

# Chapter 22

*calloway cay*

“Shall I give you a tour of the castle, my lord? Maybe you won’t find it so desolate if you have someone with you.”

Black’s tone was light, but hearing his own words to describe the castle thrown back at Sivan made him feel a little embarrassed for being so blunt about the man’s home.

“Ah, my apologies if I offended you. I did not mean to criticize this place. It is very beautiful,” Sivan said, looking up to admire the crystal chandeliers dripping down the hallway’s ceiling.

“No, you’re right, this place is cold and desolate. I thought my adverse feelings to the Cay were due to my bad memories of it. I’ve never actually brought anyone else here before. It’s good to hear someone else agree with me.”

Sivan frowned. “Bad memories?”

Black grimaced and placed a hand on Sivan’s back, leading him further down the hallway. They had left the bridge and waterfall, but Sivan had no idea where they were heading. Every

turn was marked by the same glittering crystal and polished floors, making it impossible to discern one hallway from the next. But Black seemed to know where he was going.

“It might be easier for me to show you,” Black murmured. “Did you ever wonder where I learned to fight?”

Sivan’s mind rushed back to that night in Varis, when the pirate lord had beaten him back with such ferocity it had shaken his swords right out of his hands. “I guess not.”

“Well, a fair share of it originally came from the lessons you gave me on the Spear.” Black smiled down at him warmly, his eyes light and glittering. “But you know best how fencing and real battle are like night and day.”

“Yes, I’m well aware of that.” Internally, Sivan laughed bitterly, remembering his first year into the war, and how he had been only slightly more than useless thanks to his fencing training. Fighting for his life against Uncharted legions was what forced him to turn his showy fencing skills into something more deadly.

They turned yet another corner, and there was finally a break from the pristine crystal. Ahead of them loomed a set of iron doors that looked like they had been regularly beaten with meat cleavers.

“Just past these doors is where I trained,” Black said, a tense vein in his tone.

Sivan was led inside. He had been a regular at many training arenas in his time. Some of them were like the shaded rooftop on the Spear. Some of them were more like the dimly lit back alley of the Royal Navy barracks. However, he had never seen one quite so stained with blood until now.

It took him a moment to register that the walls were not in fact painted a deep rust. They were layered with years and years of dried blood. Some of them had been layered over so many

times they were starting to turn black.

“Eliza refused to clean the bloodstains. She said it was to remind me of my past mistakes. So I could learn from them,” Black tried to offer to Sivan’s stunned silence.

“Wh...is this all your blood?” Was all Sivan could think to ask.

“Hm, most of it, probably.” Black took a moment to survey the walls. “I can’t really remember anymore.”

Sivan gaped at him, wondering how on earth the idiot could still be alive. Even with his superior healing abilities this was an obscene amount of blood.

“But it’s not all my blood!” Black tried to soothe over Sivan’s horrified expression. “A lot of it’s from beasts Eliza would bring me to fight.”

“Beasts,” Sivan repeated monotonically.

Black nodded sheepishly, squirming under Sivan’s disbelieving stare. “Most of them were Uncharted beasts. Like the serpent you killed on the Spear!”

“I see...”

“Although, one time she made me fight a land shark.” Black looked up at a particularly large bloodstain near the ceiling. “Have you ever seen a land shark? They live in the sands on the Eastern continent and are heavily armored. Terrible things.”

Sivan vaguely recollected seeing an illustration of one in a book before and had genuinely thought they had been mythical. However Eliza procured these beasts was something he wanted to keep well away from.

“Why make you fight monsters, though?” Sivan asked.

“I think she reasoned that if I can fight a land shark I can fight Jhaeros.” The man shrugged, walking to a wall lined with swords. Some of them were a little rusty, but overall they looked fairly well maintained. “Besides, it’s always just been me and Eli-

za here. She's really not one for swordplay. I didn't have anyone else to spar with."

A mixture of guilt and heartache that was beginning to become familiar to Sivan washed over him. "I wish I could have been there for you."

Black smiled, all white teeth and a dash of mischief. "Then will you spar with me now, my lord?"

Sivan's mouth opened to shut him down, but the guilt made him promptly shut his mouth again. He frowned slightly, realizing once again that Black was using his own abandonment issues to manipulate Sivan into getting what he wanted.

"You know my skill with the blade hasn't been the same since I lost to Jhaeros. I'm not really a match for you," Sivan said slowly.

The pirate plucked a training sword off the wall. "Nonsense. You were just as quick as I remember back in Varis. If you're that worried about it, I'll use a training sword. Maybe having your old twin sabers in your hands again will help you gain that confidence again."

Sivan opened his mouth again to protest, but Black had already called forth a crystal golem to go fetch Sivan's swords from his room. "You've learned how to twist my words quite well over the years," Sivan muttered under his breath.

Black heard every word and seemed very pleased by it. "I'm not twisting anything. I just want to spar with the Two-Headed Viper."

