A Prison of the Mind

by hallowedmaiden

Summary

Death changes a person. Sometimes they become so far gone that they are barely recognizable. When Elizabeth agreed to save Jack from the hell she sent him to, she wasn't prepared to meet the Jack Sparrow that his hell had created. She was even less prepared to accept the person she had turned herself into.

Notes

This story is my re-write of At World's End. It will have graphic themes, and will feature a darker Jack for the majority of the story. I have had the ideas featured here brewing in my head since I saw the movie, but I just now got the motivation to put pen to paper. I hope all that reads enjoys. =]

Update 5/26/17: I have moved the story from the Explicit tag to the Mature tag, because at this point in the story, I don't think it garners the E rating. However, I will mostly move it back to the E rating later on.

Update: 8/22/17: Story is back in the Explicit tag. :)

Update: 12/16/17: I am still working on this story, I promise! I am currently going through and revising some things slowly (POV, expansion, etc.). I have the next five chapters outlined, so be on the lookout for a new one soon. :)

Update: 12/19/17: I am going to start re-writing this story chapter by chapter. The storyline
will not be changing and most of the dialogue will stay the same. I just want to write with more focus on internal thoughts from the characters, so it will be more POV focused, like Scythe's Song is.
No Light, No Life

In the dark corners of a person's mind lies twisted forgotten fragments; the guilt over every lie they have ever told, the shame over what they have turned into, the hatred of the people that made them that way, the fear of having a corrupted soul, and the glee of having finally gone too insane to care. The fire rages inside their mind, burning, and piercing, until it reaches their heart. Flame then turns to ice, ceasing the existence of emotion, rendering them into a shell, as hollow as every breath that passes their lips. It is at this point that they are ready to accept death as an old friend, willing it to envelop them with the last ounce of strength left.

Little do they know that a lifetime of misery awaits them when they make the final journey into what is supposed to be peace-filled bliss. Especially when that journey takes place in the mouth of a Kraken and the cause for being there is a betrayal from the person whom you trusted the most.

Every inch of her skin haunted his mind, every word she ever spoke echoed through the chasm that his mind had become, and the burning hatred for her filled his heart with a pain like no other, even though it no longer beat here.

"I'm not sorry."

A rock left his hand, and flew toward the wall, hitting it with a sharp crack. Leaning against the stone wall, wheezing from exhaustion, he tilted his head back and closed his eyes.

"It's after you, not the ship. Not us. It's the only way, don't you see?"

The inky darkness behind his eyelids matched the thick air around him. In every direction he looked was a never-ending passageway. He was almost sure that he had stumbled down every one countless times, but they all looked the same. Everything looked the same. Light did not exist here. Hope did not exist here. Life was never going to exist here.

This was his hell, the one that she had sent him to. He could live with his life being taken away. Death was not something he had been afraid of in all of the times that he had been so close to it, but this, this was torture.

She had taken it away twice. Once when she chained him to the mast, and now, as he sat on the stone floor, trapped in the endless maze of tunnels.

He had come back to stay with his ship. He had chosen to die for them, for her. He had wanted to do the right thing. Then she took that choice away from him in one fell swoop, and the unspoken words were so loud that she might as well have shouted them. She thought so little of him that she felt she had to force him into sacrifice, instead of trusting him to do it himself. She had taken away the one thing that he had always valued most, even over life itself. His freedom was gone, and he swore that he would make her hurt equally if he ever saw the light of day again.

Scoffing, he picked at the trinkets in his hair. Time didn't matter anymore. It could have been years since he had been in this place, and he wouldn't know the difference. He placed his other hand over his heart, feigning the shock he once felt the first couple of times. There was no longer a heartbeat. Nothing. No pulse in his veins, no breath in his lungs. No life in him at all. And he was never getting out of here.

He lifted himself up off the floor, swearing that he could hear his bones grinding together. Right about now, he would normally feel his headache for the sweet taste of rum, but he hadn't felt a
craving for food nor drink in a long time. Perhaps this is what his mutinous first mate had felt when he had taken that last piece of Aztec gold. Even now, he didn't feel sorry for that worthless excuse for a man. He would still wish this and a thousand times worse for him.

"I'm proud of you, Jack."

Gritting his teeth, he took a couple steps forward, without aim or direction. His movement stopped when he heard a noise that was not coming from him. Cautiously turning around, he narrowed his eyes as the noise became more clear. A dull thump, over and over again. Inching forward, a passage to the right suddenly brightened, and he had to shield his eyes from it lest he have them burned out. The sound became louder as he got closer. The light started to flicker.

Fire?

Rounding the corner, he blanched at the sight before him.

"You're not real." The figure that was rhythmically slamming a hammer down looked up at him without slowing his movements.

He turned around to avoid having to look at the person currently behind him. Was his mind so addled now that he was hallucinating?

The noise stopped. "Perhaps not, Jack, but that doesn't mean that I am not here."

He squeezed his eyes shut in frustration, slowly turning around again, hoping that facing him would make the man disappear. When this didn't pass, he clenched his fists, and ground out the man's name.

"Turner."

William wore a look of disappointment on his face. "You stole her from me, Jack. You knew that she was mine, yet you still played with her like she was a conquest, and she followed you. You gave her the temptation, and she took it. Don't you feel guilty? Why else would she hide her true reason for kissing you on the mast other than her distrust in me? You poisoned her mind against me, and now she won't even look at me."

Glaring at him, he tried to decide if he wanted to expend the effort to respond to the twit or not.

"Mr. Turner, need I remind you that I am a pirate and that when I see something I want, I make an effort to take it, regardless of who laid claim to it before myself?"

That was a lie and he knew it. He hadn't seen that wretched girl as a conquest. He had respected her, had seen her as his equal, wanted to have her by his side until the end of his days. Peas in a pod, as he once told her. Now? She was lower than the grime underneath his boot.

"You will never deserve her, Jack. Despite what she did to you, she will always have more honor and worth than you ever did. She was only doing what she thought was right, which is something you still have yet to do."

He gave the man a look that he hoped would tear the hallucination in two.

"I no longer have any desire to be equal to her or you. You can have her, Turner. The less she is around me, the more chance she has of living."

The blacksmith's expression turned from disappointment to confusion, making him look pathetic.
"What reason do you have to hate her, Jack? She saved me, and the entire crew. You have cheated death far too often, and she saw that it was finally your time to meet your maker. If anyone deserved death, it was you."

His face darkened, and he backed away, shaking his head. "Why am I even talking to you? You're not real."

He turned around once again so that the maddening whelp was staring at his back. Then, the orange flickering on the stone wall vanished, leaving it as dark as death's final moments. He knew without looking that the hallucination was gone.

"She killed me", he said aloud. His voice sounded like he hadn't spoken in eons, scratchy and hoarse. He had every right to hate the witch.

But some small part of him wanted just as much to slant his mouth over hers and run his fingers over her silken skin until she screamed his name. Drive into her until she couldn't remember her own name.

Sinking back down to the ground, he closed his eyes and drifted off into a daze, uncaring about anything.

Small whimpering noises brought him back to conscious thoughts, and when he opened his eyes, his jaw fell open.

The black wooden walls loomed around him, swaying softly to the time of the waves, and the candle on the desk flickered back and forth. His bed, with black satin sheets and beautifully carved wooden posts, stood before him.

He was standing in his cabin. Or at least that is what his mind had chosen to conjure up for him this time, and that wasn't all.

Elizabeth Swann was splayed out on his sheets, naked as the day she was born, the soft candlelight glowing on her sunkissed skin. Her legs were spread, and her fingers were swirling delicately around her soft folds, causing intoxicating noises to leave her parted lips. Her eyes were darkened to a near chocolate color, and they were staring directly into his.

"This is what you can never have Jack, no matter how badly you want it. You will never be good enough for me."

His head spun, the floorboards beneath him threatening to swallow him whole. Seeing Turner was one thing, but this, this was too much. Blood rushed past his ears, and his heart, if it worked, would be thumping madly.

Her back arched, and her fingers rubbed faster. He could feel the air in the room clench with her muscles as her orgasm crashed over her. A flush covered her skin, and her chest heaved.

His mind warred between bringing her to another blissful release and sending her to her well-deserved death.

The center of the bed sunk in as she sat up and swung her legs around so that her delicate feet were touching the floor.

