

# Chapter 25

*Lissandry*

Sivan's second arrival at Lissandry was far more gruesome than his first. The Royal Navy had gotten to work on executing the pirates they'd arrested when they captured the pirate capital. Their heads were displayed on spears around the docks. Sivan recognized a few of them as previous members of the Blackwater, and his stomach churned at the realization.

He shut the curtains of his father's cabin, blocking out the grizzly view from the ship. Sivan couldn't bear the thought that Black would be joining them if he did not do anything.

The skeleton of a plan had been worked out overnight. But Sivan knew that the only way they were going to get out of Lissandry alive was if a miracle graced them. No plan was good enough to save them from the fleet of the Royal Navy.

But he had to try anyways.

His father hadn't returned since their argument the night before. Sivan assumed he was already on the island, preparing

for the execution. And, judging by how many sailors walked off the ships, most of them had opted to watch the decapitation of the dreaded pirate lord. Meaning the ship Sivan was on would be mostly deserted.

He stood at the door, steeling himself for the task. A glint of silver flashed in his palm: the pin he'd found in his father's desk and mutilated into a lock pick.

But before he could even try to escape, the door opened, and Sivan jumped, dropping the pin.

Thankfully, Renalt did not hear the plink of metal on the wooden floor, but he did give Sivan a look of questioning disapproval.

"My lord," he said slowly, looking Sivan up and down. "What are you doing?"

"I—" Sivan's lips twitched momentarily, frustrated color rising to his face. This ended up working to his advantage, as the blush immediately dispersed Renalt's disapproving gaze. He wasn't sure if his guard had gone to watch the execution or not, but Sivan had a backup plan, just in case. "I, ah...I wanted to speak with you, Renalt..."

The sailor's mouth dropped open for a second, his eyes dilating at the mere mention of his name on the Sivan's lips. "Oh, o-of course, my lord, um—" he floundered. "Shall we speak inside?"

Sivan nodded, and led the man to the table he had poured his feelings over. They sat awkwardly, much further away than they once sat the night before. Renalt fidgeted in his chair, and Sivan could actually see a vein in his neck that broadcasted the sailor's nervous pulse.

Renalt really, truly, had feelings for Sivan. It almost made him feel bad for what he was about to do.

"I've been thinking about your proposal," Sivan started.

Renalt nodded, like he had to reassure him that he still knew

what the proposal was.

“Well, I-“

“Please, my lord, before you turn me down, I want you to promise me that you won’t treat me any differently after. I do not wish to raise tension between us.”

Sivan blinked at him, schooling his expression into hurt when he only felt mild annoyance that the man was making this so difficult for him. He was really making Sivan feel badly for him. “I cannot do that, Renalt.”

The sailor looked at him like a kicked puppy, one who still had the instinctive hopeful reaction to having his name called.

“I cannot do that...because I’m accepting your hand in marriage.”

It took a moment for Renalt to process Sivan’s words. He blinked very fast, mouth opening and closing silently. “R-really? I-I-I’ll send word to my aunt at once, I’m sure she’ll make a generous offer to your father.”

Sivan knew he was being cruel at this point, but he couldn’t help but rebuke his father, even in this made up scenario. “Please leave my father out of this. He’s treated me as nothing but a token to trade in for favors. If your Yevernian aunt wishes to assist Grenaldia, she can do so free of our union.”

Renalt’s eyes glistened, happy tears springing to his eyes. He was really nailing Sivan’s guilt home.

“Oh, my lord—Sivan—“ he reached out for Sivan’s hand under the table, but made contact with the paperweight the lord had surreptitiously picked up from the Earl’s desk. “Wh-what’s that? What do you have?”

The fear of being caught rose to Sivan’s throat, and he leaned forward to kiss Renalt. Whatever doubts the sailor had were wiped clean at the feeling of his beloved kissing him. He melted, completely unaware to his precious lord raising the paperweight

high before crashing it down on his head.

Renalt crumpled onto the table, falling into unconsciousness. Sivan panted slightly and stood back. He dropped the paperweight, where it clattered against the hard floor. The lord felt quite bad for playing with the sailor's heart like this, but he'd been given no choice.

Sivan stepped forward and started by reclaiming his twin sabers from Renalt's belt.



Sivan stepped out of the Earl's cabin dressed in Renalt's uniform. The sailor was significantly taller than Sivan, so the clothes were far too large for him, but he managed to make it somewhat believable by tightly synching the belt around his waist and rolling up the cuffs. His twin sabers were strapped onto his belt, as was an empty canteen he'd pinched from his father's wardrobe.