Sivan's face burned red upon hearing the moniker he was so embarrassed by. "Wh-where did you hear that dreadful title?"

The pirate chuckled, swinging the practice sword in a large arc to get a feel for it. "I believe it was from one of your officers while you were a commander for the Royal Navy. I infiltrated the ranks every now and then to make sure you were doing

alright.”

Sivan made a note to never speak to any of his former officers ever again.

“You shouldn’t be ashamed of it, my lord. It’s a fitting title.”

Sivan let his face warp into a rare grimace. “It’s really not. It’s far too romantic a term for someone like me.”

Black opened his mouth to argue that, but the golem appeared again with Sivan’s swords. The pirate had managed to ruffle Sivan’s feathers enough to goad him into accepting this sparring request, so he took the swords from the golem readily.

This only made Black grin wider.

“I promise not to use any of my siren powers,” he offered nonchalantly, spreading his stupidly muscular arms wide.

Sivan knew he was doing this intentionally. They had spent just enough time together over the last few weeks for the pirate to learn exactly what kind of provocations would get under the skin of the more mature version of his precious lord. Yet Sivan still let him do it, and it gave him a little thrill to do so. No one else dared toy with a lord like this. Whether it be because he was the Earl’s son and a respected war hero, or because everyone walked on eggshells around his broken body and spirit after his retirement...either way, Sivan was always treated like something fragile.

But he wasn’t fragile. Not with Black.

They stepped into position, swords drawn, eyes locked. Maybe the pirate did not expect Sivan to attack first. Maybe he expected Sivan to hold back, like he used to when they trained on the roof of his father’s manor.

So when Sivan came at him in a rush, it genuinely made the pirate lord lose his footing and step back several steps. The clanging of metal on metal reverberated through the bloody arena, satisfying Sivan’s ears in a way he’d almost forgotten about.

Black looked surprised for a moment. Then Sivan grinned. “Don’t you dare hold back on me, Black.”

The pirate gaped at him, a faint blush growing on his high cheekbones. Then he smiled devilishly and returned Sivan’s blow with a powerful swipe of his blade.

The attack was as powerful and rattling as it was when Sivan faced off with him in Varis. However, now he wasn’t equipped with flimsy decorative swords. Now he had his favored sabers, the ones that had lived through the war with him. Sivan gripped the familiar handles, his fingers perfectly notching into the metal that had molded to his hand over many battles. Now he had his right and left hands again.

So he was able to parry the slash and slip out of Black’s angle of attack. Yet, as fond as he was of Nereus, and as fond as he had grown of the man he was now, he was still facing a skilled pirate. Black followed his every move, advancing and retreating wherever he found room, and forcing it if there wasn’t any.

They danced around each other, their swords slashing to meet one another over and over. Sivan had learned the classic waltzes he was required to know if he found himself at a ball, but he had always preferred this dance of blades. Black was a fitting partner; he could match Sivan’s speed and give him a challenge when he needed it. The pirate’s style of fighting was much more brutal than the lord’s. Sivan tended to go for speed and finesse over strength. If he could, he would choose to avoid an attack entirely, letting his fast footwork and slim frame dance just out of danger.

Black liked to make every attack count. If he landed a blow, Sivan would feel it shake his whole body, all the way down to his toes. Yet the man often sacrificed his footing in order to deal such terrifying hits.

Sivan saw the pirate begin to lunge, and stepped into the

attack, turning his body so the sword slid past him harmlessly. Another quick turn brought him behind Black, allowing him to line up a sword to his throat.

“Your footwork has gotten sloppy,” Sivan panted. “Did you forget all I taught you?”

Black chuckled, looking back at Sivan with a glint in his green eyes. “Forgive me, my lord. It’s hard to keep up with my footwork when fighting Uncharted legions.”

Sivan pulled back his sword, letting Black step back. “That never stopped me.”

Black’s smile did not falter. That same eager expression Sivan had seen back in Varis was once more focused on him intensely. “Not everyone can be you, my lord.”

Black attacked again, his face alight with joy as the two of them battled across the arena. The man was growing impatient, and his footwork was getting worse by the minute. It was so easy for Sivan to avoid his attacks entirely, only parrying when he felt like it. Sivan could feel that same eager expression affix to his face. He had forgotten what this felt like. What it felt like to feel invincible with a blade in each hand and the wind at his back.

They were both sweating now, bodies working in overdrive. Sivan hadn’t sparred like this in so long, and he could already tell his muscles were going to be furious with him tomorrow. But Black had a seemingly endless supply of energy. Unlike Sivan, he had been in active combat on a regular basis for the last year, and there was the siren curse which factored into that.

Eventually Black backed Sivan up against a wall and landed a blow on both of Sivan’s swords that was so powerful it shook his shoulders visibly. Then Black dropped his sword.

He stepped forward, grabbing both of Sivan’s hands. One of Black’s hands ripped the sword away from him, and the other gripped Sivan’s wrist tightly and brought it over his head, caus-

ing him to drop his other sword. One of the finely crafted sabers clattered to the floor next to Black's training sword. The other, in Black's hand, was held inches from Sivan's throat.