"You wretch", he ground out, glaring at her. She simply smiled.

"Wasn't it you that called me a pirate? You deserved what you got Jack. You know it and I know it."
Perhaps if you were less of a coward I wouldn't have deemed it necessary. If you would have stayed with your ship by choice, I could have kissed you goodbye in thanks instead of in contempt. But I know you, and I knew that you would rather risk all of our lives, including mine, just to save your worthless hide. I was doing all of us a favor, as much as Gibbs denies it, by removing you from any future equations."

He seethed.

"If there is anything I am sure of, Jack, it's that if given the choice to go back and re-evaluate my actions, I would kill you again without a second's hesitation."

He was going to kill her. The second he laid eyes on her, the real her, she was going to die.

"It doesn't matter anymore, Miss Swann, because I am here, with nigh a heart nor breath, and I am never leaving. You aren't real, just like your fiance wasn't real."

She stepped forward until she was inches away from him, her hot breath ghosting across his face.

The room around him changed slowly until he could feel the cool breeze from the ocean, and the hardwood on his back. He was against the mast again, and the shackle was around his wrist.

And the charming murderess was standing before him, this time wearing a triumphant expression.

"Whether I am real or not makes no difference, because my words are true, Jack."

He leaned his head back against the mast.

"You ran away in your longboat because you were too afraid to accept your fate. You sent my Will to pay your debt for you because you were afraid to finally realize that it was only going to end if you died."

"I came back, Ms. Swann." Anger coursed through him, and if the shackle wasn't around his wrist, hallucination or not, he would strangle her.

She leaned closer to his lips.

"I don't care."

He regarded her for a moment. Her eyes held a different quality than the real Elizabeth. These eyes were dark, vicious.

"I came back for you, love. I came back because I couldn't stand leaving you there. Bugger everything else. But now? I would gladly be the one to pull the trigger when your time comes."

She just kept smiling.
Candlelight danced in her eyes, giving them the only life that they had possessed since the last piece of her soul had been ripped away by her own doing.

He must have seen. The was the only thing that could explain his attitude towards her.

Perhaps a person could wither away from overwhelming guilt, just as she might do in the very bed she was sitting on.

She had betrayed two men that she loved, and one of them was never coming back. She no longer felt the need to remain on this earth, and she could not bring herself to understand why she was still among the living.

Dark thoughts had clouded inside her head since that day, always reminding her of how unforgivable her act was, how she could never turn back time and undo what she did, and how if by some miracle he were to return, he would never forgive her for her act of betrayal.

His black eyes would glitter with hate every time he had to look at her. His voice would hold no emotion every time he spoke to her, should he have the misfortune to.

She would almost wish that he would kill her.

"Pirate."

The last word he said to her was burned into her mind. The accusatory tone of his voice had held a multitude of other things in its layers. Admiration, hurt, and rage.

She had thought she was doing the right thing. It was after him, not the crew, and he did need to go down with his ship to save them. Anyone would have done the same.

So why did she feel like the Devil himself for doing it?

"You love him, don't you?"

She looked up into the corner of the room and set her face in a stony expression.

"Even if I did, it doesn't matter now."

Tia Dalma smiled a strange smile, making Elizabeth's eyes narrow.

"What do you know about love?"

Tia's face darkened, a storm forming in her eyes. "I know more den you think, girl. I know that you never truly loved William. You are the same as me, untamable. Only Jack Sparrow could match
She sucked in a breath and pursed her lips. "I am supposed to love Will. He is the right choice, the proper choice. I am supposed to marry him so we can have a family together. Why did I have to go and ruin it all?"

Tia leveled a gaze at her. "Something tells me that you don't feel as guilty about that as you do about betraying Jack."

She looked up sharply. "How-you weren't there! You can't know what I did."

Tia stepped forward and knelt in front of her. "Listen to me, child. A woman's right to happiness is something that she should put above all else. Jack Sparrow makes you happy. You are doing nothing wrong by loving him. Sending the one you love to his death is the true darkness of your soul."

Raising her eyes to meet Tia's, she asked a question that she had been asking herself since climbing into the longboat.

"Do you think he will ever forgive me?"

A sad look came over Tia's face. "Jack's soul has been through a lot of darkness itself both by his doing and the doing of others. There are sides of Jack that very few people have seen. I do not know which side of him you will encounter should you see him again."

She paused and seemed to consider her words. "Being in hell can change even the best of men into something the Devil himself would fear. I am afraid that your betrayal may have been the final wound that destroyed his humanity."

At Tia's words, her blood turned to ice, and every last drop of color drained out of her face. Then she dared to ask a question that she wasn't sure if she wanted to know the answer to.

"Is there any way to bring him back?"

Tia sighed and stood up. "Yes, but few would ever take the quest upon themselves, even to save the ones they love most. You see, to make the Locker give up that which it has taken, you need to offer a replacement. Davy Jones took part of Jack's soul."

The two women stared at each other for a moment.

Finally, she asked another question.

"What is the price, the replacement?"

Tia's face grew grim.

"Part of your soul."

Part of her soul...perhaps it said something about her state of being that the price seemed so paltry...

She cast her eyes downward. "If I choose to go through with this, will Jack be himself when I bring him back, or will he be..."

Her words trailed off. The one time she had seen Jack drop his guard, his mask, was when he killed Barbossa on Isla De Muerta. His eyes had held a deadly serious calm in them, and she feared to see them directed at her.
"It's hard to say when part of a soul is taken. Witty Jack may be the same person he was just before you shackled him to the mast, or he might be the person Hell turned him into. That is for you to find out. In order for this quest to work, for you to be allowed access to the Locker, you need to be willing to accept what it is that you find. You cannot fear it, and you cannot run away from it."

Would she be willing to bring Jack back even if a different person lived behind his charcoal eyes?

"How do I get there? The Locker."

Tia procured a knife from somewhere in her dress. The blade glittered in the candlelight, almost taunting her.

"For you, you must give into the guilt that you are feeling. To get to the Locker, you must die by your own hand. Davy Jones only accepts damaged souls, girl."

She stared at the knife. "Is my soul not damaged enough already?"

Tia smiled. "There are only a couple of thing that truly damage a person's soul. Being betrayed by the one you love most, and taking your own life."

"How do you know that the Locker is where I will go?"

A truly satisfied look swept over Tia's face. "You sent him to his death, Elizabeth. You put a black mark on his soul, and you will forever be connected to it. You will go wherever Jack is when you die because fate has a way of reuniting the victim with their murderer. It is the only way."

Tears would have formed in her eyes if she had any left. "Is there anything else?"

The witch walked to the door and then turned to face her.

"You must confess what you have done to all of them. Only then can the true measure of your guilt fill you. Only then will you be truly ready to die."

With those words, she left the room.

Her head was heavy when she dropped it in her hands. She had to take her own life. She never thought that she would even be in the realm of considering that. At one time, taking the life of another would have been appalling to her as well.

How could she tell them? How could she look into their faces and tell them that it was she who had betrayed Jack, she who had shackled him to the mast of his own ship, and she who had taken away his freedom of choice?

Taking a deep shuddering breath, she made her decision.
Here is the third chapter! Drop me a review pretty please?

Water ran in inky rivulets down the dark stone wall, forming a puddle where he had passed out. Opening his eyes carefully, just enough to see the area immediately in front of him, he searched for honey-colored hair and devilish eyes.

She was gone. He was back in his prison, alone. The world threatened to disappear again as he sat up, pain rushing through his head.

Getting to his feet, he stared down the passage and raised his eyebrows. The walls were now lined with jail cells.

Empty, he realized, all of them. Much like himself at that moment.

So long ago it seemed that he was stuck in the Port Royal jail, attempting to bribe a dog into handing over the cell keys. Turner had rescued him, then insisted on destroying every single one of his plans until he fell over the stone wall into the ocean, back to his beloved Pearl.

The bittersweet reunion with his ship after Norrington had so graciously given him a head start was short lived. William Turner Sr. had kindly come aboard to remind him of his impending debt with Jones, and he almost had a serious reconsideration of the rule to not shoot the messenger.

He briefly wondered if he would rather be a prisoner on the Dutchman, instead of wandering the endless corridors and hallways that he was trapped in now.