As he suspected, the ship was relatively free of other Grenaldians. Even if he were to run into someone, the outfit would just make them think he was a sailor who was running late to the execution. He disembarked without incident, and slipped down to the shore. Sivan took out the canteen and filled it, nervously watching for patrolling sailors as the seawater bubbled and the canteen filled.

Once it was full, he started walking towards the southern tip of Lissandry, towards the tavern. It was where he had witnessed the throng of sailors migrating towards.

The burned down pirate fort was hauntingly empty. From the looks of it, every single sailor who was not required to keep an eye on the ships had gone to the execution. Their fascination

with the dreaded pirate lord and his subsequent death in his own stronghold was too tempting to turn down. It left a bitter taste in Sivan's mouth, making him walk faster and faster until he was outright running towards the tavern. It was where Black and him had kissed for the first time, and now it was being used for the pirate's execution.

Sivan's lungs burned as he ran, but the pain could not compare to the heartache he felt at the thought of his Black, his pirate, his beloved Nereus, losing his life.

As he neared the southern tip, Sivan began spotting sailors milling about, leisurely chatting about the execution.

"I thought he would be more frightening."

"Didn't the commander say he was part Uncharted or something?"

"He just looks like a broken man."

Sivan grit his teeth, holding back tears. He wasn't prepared to see Black like this, but he couldn't stop running either.

The tavern was crammed full with sailors, commanders, nobility, anyone who sought entertainment or retribution in the form of murder. Sivan knew Black was a hated man, he knew he had stolen from nobility and made a mockery of the Royal Navy, but seeing so many people excited for his death was still heartbreaking. None of them knew the man. None of them knew where he came from, what he'd gone through. Yet they all thought he deserved to die without even knowing him.

Sivan pushed his way through the crowd, and he began to hear his father's voice over the din of the gathered sailors.

"...your crimes. That of which include piracy of public and private property, smuggling, jailbreaking, assaulting a royal official, kidnapping, and murder," the earl announced loudly, his booming voice carrying over the crowd and into the pit where Black was tied up.

Sivan could see him now, just a smudge of black hair and iron kelp. Where the pirates had used the pit to build a bonfire, Sivan's father had erected a guillotine. An executioner stood next to Black. The pirate was on his knees, but he was clearly struggling to say upright. The executioner kicked him, reminding him to keep kneeling.

Sivan's heart lurched painfully at seeing Black like this. He'd always been so vibrant and full of life, even when Eliza had nearly killed him. Now he looked broken, disheveled and beaten.

Black spit out a mouthful of blood and somehow managed to raise his head to look up at the Earl, seated on an ornate chair someone had brought up from the Black's manor. There were other nobles and commanders seated around him, all of them leaning in slightly to enjoy the show. Black had been a notorious pirate, after all. Of course they would want to see his fall from on high.

The pirate glared at them. Judging from his shaking body, the man should not have been able to muster such vitriol, but more than anything, Black had to express his contempt for these people.

"How do you plead?" Tristan Montgomery asked, wholly unaffected by Black's glare.

"Guilty! To all that and more!" Black spat, earning a few mocking chuckles from the crowd of sailors.

"Oh?" Sivan's father sounded bored. Like this was simply another criminal with some errant excuse. "And what else do you plead to?"

"I plead guilty to providing food to the common people of Grenaldia when the nobles kept it all for themselves. I plead guilty to slitting the throats of smugglers who use a war to take advantage of those who are in need. I plead guilty to stealing from those who have it all and giving it to those who have been

abandoned in the wake of this war they had no choice in!”

The crowd was eerily quiet. Black’s words cut right to the unspoken resentment felt by the commoners of Grenaldia. A handful of sailors were minor nobles like Renalt, but the majority of them came from common households. In fact, many of them were drafted or forced to join this war in order to provide food for their family.

Still, they were the lowest ranked in the Royal Navy, and the silence was broken by their commanders booing at the pirate.

Sivan’s father was not laughing. He had not broken eye contact with Black. He had given up the fight against the immovable Uncharted, so the earl could only refocus his frustration and anger upon anything that was still under his control. That happened to be the pirate lord who he’d finally captured. “You think just because you feel righteous in your actions it makes you less of a criminal? Your crimes don’t make you a good man. They make you a criminal. Whomsoever does not respect the law just because they feel like it does not serve them are not fit to be citizens under the flag of Grenaldia.”