Both of them were panting, breath mingling as the tension of the moment settled. Sivan's golden eyes danced with fire, meeting Black's capricious green with a challenge.

"You cheated," Sivan said, breathless.

The pirate grinned. "And you lied."

"Lied?"

"Mm, yes," Black hummed while looking Sivan up and down. "You said you weren't a match for me. If I hadn't cheated you would have cut my head off."

Sivan chuckled. He hadn't even realized he was so on top of his game during the match. It'd been so long since he'd even felt comfortable with having a sword in his hand, but when he was with this man he felt no issue in bringing out the decorated war hero he once was.

"Even so, you still haven't grown out of your cheating ways. Not playing fair won't get you anywhere."

Black's grin turned toothy. He inched closer, his voice dropping an octave. "Well, I did become a pirate."

"You did," Sivan acknowledged. His heartbeat quickened; he could almost feel the heat coming off the man's lips. "And I feel like I should reprimand you for that."

Black's grip on his wrist tightened a fraction, the sword between them lowering. Somehow, his voice dropped another octave lower, becoming deep and sinful. "If it's from my lord, I'll take it with pride."

The pirate's words stoked the embers in Sivan's gut that had been growing for Black. He was dizzy with it, weak to resist the pull that drew them closer and closer together.

Sivan surged forward, meeting Black with a fire that he could



no longer contain. His lips were hot, salty with sweat, and hungry to open Sivan up. The pirate kissed him like he was starving, desperate to swallow up every breath and sound that came out of him. Black could not let go of his wrist, and Sivan didn't want him to. His hand so perfectly encircled his thinner arm, reminding Sivan of their vast difference in power and size. He thrilled in this contrast, the arousal in his body burning when Black pushed him further up against the wall. Sivan's feet left the ground, his legs parting to accommodate the man between him.

Sivan wrapped his free arm around Black's neck, tangling his hand in the thick mess of dark hair that had started to stick to his sweat-slicked skin. Their mouths moved against each other with a furious purpose, weeks if not years of pent-up need struggling to find a release through their lips.

Black thrust his hips between Sivan's legs, grinding his growing erection against Sivan's own. "My lord..." he groaned, parting only for a moment to allow Sivan to gasp for air.

The lord in question couldn't even process what to say. Heat gathered in his body in a way that was unlike anything he'd ever experienced. This was a heady and dangerous passion, wanting this pirate, this man. Just this kiss was enough to consume his mind with an obsession that could never be satisfied.

Sivan shuddered, his legs wrapping tightly around the man. It had only been a few weeks since that night in Lissandry, but his need to find release was stronger now than ever before. He could feel Black's arousal press up against his ass, and he hummed with the desire to be filled by that large cock.

He was dimly aware that they were in a blood-stained training arena, and there was nothing from stopping the crystal golems or Eliza from walking in, but all the propriety that Sivan had been trained to obey dissipated in the face of this pirate.

Sivan gasped as Black pulled back once more. His lips were

glossy and red, a faint trace of blood on his chin from where the siren's sharp teeth had pricked him. Black's lips went to Sivan's neck, lifting him up further with an arm snaked behind his back. Sivan felt subsumed. He had no room to move, but still felt like he needed to get closer.

"My lord-" Black rasped against his throat. He sucked and nipped at copper skin, peppering the line of Sivan's neck with marks. His teeth would catch on his skin, drawing small drops of blood that would be cleaned up by more kisses.

It was a brutal form of affection, one Sivan did not have much experience with. It was exciting, but a shadow of fear crossed his mind every time he felt the teeth against his neck.

Then his arm began to burn. Sivan did not notice it immediately because he was so intoxicated by this intimacy, but when he did, it flared to attention over any pleasure.

"B-Black!" Sivan choked out, the pain intensifying as the pirate's grip on his wrist tightened. He remembered the night in Varis when Black had placed his mark over Jhaeros's. The heat was the same, but the pain was far more dizzying than he remembered. "Stop-ngh!"

The man holding him passionately against the wall was beyond Sivan's reach. Even if he could struggle to free himself, he had no strength to. The siren's grip around his burning wrist was draining him of energy.

Still, Sivan attempted to struggle. His other hand was still in Black's hair, gripped tightly. If he could just get Black to snap out of this, out of whatever tunnel he'd gone into, maybe the burning would stop. He tightened his fist of black hair and pulled with all the strength he had left.

Black growled, immediately pulling back from Sivan's bloodied neck. This seemed enough to bring him out of his trance, and he let go of Sivan, who dropped into a heap on the floor.

Darkness began to overtake Sivan's vision, but he saw Black fall to his knees next to him, tears and fear in his eyes as he sobbed, "no, no— My lord! I'm so sorry—I—"

Sivan's world faded into unconsciousness, totally drained of energy.