As least he would have the ocean.

He stopped and cautiously turned around when he heard a soft cry behind him. Peering into the darkness, he listened to a delicate female voice echo against the stone wall. The voice spoke his name but was not speaking to him.

"Jack. I'm sorry, I...I couldn't forgive myself for what I did. You would never forgive me. I had nothing to live for."

Blood rushed past his ears. Stepping forward, he came to a stop in front of one of the cells, and at the sight in front of him, froze, reaching out for something to steady himself, and finding nothing.

A small naked woman sat with her knees to her chest, stringy blonde hair hanging in front of her face. Her skin was wet and pale as death. Slowly, her head turned, and empty eyes stared into his empty soul.

"Elizabeth?" His voice came out as a low whisper as if his throat had attempted to strangle the words before they could be uttered.

Air seemed to be leaving the room faster than he could breathe it. His chest tightened, and for one
gleeful moment, he hoped that it was the hand of death bringing him peace.

"Look."

Her head inclined in the direction of her wrists. When her eyes made contact, even she seemed to be shocked by the sight; a red trickle slithering out of her wrists to coil into a puddle on the black stone floor.

Before, the world had swayed before him. Now, it was unmoving, cold, and harsh.

"Jack. I'm sorry. I couldn't forgive myself for what I did. You would never forgive me. I had nothing to live for."

A piercing pain radiated through his head, and his hand flew up to press against his bandana.

He felt sick.

Turning away, he placed his hand against the wall, shaking his head in an attempt to stop conscious thought.

Moments passed, the silence grew thicker until he finally opened his mouth to speak.

"I don't believe you."

Hearing a sharp intake of breath behind him, he turned around again, facing her. "I am sure that you hoped that I would be the Jack Sparrow that you knew before you killed me. That person danced around a fire with you. That person would have happily been stranded on an island with you until the hunger did us both in. That person dove into the water to save you, knowing that it might mean his death by a noose. That person, Miss Swann, is dead. The pieces of him are floating in the ocean, along with his ship."

Her eyes were pleading, and she opened her mouth to speak, but no sound came out.

Anger spread through him like a slow-growing fire.

"You have nothing to say to me. You told me that you were not sorry. You chewed me up and tossed me aside at the first sign that I may have been more than you could handle. You handcuffed me to my ship and left me to die. You are better off dead."

Laughter began tumbling from her lips, shocking him.

"Don't you understand Jack? Everything you see here is something that your mind creates. It comes from within you. Can you not guess what I am?"

She stood up and stepped over to the bars, putting her face in between them, and wrapping her fingers around the cold steel.

He stared past her. "What. What are you?"

A small smile ghosted across her face.

"I am that small fraction of you that is now locked away. That fraction of yourself that is shrouded and choked by the hurt and anger that has filled the empty spaces that your heart and soul once occupied. When you saw me sitting on the ground dying, you stayed. While the only thing that passed your lips was hatred, you did not turn away. You may believe it to be true, but you are not all lost. That part of you, floating somewhere in the oblivion of your mind, belongs to her, even still."
Start searching for it before you destroy yourself to the point of no return."

She paused, giving him a sad look, before gesturing to the puddle of blood behind her. "Your broken soul is trying to show you the consequences that will come should you choose to follow the path of revenge. Jack Sparrow, you may not care now, you may want her dead a thousand times over and damned to all nine circles of hell, but when you are walking through the brig late at night in search of a drop of rum to quiet your mind, and you find her with a knife to her wrists, you will wish in every language you know that you could have found it within you to forgive her."

The cells disappeared along with her, and the walls returned. He stood, unmoving, his mind wavering between rage and defeat, until the war gave out to exhaustion, along with his body.
The cold vice-like grip of dread was strangling her from the inside.

As she sat on the wooden chair, she felt like she was wavering in the calm before she was to be sentenced to death before a jury of the people she was supposed to love and respect; not betray.

All of the colors in the room blended together, leaving her with nothing to focus on but her limbs anxiously twitching, and her heart making a valiant attempt to escape from her chest.

When Tia Dalma ghosted across the room, she had to remind herself to start breathing, not for the first time that night, and certainly not the last.

Tia stopped at her desk, and turned around, staring straight into her eyes, almost as if challenging her to run from her fate. She stared back and inclined her head only slightly towards the other woman. A small knowing smile creased her lips, holding a thousand different words. Tia turned back towards her desk and picked up a glass bottle and a knife. The sound that emanated from the two clanging together was deafening to her, despite the even more cacophonous sound of blood rushing past her eardrums.

Doors opened and shut. Her chest tightened, and she had to force breath through her mouth because it was threatening to vanish from her lungs.

"Gather 'round."

Tia sliced her arm through the air, motioning to the remnants of the Black Pearl's crew, beckoning them to congregate around the pale shaking human embodiment of raw fear.

Once they all formed a half-hearted circle, Tia spoke.

"Elizabeth and I discussed a...possible way to retrieve the good Captain of the Black Pearl. A grand quest, as it were. One that a few of you will benefit from, I think, more than others."

Her words were aimed at William Turner, who was currently avoiding her like the plague. His head jerked to look in the swamp witches' direction, eyes narrowed.

"My involvement in this possible quest is irrelevant. What is relevant is the fact that you declined to share this information with all of us at once. Why did Elizabeth need to hear it first? Furthermore, why do either of you assume that we actually want Jack Sparrow back from the dead?"

Her entire body winced at the way her name passed through his lips. It was as if he was speaking of a fatal disease, instead of the woman he loved.
Tia sidled up to Will and positioned herself inches from his face. "William, you believe that with the Pearl, you can help your father escape his fate of eternity with the sea devil, Davy Jones himself. Do not underestimate how well I know any of you." She rotated back around slowly, allowing her words to sink into Will's brain.

"However, William's inquiry is fair. Yes, I did share this idea with Elizabeth first, and you all want to know why."

Four pairs of eyes stared back at her, three of them only holding curiosity, and one holding the purest display of dread that had ever mingled with the consciousness of a human.

Tia raised her hand to touch one of the many ornaments hanging from the ceiling of the hut.

"The quest to raise a human soul from the Locker is a complicated one. It can only be done when the soul in question was sent there before their time, by a betrayal that was not supposed to happen."

She paused, waiting to make sure all of them were understanding.

"The price of returning life to a soul is to offer a replacement."

The weight of her eyelids forced her eyes closed. She felt bile rising in her throat, and her skin broke out in a sweat.

She saw a hand gesturing to her in the haze that her vision had become, and words were spoken that she vaguely heard.

"If she would be so kind, I believe Elizabeth can tell you the rest."

When she raised her eyelids, they felt like they had a hundred pounds of lead resting on them.

Almost as if in a trance, her eyes drifted over to the man that had been a father figure in her young life. A man that had known two different paths in his own lifetime. A naval officer, and a pirate. Genuine worry was etched into his face. Joshamee Gibbs may be the only true friend Jack had.

Next to him were Pintel and Ragetti, two pirates that had been accessories to her captivity on the Black Pearl with Captain Barbossa. Now she had fought alongside them in a battle to a near death.

Finally, there was the boy that she had rescued from a shipwreck when she was a little girl. The boy that had become her secret love, the man that she was never going to be able to marry because of their differences in social status. Now, he wouldn't even look at her.

Swallowing thickly, she finally spoke.

"Captain Sparrow was betrayed. He did not choose to go down with his ship willingly, the choice was made for him. That is why his soul is able to be rescued."

Her breath hitched, and she hoped that further explanation wouldn't be necessary. She wasn't sure if she could make it through anymore.

"Why did Tia Dalma share this information with you first Elizabeth? Why?"

Will's words were slow and deliberate.

She shook her head in pointless denial of what she was about to share.

"When I climbed into the longboat and told all of you that he had elected to stay behind, I lied. That
much you already know. But there is another part of the truth that I have neglected to share with you."

She could feel their gazes burning into her skin, and she could hear the cogs in their brain turning.

"Will saw me kiss Jack, but it was not out of passion or grief. It was an impulse of trickery from someone who realized what had to be done in the spur of the moment. I shackled him to the mast of his own ship, forcing him to stay behind while all of our lives were saved."

Tears were now streaming freely down her cheeks. She raised her eyes to stare directly into Will's.

