when another sound of glass against wood broke his attention. He leaned back over the side and once again saw the glass vial of light next to his boat. Sivan frowned at the light, as if he could make it go the other direction just from an expression. He paddled water in the opposite direction of the vial, trying to get it to find another current.

Plink.

Plink.

Plink.

Without fail, the vial always steered back to his boat. Even replacing it to the other side of his boat still resulted in the light returning to him. With a sigh, Sivan scooped up the light once more. It lay in his palm like a small bird, warm but so, so fragile.

Another light on the horizon drew his attention away from the vial. Finally, the blip had come close enough to be recognizable. The silver light of the Royal Navy dotted the horizon, making a beeline for Lissandry.

Without another thought he tucked the vial into his shirt pocket, buttoning it up to make sure it did not escape. He pulled on the line to bring the anchor up and found the best angle for the sail to propel him towards the oncoming ships.

He sped towards the approaching lights, but his ship was not as fast as he would have hoped. Soon the Royal Navy's ships came into focus, clear silhouettes growing steadily closer.

With every passing moment Sivan prayed the pirates would

not notice the approaching fleet.

He stopped praying when a shrill alarm sounded from the Lissandry port.

The pirates had seen the Royal Navy.

Still, Sivan pushed towards the boats. His plan had not gone like he had hoped. He had sorely underestimated the speed at which his little boat would sail or how fast the drunk pirates would catch on to the oncoming attack.

His boat was pointed in the direction of his rescuers while his attention was drawn towards the pirate capital. Sivan was horrified as he realized the Blackwater was already unfurling its sails.

The pirate ship was darker than the night and faster than any ship Grenaldia owned. Cold dread seeped into Sivan's bones as he watched the Blackwater cut through the bay of Lissandry with unnatural haste, leaving the other pirate ships behind. The Grenaldian fleet was still approaching, the silver light of the oil lanterns glittering in the night. Sivan felt like he was caught in the middle of his father's war table. A single great obsidian pirate ship driving into a fleet of silver Royal Navy vessels. Sivan's tiny ship would not have even earned a model on the table.

He finally got close enough to the Royal Navy ships to try and flag one down, but the sailors on board were too frantic in their preparations for battle to notice his shouts from below. All their attention was directed towards the legendary pirate ship charging towards him. Even if they had seen Sivan, the Grenaldian ships weren't really here for him. He had become an excuse for the earl to extract his revenge on the pirate menace named Captain Black.

The Blackwater saddled up to the head ship of the naval formation, the fellow pirate vessels not far behind. The pirates' cannons were drawn to match the Grenaldian ship. Somehow Sivan's tiny boat had ended up between the two opposing forces.

“Grenaldian scum!” a familiar deep voice shouted. “Give me back my lord and maybe I won’t send you to the briny hell!”

He looked up and saw Black, still shirtless, standing on the railing of the Blackwater and shouting at the Royal Navy. Sivan was suddenly mortified. Now everyone on the ship knew the dreaded demon of the Blackwater called Sivan by his title quite properly. Not only that, but Black was referring to Sivan as his own. Said lord floating between the two ships could have shouted out, could have used this opportunity to get their attention, but right then he wanted nothing more than to recede into the wood of his tiny ship.

“Do not play games with us, Black!” came the reply. Sivan gasped when he recognized the voice.

“Renalt...you traitorous cad!” Black’s previously calm voice had turned livid. A crowd of jeers supported him from the Blackwater crew. “Where is my lord? What did you do with him?!” The pirate lord’s voice was growing frantic, anger turning into fear.

“Don’t take me for a fool! You still have him, I know you do!” Renalt shouted back. The Grenaldian spy somehow found a way to meet up with the Royal Navy, but did not manage to take Sivan along with him. Perhaps Black’s near constant vigil around his chambers had not allowed Renalt an opportunity to sneak him away.

“Enough! I’ll take apart every one of these damn ships if I have to!” Black spit, and turned on his heel back onto the deck, his hair, darker than the night, fanning out around him.

Renalt disappeared from Sivan’s vantage as well, and he then lost his opportunity to make his presence known. “Wait-!” he shouted, but was cut off by sudden explosions of cannon fire from both ships.

The cannonballs found their marks, splintering the sides of

both ships brutally. Sivan covered his head to keep wood chips from slicing his face open and waited for the first round to end. He was now painfully aware of how stupid this plan had been. How could one man stand between two insurmountable forces?

Once the cannon fire abated long enough for Sivan to sit up straight, he steered his little boat as fast as he could away from the two massive ships.

As he passed the Grenaldian ship, Sivan observed the damage the Blackwater had done. Great holes had been bored into the wood, some of them already filling rapidly with seawater. This ship would sink soon, it was already beyond saving. He was only grateful the rest of the Navy was nearby so any survivors could swim to another ship.

By contrast, the Blackwater had barely taken any damage at all. Sivan knew the cannons the Royal Navy used, and they were not instruments to be taken lightly. Even if the pirates used dangerous amounts of gunpowder to get more explosive shots, the Grenaldian ones still should have done more damage than this. The places the Navy's fire had struck were mere dents in the hull. Sivan swore he saw a hole where one cannonball had pierced the ship suddenly stitch itself back together.

Sivan made it safely to the other side of the Grenaldian ship before another round of cannon fire erupted between the two ships. He could just barely see Grenaldian sailors swinging on ropes to board the Blackwater. The clatter of sword meeting sword signaling that the battle had begun.