Black snarled at the Earl, baring his sharp teeth. “Grenaldia was never my flag.”

“It was, once. And you abandoned it to sail under the black. You even renamed yourself after it.”

The sailors laughed at the Earl’s jibe, and Sivan used the break in tension to push to the edge of the pit.

“I sentence you, Captain Black of the Blackwater, to death by beheading.”

The sailors cheered, the executioner pushed Black’s head towards the guillotine, and Sivan’s blood ran cold.

He jumped over the partition, sliding down into the pit. The executioner looked surprised, but nimbly drew his sword when Sivan drew his sabers. His boots landed on the platform with a

clack, and he quickly put himself between Black and the executioner.

“My lord!” his beloved pirate exclaimed, joy bubbling up through his voice even though it’d grown weak from use. Sivan spared him a glance to nod at him, and could now see just how haggard Black looked up close. They seemed to have wrapped him up in even more iron kelp, except now it looked withered and encrusted in the man’s blood. He was shaking, like even sitting upright was a challenge. But Black still managed to give Sivan an enamored grin.

“Sivan Randolph Montgomery!” His father used his middle name. Sivan didn’t need to hear the anger in his voice to know he was furious with him. “Step away from that pirate!”

Sivan ignored him and swung at the executioner. The man was using a cutlass similar to the one Black liked to use. Except it was rusted brown with human blood instead of stained in the black blood of *Uncharted*. He parried Sivan’s blows easily, his brawny arms having no issue in tossing back the slim man’s might.

“My lord! You should have just run—you didn’t need to come save me!” Black offered quite unhelpfully.

“Like I could have—” Sivan lost a step to avoid the executioner’s swing. “—done that!”

“Ah,” Black breathed. “Do you mean that?”

“Of course!” He side-stepped, narrowing his opponent’s range of attack while parrying a blow. “But now’s not the time, Black!”

“But, my lord...” The pirate’s voice wavered, and Sivan didn’t need to look at him to know he was looking at him pitifully. “How do I know you’re not doing this just to rebel against your father?”

“Because!” Sivan growled in frustration and used both



swords to beat back the executioner. “I promised I wouldn’t leave you!”

The executioner balked at Sivan’s aggressive footwork, somehow unable to stay steady against a man far weaker than him. Stealing a move from Black’s playbook, Sivan used both swords to swing down hard on the cutlass, rattling it right out of the man’s hands. This caused the executioner to step back, trip, and fall right back into the guillotine.

The force of his head hitting the lunette jolted the device so badly it caused the blade to fall.

The man’s head was cleaved in half by the guillotine, the top half of his cranium landing on the platform with a wet thud.

The crowd gasped, and as horrified as Sivan was at the man’s death, he knew he didn’t have much time. He rushed to Black’s side, ignoring his worried ‘my lords’ and slicing the iron kelp away with his sabers. The kelp was much tougher than Sivan expected, and it took several passes to cut all of it off. Black’s body and clothes were burned from the kelp restraining him for so long. Some of his skin had turned black from the contact, and blood had trailed down his body and clothes, turning anything not already black into a deep crimson.

“Can you stand?” Sivan asked, but there was no answer from the pirate. Black’s eyes rolled back, his consciousness slipping away as the last of the iron kelp was peeled off. Evidently the only thing keeping his internal organs from bleeding out was how tightly the iron kelp had been wound around him. Now that it was gone, his body was starting to shut down. “No! Black, come on, you have to stay with me!”

Sailors were scaling the perimeter of the pit, and were drawing their swords as they descended upon them.

Sivan fumbled with the canteen he’d filled before. His hands were wet with Black’s blood, and he couldn’t find purchase on

the cork. Instead he bit into it, flinging it off with his mouth.

The sailors were on the platform now, ready to strike them down.

Sivan raised the canteen and poured seawater over Black's dying body.

It was just as instant as it had been when they'd jumped from the Blackwater. Black's human body rippled and snapped, transforming violently into a twenty foot long siren. His arms wrapped up Sivan's body, holding him close as his tail whipped around violently, knocking back all the sailors who had dared to attempt capture.

Held close to Black's chest, he witnessed the wounds from the iron kelp heal right before his eyes. Just as Sivan had hoped, the siren magic within the pirate's body healed him instantly. Shadowy tentacles snaked from Black's tail, forming a writhing wall that prevented any sailor from attacking them again.