"I sent Jack to his death. I killed him, and that is why Tia spoke to me about this prior to any of you. I am the only one who can bring him back."
Chapter Summary

Yay, chapter 5! I got the inspiration for the events in this chapter kind of randomly, but I am so glad that it came. Hope you like it!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He no longer had any desire to open his eyes. The black kohl had since smeared away from the countless times that he had run his hands over his face, trying to erase his memories, this place, his life. It was now replaced by the weight of the knowledge that nothing was going to make this hell cease to exist, and he was going to be trapped, floating in oblivion forever, haunted by scenes from his mind's sick play that recounted every memory in his mind that he wanted to forget.

His consciousness was fading in and out. He vaguely felt long fingers of cold crawl over his arm, then his shoulder, and finally to his face. Somewhere in the chasm of his mind, he registered that he wasn't supposed to feel cold.

He couldn't feel anything anymore.

"Jack Sparrow."

Every hair on his body stood up, and he shivered. Voices belonged to bodies.

There was someone here with him.

Coaxing his legs into working, he slowly stood up. His taunting hallucinations and the harsh pierce of reality were starting to overlap. He wondered if he was finally going insane.

"Jack?"

The voice was quiet, but the way the deep timbre held no kind of uncertainty or fear or anything but peace spoke of a very old soul.

Peering into the darkness, trying to locate the voice's possessor, he suddenly heard it chiding itself.

"Oh, excuse me. It may help if there was light, as much as I loathe to have it around."

His eyes took a moment to adjust to the change in the room before him. Torches now lined what appeared to be a circular room with a roundtable.

Standing on the opposite side of the table from him was a figure hidden behind a black hooded cloak.

The time, if it existed here, ticked by at a slow creep, as he waited. Finally, he decided to speak first.

"What's wrong with having light around?" He eyed the figure warily, making sure it knew that if it was here to manipulate him, it was a lost cause.
Its head tilted. "Brings back bad memories."

Bad memories were the only thing he had at this point.

The chair the figure was standing next to scraped across the stone floor as the figure pulled it out to sit, motioning for him to do the same.

Stepping forward, he watched his shadow bounce and sway across the stone walls. When he reached the chair, he did not sit down right away.

"Are you another hallucination?"

"Oh no, Captain Sparrow, far from it."

Dark kohl-colored eyes watched hidden ones.

"Then who exactly are you?"

A ghostly pale hand extended towards Jack's chair.

"Sit, please."

Finding no reason to challenge it, for now, he sat.

"I am going to venture a guess and say that you are not considering the idea of removing your hood. I prefer to see the people I talk to if you are a person."

The figure seemed to think for a moment.

"If that is what you wish, then I shall comply Captain Sparrow."

Until then, the firelight had seemed to lick at what was hidden underneath the black shadow-like fabric of the cloak. Now, as every inch of black fabric was pulled back, he sat there, shocked. At the collar of the robe, a blue and white coat peeked out, laying against skin that was not yet kissed by the Caribbean sun. Raven black hair was pulled back into a low ponytail. Chocolate brown eyes peered out at him, watching his reaction.

"I am going to assume that the identity of Lieutenant Sparrow has not been completely washed away by the salty waves of the Caribbean."

It was his voice, without the various accents he had picked up from traveling. It had such a strong aristocratic lilt to it that it sickened him. Even though his entire stint in the Royal Navy had been an attempt to disguise himself as a good man, he still loathed any reminder of it.

He sat back in his chair.

"It was never an identity, to begin with. It was the first and last attempt I made at running from my fate as a pirate."

Chuckling, the Navy officer reached into his coat and pulled out a small metal flask.

"Whisky?"

Glaring at his younger self, he scoffed.

"I never did like that shit. Always preferred rum."
The lieutenant shrugged. "But you did drink it a lot didn't you?" he asked, gulping the liquid down, which caused him to raise an eyebrow, suspicion clouding his face.

"Yes, but I always drank it slowly. That was the idea that the English harbored. You had to drink it slowly to savor the taste, and we both know how hard I tried to blend in."

The younger man had slight trepidation covering his face now.

"You aren't actually me, are you?"

The other Jack sighed, and pulled the hood back over his face, again shrouding himself in darkness, voice changing back to the ancient drawl.

"No."

He narrowed his eyes. "Who are you and what do you want from me?"

The smirk was palatable even without being able to see it.

"I have always had a special interest in you, Jack. You have exhibited traits ever since you were born that truly piqued my curiosity. Your soul is filled with darkness, but not by evil. You have pure darkness within you, but you are not an evil being."

Letting out a slow breath, he chose his next words carefully.

"What point are you trying to make here?"

More whiskey was drained from the flask.

"I am here to help you see that you can embrace that darkness, not run from it. Most mortals obtain darkness in their soul because of an act of evil. Perhaps they took a life or forced a woman or man into something unwanted. For example, I collected a soul fairly recently that was being sent to me because he allowed a woman and her child to die. He failed to intervene."

A subtle mask of confusion flashed across his face.

"That doesn't mean that it was his fault."

The hood jerked as the wraith-like entity turned his head slightly and leaned forward.

"He ordered the attack on them, to begin with. He told his men to kill anyone and everyone they found. He told them to raid every house and every shop, and to cut down every living person in their path, be it man, woman, or child."

He drummed his fingers on the table.

"You specifically took him for killing that woman and child. Why were they special?"

"Because, Captain Sparrow, that woman was his fiance, and the child was his own."

The silence in the air was thick enough to choke a man to death should he allow it.

"Who was this man?"

Pale fingers snaked out from under the robe to glide over the dark wood of the desk.
"It's funny you ask that Jack. You see, you are the one that ended his pitiful life. You sent his black soul down to me. When you put a bullet through his heart, it was for vengeance, and you also inadvertently saved the woman who would go on to put a shackle around your wrist, dooming you to death and this place. Fate has an odd way of working, doesn't it?

Anger flooded his senses when he realized who was being talked about.

"Hector."

The name escaped his lips as though he was spitting out poison.

The other man leaned back in satisfaction.

"People like you have a natural way of...removing problems like him. He misused darkness for evil. Darkness, much like myself, were created to balance the world, not to cause chaos.

He closed his eyes wearily.

"Why are you here, specifically?"

The nameless man's head twitched.

"You have a problem that you have been wrestling with. You were murdered by Elizabeth Swann, and you do not know which path you should take when dealing with her."

Allowing his eyes to sweep around the room, he smiled sadly.

"You talk as though you are certain that I am going to leave this hell eventually."

The man grunted with something akin to excitement.

"Trust me, Captain, this is not hell. You may think it is because being trapped without freedom is your own personal hell, but hell itself is much, much worse. You will escape these endless corridors. In fact, your lovely murderess is coming to rescue you."

A mix of emotions paraded their way through him faster than he could identify them. He settled on confusion.

"Why?"

A small laugh escaped the man's mouth.

"Well, she feels guilty of course. She is desperate for relief from that crushing weight. She won't find it, but it will be a valiant attempt none the less."

He didn't give him time to respond.

"She won't find it because bringing you back won't fix her soul. When she killed you, she gave you the pathetic excuse of needing to save the rest of the crew. If she really was doing it selflessly, she would have offered to go down with you. No, she was acting with no one other than herself in mind. Simultaneously sacrificing the man she loved to save her own skin, breaking the heart of the man she didn't, and betraying the entire crew by murdering their Captain is quite impressive."

The man watched his reaction carefully and finding no argument in his eyes, continued.

"Your other hallucination told you to forgive her. This will most certainly accomplish nothing."
A breath escaped his mouth that sounded like a hiss.

"I was not planning on doing that. In fact, that was the last thing on my 'back from the dead' list of things to do. You, however, seem to have a more expanded idea of what I should be doing. Please, elaborate."

The other man seemed to be staring intently at him, and he stared right back, almost challenging him.

"Kill her."

"Come again?"

The man chuckled.

"You heard me. You need to kill her. She upset the balance. Her decisions came from the most selfish place in her black soul, and she murdered you, which should be reason enough for the ruthless Captain of the Black Pearl. Let me count how many people are still alive that have crossed you. Oh, there are none. Funny, that."

"I am not a murderer...anymore."

Frustration filled the other man's voice when he spoke.