Meanwhile, the sky above had started to darken unnaturally. The clear full moon had been quickly obscured by storm clouds made of pitch. Flashes of lightning danced in the sky, thunder providing a suitable background warning while the battle between the two ships raged on. Sivan couldn't fathom how the weather could have turned so quickly. It was a calm and cloud-

less night moments before, yet now it seemed like the sky was about to crack open and swallow them up.

The water beneath the Grenaldian ship started to swirl, forcing the vessel to turn as a new wave of cannon fire railed into the side. Strangely enough, the Blackwater did not give way to the torrent like the other ship. The pirate ship maintained its position in the water, the crew cheering and jeering as they watched the Royal Navy's ship spin wildly. The rudder passed Sivan, trying its best to steer the ship back on course, but it was useless against the force of the whirlpool forming directly beneath them.

Sivan's boat started to drag into the current of the widening whirlpool. He frantically grabbed hold of the oars and attempted to counter the force of the water, but it did little to get him to safety.

He heard a horrid snap of wood and watched as the Grenaldian ship was eaten up by the whirlpool. The sailor's screams as they were swallowed by the water struck a mighty fear in Sivan's gut. The force of the swirling water ground up the ship into pieces of wood and cloth. Sivan's blood ran cold as he realized his own ship was taking on water as it tilted to the side.

Sivan tried to hang on to anything that would float, but nothing could save him from the hurricane-like might of the whirlpool.

His boat buckled under the crushing water.

He sank fast, the flailing of his limbs useless against the overwhelming currents still rocking beneath the water's surface. Even if Sivan could swim again, he couldn't fight the torrent. It sucked him deep down into the dark ocean.

He tried to open his eyes, to find which way was up, but the saltwater stung his eyes, and the water was so devoid of light Sivan could not make out anything. Still, he didn't need to see in order to know what was happening. The Grenaldian ship was

sinking with him, the bodies of sailors limp, floating around the wreckage like flies.

It was cold down here. The depth of the ocean was all-consuming in its vastness. Down here Sivan remained frozen, unable to even move when faced with the entirety of his fear.

A flicker of warmth thrummed briefly against his chest. It was so faint, and the only reason Sivan noticed it was due to the cold around him. He remembered the vial he'd scooped out of the ocean. It hummed through his shirt, giving him the smallest beacon for his fraying sanity to grasp onto.

He could feel his his body going limp, the burning of his lungs caving in to taking a breath even though all they would suck in was water.

Yet before Sivan passed out, he felt strong arms wrap around him.

The arms were warm, a welcome reprieve from the cold abyss.



“-lord! My lord!”

The burning in Sivan’s lungs seared his mind into consciousness, and he unceremoniously heaved up water onto the floor, heedless of his surroundings.

Slowly, those surroundings came into focus as the dark edges around his vision began to recede. The floor was wood, likely a deck of a ship based off how wet it was. His chest burned, and his head ached, and for a moment he thought he was losing his vision again because his sight refused to clear fully. However, after feeling his face, he realized he’d lost his glasses in the ocean.

A tail flicked anxiously in the periphery of his blurry sight. Sivan squinted, trying to make sense of it. The tail was large, too large for any fish he'd ever seen. It was a deep black, scales iridescent with purples and greens, like oil slick spilled into the sea. It wound around the deck, longer than any eel or sea snake. He dimly recognized the dark silhouettes of pirates who crewed the *Blackwater* standing just out of the ring of the giant tail.

Strong arms pulled him closer to a wet body, cradling Sivan like he were a precious treasure.

"My lord!" the man holding him called tearfully, tears streaming down his face to mix with the seawater that dripped from his inky black hair. His dark eyes had seemed to clear for the first time, his tears turning them into a bright, fair green.

"Are you okay, my lord?" he sobbed, clinging to Sivan desperately. "I did not know you were in the water or I would have never sunk that ship."

This man was Black, the dreaded pirate lord, but he was also someone else entirely.

Someone Sivan had thought was now only a memory.

"...Nereus?" Sivan rasped, the water he had coughed up had made his throat raw.

The man holding him froze, uncertainty clear on his face. How had Sivan not seen it? The boy he'd left on the *Spear* had been a wholly different person, but the resemblance was still there. He'd spent years with Nereus, yet he'd forgotten his face so easily

Sivan struggled to sit up, and saw that winding tail grow closer and wider until it reached the man's hips. Black scales dissipated from the tail and gave way to a man.

No, not a man.

A siren.

Fear gripped Sivan instinctively, making him push back

against the thing that was holding him. “Y-you’re a-!” He couldn’t say it. The last time he’d seen a siren was when Jhaeros had almost killed him. Yet here was another one, and Sivan couldn’t make sense of it. Black had been human hours before.

The memory of the bright-eyed boy that had desperately called out his title vanished, and the familiar dark shadow crossed back over Black’s face. His eyes darkened, his expression grew hard. His grip tightened on Sivan, refusing to let him escape.

“Ahh, you finally see the truth of it all. Yes, I am that boy you once knew. That boy you abandoned on that burning spit of land to be sacrificed to demons.” Black’s words were full of malice, spite stabbing into Sivan. He leaned in close, whispering into Sivan’s ear, “this is what I became after you left me. All that I am now, all I’ve ever done...it’s all your fault.”