"Are you okay, my lord?" Black asked, his voice deeper than usual from the sudden display of power. For some reason it made Sivan's toes curl even though they were in mortal peril.

"I-I'm fine, Black. What about you? You were almost dead a second ago."

The pirate smiled at him cheekily. "Sirens can only be killed by the Corseque of Estes."

Except the man was half-siren, and he really did look almost dead. Sivan figured if he felt well enough to make quipping remarks he was well enough to fight.

"Sivan!" His father yelled furiously. "Get that monster to stand down!"

Black's shadowy tentacles built up beneath them, raising the two of them to eye level with the earl on his throne. "I'm sorry father, but I cannot do that. I won't."

His father's steel eyes twitched. His face, usually so placid

and controlled, was seething with anger. “If-if you do this, I’ll disown you! You will lose all power and title. You will no longer have a home!”

The threat hurt, but Sivan continued to frown at the man who he’d once respected. “If that’s the price I have to pay, then so be it. This war has caused you to lose your way. You no longer recognize what makes a good man. Because Black is one, and I will stand by him whether or not you approve of it.”

“My lord...” Black whispered, awe in his voice. The words had sounded so righteous in his head, but when the pirate murmured the title he was about to lose in his ear, Sivan couldn’t control the embarrassed flush that bloomed on his face.

“D-do you have any way to get out of here?” Sivan hissed. “I was kind of banking on you being able to open another portal or something.”

“Oh, I have something better than that,” Black said lowly before giving Sivan a smile so wide he could almost see every sharp tooth. It made his heart stutter, that grin that was as sharp as a blade. That smile drove right into Sivan’s heart and made it skip a beat. Black held Sivan tight around the waist and the tentacles pushed them upwards as the wind began to whip around them relentlessly. The waves caused by the wind crashed against the side of Lissandry, battering it with a sudden torrent of wind and water.

From their higher vantage, Sivan could see the sea before them. A disturbance lay just past the shallows, the water seeming to boil from below the surface.

“I can’t say the time spent in your company has been pleasant, but I bid you a fond farewell nonetheless!” Black shouted to the clamoring crowd of sailors. “And I apologize for not giving you a better show, but I don’t particularly feel like dying today!”

Seemingly at the signal of his words, the Blackwater rose up

from the ocean on a tidal wave that crashed into the tavern. The sailors trying to fend off Black's perimeter of shadowy tentacles were washed away by the water.

Black's hand tightened on Sivan's back. "Are you sure about this, my lord? You do realize you'll be defecting if you come with me now..."

Sivan's jaw clenched. His father's words hadn't quite sunk into him yet, but he'd already made up his mind. "Yes, I realize that."

"Then..." Black's voice dropped to a tone only Sivan could hear, as if he tuned his words for Sivan's ears alone. "You really meant it? You'll never leave me?"

Sivan's father was screaming at him, and it was an outburst so unlike the earl it would have shaken Sivan to his very core if he'd been looking at him. But Black's glittering green eyes took all of the man's breath away along with his full attention. The majority of the remaining naval force was watching them, but Sivan didn't need to be reminded of that to justify the flush that spread over his face. Black was looking at him like he'd seen starlight for the first time, and it was making his stubborn composure crumble.

All he could do was nod and wrap his arms around the pirate's neck.

"Aye, I see 'em! We be right upon 'em!" Brand's voice called out from over the railing of the Blackwater.

"Brand!" Black called out joyously, waving at the man. "So good to see you've finally made it!"

Brand tossed a rope over the edge of the ship. "Ye better get up deck quick, Black! Hayes got a bone or two to pick wit ya!"

Black chuckled and grabbed onto the rope, tugging once. It pulled the two of them up easily, and Sivan spared one last look down at his father, who had stopped shouting and was merely

glaring balefully at the ship.

He wasn't sure if he'd ever see the earl again, but the warmth he felt between Black and himself far outstripped any sorrow caused by this familial rift.

Black hoisted Sivan over the banister of the Blackwater, setting him down carefully on the deck. At the same time his long tail slithered up and over, smacking the wood floor with a wet noise. The pirate squeezed Sivan's waist one last time before letting him step away and face the Blackwater crew.

There were slightly more than half the Blackwater pirates left. Some of them could have been below deck, but somehow Sivan doubted that was the case. They looked haggard; whatever had happened to the crew after Black and Sivan jumped ship must have cost them.

"You took your sweet time getting here, Hayes!" Black shouted lightly at the woman steering the helm.