"Ah, back to attempting to battle the darkness within you. It is not going to go away Jack, no matter how hard you try to fight it. You very nearly embraced it, just before...certain events happened. Then you nearly accepted it again, when you killed Captain Barbossa. Yet, you just cannot bring yourself to let it fully consume you."

Abruptly standing, he ground out something that had a burden on his mind for a long time.

"I don't want to accept that I am becoming like him."

The cloaked man also stood up, and circled the table, coming to a stop directly in front of him.

"Your father."

He nodded.

The man sighed. "Yes, I understand that you wish to not share his traits, but you are missing something, Jack. Your father was evil. He only wished to bring about evil. The way he beat you down night after night could have only come from pure evil. You do not share that with him. Your soul is crafted to be able to make the decisions necessary to remove evil when you find it, where other mortals would not be able to. Without the darkness within you, you would not be the pirate that you are today. You would have never made it there. Every single life you have taken deserved it. Every single entity of evil that you have removed allowed the balance to continue. That kind of darkness is critical to keeping what little peace the world has left. Your ability to make impossible choices without a moment's hesitation is so very rare, Jack."

"I was never proud of any of the choices I made."

The man shook his head slightly.

"No one would be, until they are shown how those choices affected the people involved, directly or indirectly."
He glanced up, expression bordering on curiosity.

I allowed myself to die by the hands of a mere girl. How does that not invalidate everything you just said?"

The man extended his hand to clasp Jack's shoulder.

"She was the one person who you were not going to be able to kill unless you had a very good reason. I daresay that she certainly gave you that reason. Every person like you has their Achille's Heel Jack."

Uncomfortable with the strange feeling, he shook the hand off.

"Before you take me down memory lane, which is what I presume you are going to do, you are going to tell me who you really are, and you will start by taking that cloak off."

The man stepped back and bowed, then removed the cloak, which fell to form an inky puddle on the ground.

Two blood red eyes stared straight into his black ones.

"I have many names and faces, but the one I prefer is Lucifer."

Chapter End Notes

Also, for those wondering what the title means:

Et Mali Tenebrae = Darkness and Evil (In Latin)
Diabolus Incarnatum

Chapter Notes

Yay, finally updated! This conversation was difficult to write for some reason, hence the delay. Drop me a review, as it makes me erupt into a fit of delight when I read them! =]

Hope you enjoy!

Lucifer.

He had raven black hair down to his shoulders, and his body was consumed by black robes revealed by the cloak's absence, that almost seemed to twist and writhe on their own. Skin as white as the moon stood out against the darkness of the room, and a strange shadow was settled into the skin around his eyes. He had a voice as smooth as velvet, but dangerous enough to leave no doubt as to who he was.

He stayed silent, not trusting himself to speak at that moment. A slight pounding started behind his eyes, as he stared straight into the red orbs, unable to tear his gaze away from them.

They stared right back, with amusement dancing in them, as though he thought that his look of shock was something funny.

"I must say, this is not the reaction I normally get when I show myself to mortals. Generally, they run screaming as though all nine circles of hell are chasing them. Evidently, you are...different."

Methodically running through the steps to get a ship out of harbor was the only thing that had the ability to tame his irritation at being underestimated. Finally dragging his eyes away from the figure still standing in front of him, he gathered the words that had first come to his mind.

"You thought that I would be afraid of you", he said, pronouncing each word with a certain air of disbelief, as those he had not quite wrapped his head around exactly what was happening at that moment. "The only thing I fear now is being forced to remain here forever. Certainly not you."

Lucifer regarded him for a moment, then swept his arm in an arc, and he watched as the room changed again.

It was still circular, but now in the middle, instead of a table and chairs, there was a tall iron structure, with an ethereal substance falling smoothly from the top, resembling a waterfall.

The torches vanished, and the only light in the room was now bouncing off the walls in glowing tendrils, bathing the atmosphere in blue light.

It had suddenly become quite cold, and he steeled himself from shivering.

"What is that supposed to be?"

The dark figure ignored him and appeared to be contemplating something.

"You do not fear death?", Lucifer said, a strange blend of wonder and satisfaction coming through in
The corners of his mouth curved upward in a slight smirk. "I'm a pirate. I'd be a fool if I were to fear death. I'd just rather not spend eternity in my own personal dungeon. I certainly have no reason to return to the land of the living, save to hang Elizabeth Swann from the Black Pearl's sails, so don't bother expecting me to throw a party when you no doubt decide to elaborate on her apparent rescue plans."

Lucifer's eyes narrowed, and the temperature in the room seemed to drop.

"You haven't asked me why I am here, Jack. You see, I generally appear to your kind either to remove someone or something that is upsetting the balance of darkness, or to help those that do such things in my stead. For you, however -"

He made an impatient noise in the back of his throat, and then briefly wondered whether cutting Satan off from his speech was such a good idea.

"Yes, yes, you are here to convince me that I am not, in fact, evil. You plan to do that by dragging me through my own memories. Was there anything else you wanted to add?"

A dark chuckle slithered out from Lucifer, and his eyes seemed to burn with excitement.

"My, you are brave, Jack. Do you realize that I could turn you into a black stain on the floor with a mere wave of my hand? Ah, but of course. Death is not among your fears. Forgive me."

He automatically took a step forward, as if to challenge him.

"If your plan was to attempt to make me fear you, then may I remind you that I already alleviated you of that idea. I will also attempt to convince you now if only to save you some time, that there is not a single thing you can say or show me to convince me that I have even an ounce of significance; I only exist in the fringes and shadows of the world, and nothing can change that."

Lucifer shook his head, as a smirk danced across his lips.

"The fringes and shadows of the world are where you belong, Jack. You exist to watch the chaos around you, and step in when necessary to make order continue unobstructed."

A bark of laughter came out of his mouth. "Order in chaos. I should have expected that. I am also expecting you to eventually fill me in on the mystery of the strange shimmering object in the center of the room. I don't believe that it and I have been properly introduced."

The robes crawled across the ground like wisping black smoke as Lucifer's body twisted around to look at the object in question.

"I don't actually have a name for it, as I just created it when I removed those ghastly torches. We will be using it to access the memories that I have selected, provided you are willing to do so."

"And if I am not?"

A strange smile stretched across the demon's face.

"Then I will force you, and I will promise you now that that will not be pleasant."

He closed his eyes, willing his patience to extend until this encounter was over.

"I have been through every single significant memory of mine a thousand times. I have examined
them from every angle, and have always come to the same conclusion."

The demon stepped toward the object in the center and then turned slightly to face him. He extended a hand out from his depthless robes and beckoned him closer.

"Ah, but all of that rumination was cloaked behind black glass. You could not see past your self-hatred, and that poisoned your perspective. Believe me, seeing them here will shed new light on what you believe yourself to be."

He stared at the long pale fingers for a moment, then stepped forward, sending small clouds of black dust into the air behind him. Gazing into the demon's eyes warily, he turned his attention to the ethereal substance in front of him.

"It is a strange situation, isn't it? The woman that, in a severe lapse of better judgment, I thought I could trust, sent me to my death, and in doing so, may have spun and bent fate in such a way that I will no longer feel like a pariah to myself when I inevitably vacate wherever it is that I am. Coincidentally, if this self-realization would have happened just a little sooner, I would have never died in the first place, because I would not have been so desperate for someone whom I felt equal to."

Lucifer gave him an appraising look that he caught out of the corner of his eye.

Turning to face the demon fully, he continued.

"Oh, don't take what I just said as confidence in what it is that you are about to do. I believe that there is far too much self-loathing built up in every crack in the chasm of my head to even, for one second, entertain the idea of reversing it all. However, being a pirate, I constantly have to maintain the belief that the improbable and impossible can indeed happen. If I did not, then I fear I would have been taken by cannon or bullet a long time ago, due to the poisonous emotion of doubt. So, by all means, take the floor, and do your worst."

The red eyes were glittering with an emotion that he couldn't place.

"I would not have come here to you if I believed that I would fail. You do not hate yourself as much as you think Jack. I believe, and correct me if you think I am wrong, that you hate everything you have done, but you do not inherently hate yourself."

Glaring straight ahead, he shrugged with a small twitch of his shoulders.

The demon stepped up to stand next to him, and he struggled to keep the shocked expression off of his face at feeling the tangible heat that poured from the robed figure.

Sensing the confusion, Lucifer released another dark chuckle. "Many think that I would be cold as ice, capable of freezing the very blood of mortals as it runs. In fact, as you have found, I exude heat, not cold. This is because I have fire running as blood through my veins. Alas, if we had the time, I would further regale you of the fact and fiction regarding stories involving myself. However, we must proceed. Are you ready to begin?"

The blue light shimmered in front of him as he eyed it.

"What do we do?"

Perfectly arched black eyebrows rose simultaneously, and the lips tipped up at the corners in a barely concealed smirk.
"We are going to enter your mind, by stepping through this. This is why your experience would have been painful had you been forced. Unwilling mental penetration is extremely unpleasant."

Had he been drinking anything at that moment, he would have still been choking on it. Instead, he made an odd hissing noise that subsequently extended to his words.

"We are going to...ah, well, never mind. Seeing as how I have not been able to dissuade you in anything else since you arrived here, I am not even going to attempt to suggest that we find a different...avenue...of exploration."

Lucifer rose a hand and pushed his fingers through the strange waterfall. His hand immediately flew to his head as he felt a strange pressure against his scalp. His face pinched slightly in apprehension. Turning a fraction of an inch, he found Lucifer staring at him, seemingly amused.

"Shall we, Jack?"

Black eyes hardened against flashing red, and he nodded once.

As they both stepped through, the waterfall turned into black smoke, falling and curling around the iron, and then as though a harsh gust of wind had blown it away, it hastily disappeared, leaving an empty room behind.
The last title for chapter 6 was “Devil Incarnate”. This one means “The Innocent Crime of a Child”. Also, kudos to those who can work out who I modeled my Lucifer on. He is my other favorite fictional character, and I was delighted to be able to sneak him into this story. =]

The night was just becoming dark, and the atmosphere was thick with tension parading as peacefulness. Candlelight glowed in the glass of windows, and the smell of fire smoke and spices filled the air. A faint sound of children laughing trickled through the slight wind like a harp being played. Ash trees swayed, communicating in an ancient language that nothing but nature could ever hope to understand. Yet, if one were to look closer, they would see the cracks in the finely laid bricks that made up the modest houses, and the sinister reminder of depravity and death that lay in the muddy grass. Pieces of broken bottles lay cradled within the blades, the edges crusted with dried blood; remnants of a disagreement fueled by alcoholic rage and blindness.

The village was small, occupied by no more than two dozen families. It sat on a hill, a few miles from the open sea, and the dazzling stars of the sky glittered down on it when it came time for the temporary death of sleep to come upon those living there, save for a few. Men put their wives and children to bed, then slipped out of the house to congregate in a small hovel in town. Rum and beer flowed generously down their throats, and they hollered their grievances to what gods would listen. The clinking of glasses and unpolished noise of music would ring in their ears for days to come until they were too wasted away to care.

Then, like a cloaked reaper, trouble would come on swift wings to all of the men that dared to tempt it. Their wives would grow weary of their escapades and love of the drink and would tell them so through the cacophonous sounds of slamming doors and sobbing. Anger would see the opportunity as a lovely one, and latch its poisonous claws into already corrupted minds, made dumb by intoxication.

The fragile remnants of a man’s temper could only take so many burns until it snaps, and when that happens, it rages like an uncaged rabid animal, destroying everything in its path.

On this night, the foreboding struck deeper into the souls of those who feared what it had to bring, for reasons still unknown. To an outsider looking in, the scent of death could be inhaled long before it graced the unwritten bloody history of the village.

“Why did we come to this place? I was no more than seven when I lived here. I would not have remembered anything from this time, at least not significantly.”

Lucifer was silent for a moment.

“Often, it is the memories that are buried deeper than we care to dig that have the most extension into our present thoughts and actions. Something very important happened here, Jack.”

Shuffling his feet, he gazed at the houses in front of him, trying to dredge up any flicker of recognition from the depths of his mind. The only thing he could remember was a lot of drunken
brawls and threats between wives and husbands that filtered down to the unfortunate ears of the children.

Then---there it was. It slammed into him like a cannonball. He had been seven. It was a night that had seen a brand new shipment of spiced rum into the village, and that had been a cause for celebration that brought the men together in a clash of slurred words and half-hearted conflicts. In short order, every man that had a working throat and hands to clutch a bottle was stumbling and tripping over his own feet.

As a child, he remembered that he had been adventurous, preferring to slip out of bed and gaze at the gatherings until his eyes truly started to droop with heaviness. Had he listened to his mother’s threatening words about keeping his wretched head on his pillow, this particular memory would be nonexistent.

A soft hum next to him made his head snap sharply to the side.

“You realize now which memory I am talking about. What happened here cannot be so easily erased.”

His lips thinned. “None of my memories can be erased. Repression just comes easier for some of them.”

Lucifer nodded. “The reason I brought you here, to this, is because this was your first taste of death and the consequences of death.”

A low throb of noise pierced the air from elsewhere in the village.

“It appears that our cue has made its presence known. Come, Jack, let us delight in watching the still youthful petty sin of a child much too curious for his own good.”

He followed Lucifer through the maze of houses, not out of necessity, as he knew this village down to every pothole in the road blindfolded, but out of the curiosity that had dominated him since this memories origin. It was a novel thing to view one’s own memories as an outsider, and one that few people experienced.

The noise grew louder. Sounds of shouts and feet stomping were distinguishable, yet other sounds of mothers scolding children on the way back home and crackling fire were laced in between.

They came to a stop at one of the smaller houses. It was modest compared to the rest of the village, yet stood proudly in the light of the moon above it.

“Here we are. I believe that this is your childhood home, yes? Or, at least the first one.”

“Aye.”

Lucifer stepped closer so that his face was wreathed in the light from the lantern hanging just above the door.

“If I am not mistaken, Jack, I believe we are about to meet your mother.”

Just as the last syllable left the demon’s lips, a woman appeared behind the now open door. The lantern light painted her long brown hair with golden streaks, and lit up her eyes in such a way that they must have been made of amber.

The look on her face warped her beauty into an ugly thing. Her eyes were filled with repressed
terror, and every line on her body was tense. She kept shooting worried glances at the door, as though expecting something terrible to reach out and grab her.

“She was afraid of your father, wasn’t she? That is who she is watching for.”

His eyes slipped closed, as the terrible images taunted him. His father had been a very violent man and had used his mother for a personal rage outlet plenty of times.

“Aye. I was too young to stop him in this memory. I tried, but it just resulted in my mother becoming cross with me afterward, and my father promised me a punishment worse than hers. I don’t remember a time when he wasn’t vile. Out of curiosity, if you say that men like him are supposed to be removed from this world, why is he still alive?”

The demon’s eyes dropped a fraction of an inch down from his, then flashed back up again. “You attempted to kill him when you were sixteen. It is only because you failed that he is still breathing. You are meant to end his life. Elizabeth Swann is not the only bounty you must hunt.”

If he had a reaction to that, he didn’t show it. Instead, he watched his mother stare out into the village with a longing in her eyes. He stared at her, attempting to ascertain what it was she was looking for when it dawned on him. The ocean. She was staring at the ocean. With one last glance, she disappeared back into the house.

They sat on the grass and waited for about an hour. At the first sign of noise, his head snapped up from where it had been resting on his knees.

The door was creaking open very slowly, as though the person opening it was trying to make as little noise as possible. Finally, a small boy with unruly dark hair down to his shoulders slipped through, then reached back and closed the door with the ease of someone who did this very often.

Standing up, he stared at his seven-year-old self with poorly concealed wonder. Was he really that small?

The boy stood still on the walkway for a few moments, listening.

“I became quite good at sneaking out of the house. I liked the thrill of rebellion even then.”

Lucifer regarded him curiously for a few moments. “You were never meant for the honest sailor part Jack. When you ran off to join the Navy, I was most disappointed.”

He started at that, and rounded on him, clenching his hands at his sides. “You have been watching me? Oh, do tell what your judgment is of all my disappointing choices, please. I am dying to hear them.”

The demon had the audacity to chuckle, and inclined his head towards the temporarily forgotten child. “I believe you have decided that is it safe to venture out into the night. I suggest we follow you.”