"Fuck off!" She snapped, dark eyes ringed with an annoyance that could only be felt by someone repeatedly taken for granted. "You know I couldn't read your signal when you were on the sea witch's island, yet you still stayed there for days! It's your own damn fault!"

Sivan couldn't imagine what kind of signal she meant, but he was too grateful to be out of the executioner's pit to care. The crew tentatively surrounded Black, looking very much like school children who were being made to apologize to their teacher.

"We were wrong to vote Vivianne in," an Uncharted pirate with spiraling horns on her her head said. "We tried to defend against Jhaeros. It didn't go well."

"I see," Black said. His voice was even, but Sivan could see the smallest hint of a prideful curl to his lips. "I would volunteer to captain again, if you'll have me."

There was a murmur of approval just as the Blackwater was shaken violently. Brand rushed to the side of the ship. "They've got a cannon!"

Tension spiked in the crew. "Do ye have a plan, Captain?"

"Do we have to split like before? I don't think I can stand another underwater ship exit!"

"Underwater...? Is that what that was?" Sivan asked Brand.

"Aye, ye saw th' white Uncharted ship breach th' surface, didn't ye, me lord?" Brand replied.

"Yes...and, it's just Sivan now. I'm no longer a lord." he said awkwardly.

"Oh, apologies!" Brand seemed relatively unfazed by the loss of title. "Anyways, th' Blackwater be a special ship of sorts. She can travel through some kind of portal or something underwater."

"Yes, but it takes great power and effort to do, and can't be repeated so quickly," Black explained.

Another cannon rocked the ship.

"Black!" Hayes shouted, sweating profusely while gripping the wheel. She threw him a black cutlass, which he caught handily. "Get us out of here!"

Black grinned, all sharp teeth, and nodded at her knowingly. He snaked through the pirates towards the bow, and climbed onto the tip of the ship, like a living figurehead. A cannonball whizzed towards him, but he narrowly dodged it.

The siren raised his cutlass high above his head, pointing it towards the heavens. His arm rotated slowly, and with it the clouds began to darken and swirl in its direction. Black's eyes began to glow a brighter green, and the shadowy tendrils oozed off his body like an oil slick. The tentacles roamed the deck, politely avoiding the other pirates, but when they reached Sivan they began to gather around him like a pack of excited puppies. The

former lord's ears turned pink as they wrapped around his ankles playfully. Brand raised an eyebrow at him, and Sivan willfully did not acknowledge the other Grenaldian man.

The wind was picking up, making the Blackwater creak from its precarious position on the tavern's perimeter. Another cannonball shot towards Black, but a sudden unnatural gale of wind steered it off course completely, missing its mark.

Then Black stopped swirling his sword, seeming to have caught something intangible on the tip of it. High above in the sky, a bubbling flash of lightning threatened to break the surface of the blackened clouds.

Black slashed his cutlass down, and a huge bolt of lightning struck Lissandry at his command.

The pirate crew gasped, a few of them chuckled. The tavern that had been turned into an executioner's arena was on fire, the sailors and commanders and nobles running in all directions as they tried to avoid the fire and continuous crackles of lightning that danced just above their heads.

Black sheathed his weapon and turned around, raising his hands and summoning another tidal wave. It crashed onto the burning tavern, catching the Blackwater and pulling it back out to sea.

The pirates, cheered, slapping Black on the back as he slithered down from the bow. They had their captain back.

Hayes turned the boat around, her arms shaking at the exertion of controlling the wheel. Black crossed the deck and motioned at her to step aside. "I'll take it from here, Hayes. Thank you for getting us this far."

She shook her head stubbornly, glancing back at Lissandry. "They're still after us."

Black looked where she was nodding. The fleet of Grenaldian ships were unfurling their sails, beginning to make chase after

them.

The pirate captain hummed before raising a hand, his eyes flickering bright green.

A wall of water shot up from the ocean, surrounding Lissandry.

The crew didn't gasp this time. They had seen their siren captain use his powers many times before, but those instances had all been cheap tricks in the wake of Black's absolute mastery over the sky and sea on this day.

"Y-ye be quite powerful today, Captain," Brand said shakily.

Black grinned, all teeth. "I've been fired up by sweet words today, Brand!" Then the captain winked at Sivan, who was being increasingly constrained by Black's friendly tentacles.

The former lord flushed furiously as the entire crew turned their eyes towards him. Realization was apparent on their faces, and true mortification washed over Sivan.