They both turned in the direction that the boy was heading, and followed him through a seemingly random zigzag path swooping around the houses until he stopped suddenly in front of one.

“Ah, here it is. The birth of your self-hatred. Your first trauma. I suggest that you prepare yourself, Jack. This may be difficult for you to watch.”

Strings of mumbled curses flowed out of the pirate’s mouth. “Are you experiencing sudden memory loss? I believe that I informed you how many times I have reviewed these memories already.”
The demon stepped closer to him and put his hand on his shoulder. “Apparently not enough with this one. In the mind, a memory cannot recall the sounds that are made or the way the air feels as it constricts you, and can certainly not replicate the helplessness in its complete glory. Believe these words, Jack. Seeing this again in front of your eyes will affect you in ways that you may not fully realize. Your mind remembers it entirely, but you do not.”

They started forward, mimicking the movement that the younger Jack made as he climbed the steps towards the door of the house. His small frame pushed the door open, leaving them enough space to slip in behind and move to a far dark corner of the house.

The interior of the house smelled of must, and there appeared to be a leak in the ceiling. Immediately upon entering, Jack began to call out a name.

"Gabriel?"

No one answered. The small boy looked around, his eyes searching. Then, a pattering of footsteps tapped against the wooden floor. Another child, although a couple of years older than Jack, had just entered the house, this time with a mop of blonde curly hair.

"Jack, come on, we can't be here right now. My father-well, he has been drinking a little more than he normally does and-oh, why do I still hide it from you...you've seen my bruises." Gabriel looked away from Jack, ashamed.

The younger Jack stared at Gabriel with sadness darkening his eyes. "You know that you don't have to hide them. My father does the same thing to me. You know, we should just run away, and see the world. Maybe sail the ocean. We could leave tonight!"

Even as he said it, Jack's voice had such an air of defeat imbued in it that Gabriel just shook his head, and dismissed Jack's proposal without even considering it. "My father would find me. He will always find me. I cannot escape him, Jack, just like you can't escape yours. There is no hope for us."

As soon as the words left his lips, loud stomping footsteps made both of the boys jump.

"What the hell are you two runts doing in here?"

A man with half-crazed eyes came charging through the door, spittle flying from his lips, and liquor sloshing out of the bottle he was carrying to land in splatters on the floor.

Gabriel immediately threw his hands up in preparation to cover his face. "Papa, we were just talking! Please-please don't hurt us! We didn't do anything wrong!"

The bottle crashed against the wooden floor when it left the man's hand, sending shards of glass in every direction. A terrible fear entered Gabriel's eyes as he watched the hand turn into a blur of skin when it flew towards his face. Jack stumbled back in shock as the other boy was knocked sideways, then regained his composure, fear entering his own eyes. "Hey! You heard him, we haven't done anything wrong you wretched man!"

Gabriel raised himself up onto his knees from the position he was in, blood dripping from his mouth. "Jack, no! Don't fight him. He will just punish us more!"

"Shut up you worthless runt! If your friend wants to pick a fight, then it is a fight he'll get!"

The younger Jack's head shook back and forth of its own accord, and Lucifer noticed that his head was doing the same thing.
"I can't just stand here and let you hurt him! Hurt me instead, just leave him alone!"

The man charged forward again, grabbed Jack by the collar of his shirt, and threw him hard into the wooden floor, a few feet to the left.

"You fucking waste of a son, Gabriel. Will you ever stop needing your little friends to stick up for you? Jesus Christ, I should have put an end to you as soon as you came out of your mother, just like you put an end to her. I loved her, and you fucking killed her!"

Gabriel glared at his father. "You don't even know how to love, you bastard."

The man snatched the largest remnant of the broken bottle up off of the floor, and flung it at the boy, catching him in the forehead. He clutched at it, howling in pain.

The two observers watched Jack as he lay on the floor, cradling his arm, looking wildly around the room for something. Then, his eyes landed on a small knife nestled against the wall. He quickly crawled over to it and wrapped his fingers around it. Another strangled cry made his head snap back around to his friend.

He immediately shot to his feet, his face screwed up into an expression that should never have reason to grace a child's face. Hate.

Gabriel's father raised his hand to his son for the last time that night, as Jack flew forward and plunged the knife straight into the man's back.

Gabriel watched with panic as the man stumbled forward, his hand reaching back wildly attempting to remove the knife, incoherent shouts booming throughout the house. He spun around then, eyes locking on Jack for half a second, with murder in his eyes, and then, as simple as a candle being blown out, the blind rage left the man's eyes, only to be replaced by the dull unforgiving glaze of death. He fell forward, colliding with Jack, and landed on the floor with a sickening thump.

Absolute silence fell in the house, and the stench of death filled the air. Jack stared at the corpse from where he had been knocked back, and Gabriel had his eyes and fists clenched shut. Jack spoke first.

"Is-is...Gabe, is he dead?" Upon hearing the question, spoken in Jack's now ragged voice, Gabriel's eyes snapped open.

"I think so. I don't know-I have...never seen a dead person before."

Then, they both noticed the knife laying on the floor, still covered in the man's blood.

"Oh, Jesus, Jack...oh my god. No-no...you...I think---I think you killed him. You---you killed him."

Gabriel collapsed to the floor, as silent sobs wracked his body.

Jack still sat there, silent as a ghost, and his face had drained of so much blood that it looked translucent. After what seemed like ages, he finally spoke.

"I killed someone. I...Gabriel---Gabriel!"

The other boy shook his head violently, but the tremors shaking him stopped for a moment. Watery eyes rose from under the curly blonde hair covering his face to stare up at Jack.

"What?"

Jack's face was shadowed now, and it took a moment for Gabriel to ascertain why. He was angry.
The younger boy across from him was incensed and it sent fear to his eyes.

"Jack, what-"

"Why...why was it so easy for me to do that? Why...why don't I feel bad, or---or feel anything about it?? I just killed someone and I don't even care!"

The younger boy started pacing in a fit, looking anywhere but the corpse lying at his feet.

"What is my father going to say? Oh no, he is going to be so mad. I---we just can't tell him. We can't tell anyone about this."

Silence once again permeated the thick tension. Gabriel tensed when Jack abruptly stopped pacing to stare directly at him.

"What are we going to do with him?"

Gabriel stared back, dumbstruck. "D-do with him? I-the river I s'pose-Jesus, we can't carry him, Jack. We've got to tell someone."

"No!"

"Jack, don't you understand? There is nothing that we can do unless we tell someone. We can't move him."

Then there was silence, aside from the heavy breathing of the two distraught boys that were standing in the presence of a dead body that one of them had just murdered.

"Do you hate me, Gabe?"

The question struck Gabriel so suddenly that he seemed to waver on the spot. Opening his mouth to reply, not a sound came out. Instead, he just mutely shook his head.

"You should. I am a murderer---I...I only wanted to help! He just---I couldn't stand to see him hurt someone like that."

Gabriel shook his head vigorously now, daring to take a few steps forward to the smaller boy, and found his voice.

"You were only trying to help Jack, and you did. You saved us both from that monster. We could both be dead if you hadn't done what you did. Maybe-maybe we can just leave him here. Yes...everyone will just think that he died from the alcohol or something."

Jack was quiet for a moment, before nodding slowly.

"Yeah, let's just get out of here. I don't want to be in here with him anymore."

Both boys cast one last glance at the body, then made the trek towards the door on wobbly legs, and slipped out quietly.

Lucifer stepped forward and conjured a couple of chairs with a wave of his hand, and he gratefully slumped into one of them, followed by the demon.

“So, did that 'jog your memory', as I believe you humankind phrase it?”

He glared at Lucifer but without malice this time.
“Yes, it did. But seeing it again, hearing it again—it was a fresh perspective if you will.”

Lucifer leaned forward, watching Jack intently.

“Why did this memory effect you so? It wove its imprint throughout all of your other memories, implanted itself into your thought process for all of the decisions you made afterward, yet you had all but forgotten it until I made you experience it again.”

He fidgeted with his coat sleeve and thought.

“I think...I think it’s because children repress the actual experience of a traumatic memory, and instead of disappearing, the memory turns into...something more hidden, yet its presence is no less pronounced than it was before. This was the first time I experienced death, at my own hand. I never lost the memory, I just chose to ignore its existence.”

He paused, his face twisted in an expression that Lucifer recognized as grim acceptance.

“You heard me say it. I couldn’t understand why it was that killing that vile man came so easily to me then. I spent so long thinking that I was some kind of monster because I could kill so easily when the occasion called for it. That fear eventually developed an independence from this memory, due to incidents that I am sure we will also revisit by the time we are finished with this whole wonderful adventure. Then, the fear turned into acceptance that I was a monster and that I was never going to be normal.”

“Ah, I believe we have come to the root of your fear, as you call it. You believe that you commit monstrous crimes just for the sake of committing them. This is where you are wrong. You do these things because you would rather yourself carry the guilt of killing someone, instead of an innocent life dying. You do not enjoy causing pain Jack, at least not in the way that you believe yourself to. I believe that you also refuse to become close to someone since you take lives without hesitation—”

His stare penetrated the demon’s eyes in such a way that Lucifer immediately stopped talking.

“If I can so easily take a life without even thinking about it, then who is to say that I will not kill someone I...love over even the slightest provocation. Why should I trust anyone to stay close to me if they know what I’m like? How do I know that this ease I have with killing won’t mutate into the actual monster that I so fear? Maybe I am holding the woman I love one second, and maybe I am strangling her the next. I cannot trust myself with those that are actually important to me. Surely you understand that.”

“Yet you trusted Elizabeth Swann.”

His lips twisted into a sneer.

“Only because I thought that there was a speck of hope that she may be like me. I was proven grotesquely wrong. While she kills with the same ease I do, she kills out of cowardice, and I kill out of necessity.”

A pleased smile spread across the demon’s face.

“In this memory, you killed Gabriel’s father because otherwise, he could have killed you and your friend. You did not want to kill him for the sake of the kill itself, you did it because it was necessary for the man to die to save innocent lives. This will be a common theme, among others, that we will see in what is to come. That is of course if you are not going to abandon me; I will be most displeased if you choose to do that.”
He snorted. “Well, I would certainly hate to displease you. Just don’t expect these same easy revelations to come with every memory that we see. They are not all black and white.”

Lucifer stood, motioning towards the door. “Then I suggest we move on before your apparent apprehension gets in the way.”

He shouldered past him and wrenched the door open, and the demon shook his head in amusement as he followed him through.
They emerged into a room, lit by a lantern sitting idle on the table, casting a dull orange glow onto the wood walls.

"Ah, we are in your place of residence again, I believe. Just a bit farther ahead in time," Lucifer said, casting his gaze around the room, and then looking at Jack, his face deadly serious.

"This memory is one that you have never, and will never, be able to repress and as such, it may be...difficult for you to re-live. However, do not bother with any requests to ignore it, because I do not care for cowardice, and you are not suited for it. This memory will make the previous one look like a child's tea party."

He was still watching the room in silence; his eyes had darkened to hold not fear, but anger, dark and stormy in the black depths. When he finally spoke, he leveled his gaze with Lucifer's and dropped his voice to a deadly whisper.

"Never again will you assume that I am too cowardly to face my own past. We did not embark on this memory concoction of yours to examine my current psychological response, but to deconstruct my response when the events took place, so that we may unravel the knots that it wove through my mind. If you presume to suggest that I will be unable to view any memory from this point forth, you will see yourself out of my mind, and you will not be returning."

Lucifer watched him with his head tilted upwards as if appraising a particularly pleasing prospect. "Please forgive me, Jack, I did not mean to allude to the idea that I find you cowardly. You did remarkably well during the first memory. You are, however, a creature of impulse when being forced to do something against your will, as we will see in a moment, and I acted incorrectly when I assumed that your reaction to this would be an attempt to retreat."

He let out his breath through his teeth, and stepped to the back of the house, drowning himself in the shadow. "I also do not appreciate you assuming that I have no knowledge of which memory I am about to see. As you said, this particular memory is one that I have held with me since it happened, so wouldn't it seem obvious that the slightest similarity to it would send me spiraling back in time, to re-analyze again and again until I am no longer certain which parts of the memory are even real?"

The devil closed his eyes slowly, as if reigning in a temper, and chose his next words carefully. "You should realize, pirate, that I will only allow so much defiance before I abandon you. However, I acknowledge your discomfort over my assumptions. In the future, I will endeavor to allow you to tell me which memory we are about to experience, and you will inform me in advance of your precise reaction, lest I assert my vast knowledge of your mind where it is unwanted."

He slowly turned around half of his face hidden in shadow and stared straight at the door. "We are about to meet my mother for the second time, and unfortunately this is our last opportunity to do so,
as Nikolina Sparrow nee Morgan will, in about fifteen minutes time, be beaten to death by her psychotic drunk husband, while her son is restrained and forced to watch."

Lucifer raised his eyebrow as the lack of any emotion in his voice. "Your point of no cowardice from the brave pirate Captain is proven, Jack. Anyone who can speak so casually about their mother's murder must be capable of being thought of as a heroic figure. That fits nicely when the pirate in question believes himself to responsible for her death, don't you think?"

He worked his jaw, grinding his teeth together in a monumental effort to avoid getting himself turned into a blood puddle in the process of attempting to remove the demon's head from his shoulders.

Just then, the door scraped across the ground slowly, and a slim figure sidestepped her way through. Her face was lit by the lantern light, and it illuminated the age lines that now adorned her skin. Dried tears stained her cheeks, and her eyes held only the blunt sadness of a person that has lost the meaning of hope. She stepped across the floor, taking care to keep the sound of her feet confined to only a whisper. She lingered a couple of feet from where Jack was standing, her body visibly trembling, her fists balled up at her sides.

Her neck swiveled around, as though she was watching for something, and she stiffened slightly at every sigh and creak that resonated through the house.

Instead of watching her, he continued watching the door, a resigned acceptance permeating his expression.

Nikolina remained frozen in her spot for several moments, and Lucifer began to stare at the same spot as him, waiting in anticipation.

Loud stomping footsteps pounded against the dirt path right outside the door preceding the appearance of a very large man with a thick black beard and wild bloodshot eyes.

"Teague, please, he is only a child! How did you think he was going to react? The things he is forced to see—it's a wonder this has not happened before!"

She had spun around as soon as his frame had appeared in the doorway, a mother defending her child, facing the man that was determined to make both of their lives a living hell.

"Stop making excuses for that boy! This is the last time that he will believe himself to be of higher authority than me. The only thing that he has seen in this house is a husband taking charge of his wife, as it should be done. I cannot help that he fails to understand that this is a matter in which he should not be interfering." His fist thumped onto the table, sending a bottle and plate crashing to the floor.

Her chest was heaving, and fresh tears were spilling onto her cheeks. "He is only eleven, Teague. He was just trying to protect his mother from a danger that he does not yet understand. You cannot seriously be considering what he did to constitute this level of anger?"

Teague crossed the room to her in a few bounding strides, and took her face between his fingers, digging them into her skin. "Ever since I learned, a year after his birth, that I was to be forced to call that miserable excuse for a boy my son, I swore that I would teach him how to be a man. Never did I imagine that I would fail so spectacularly, but I have now realized that that was no fault of mine. You were always the poorest example of a wife a man could ever be burdened with, so why on earth would your son be any different?!"

She wrenched her face away in a rare display of independence and spat her next words out. "I kept
him from you because I wanted him to be the one child that could grow up without becoming embroiled in this unshakeable reality that the rest of us have accepted to be commonplace. Then, you discovered him, and I feared not for myself, but for my son. I feared that you would corrupt him, and when I die, I would like to die knowing that your evil did not permeate him. If that comes to pass, I will welcome death."

He watched his mother, his hand twitching every so often, as though it longed to reach out and touch her face.

Teague's lips twisted into a maniacal sneer. "I will be punishing the boy, and I will teach him that when he interferes with my decisions, things will only be worse. I will return shortly, and if you are not still here when I get back, I kill him."

Nikolina's eyes widened, fear settling deep in the brown orbs. Teague spun around and stalked back outside, his form morphing into the shadow of the night. Her slim body was shaking as she sank into the only chair in the room, her knuckles white as her hands clutched at her clothes.

Lucifer turned towards him. "He feared your defiance so much because he believed that it reflected poorly on him to be incapable of controlling you, yes?"

He nodded, although he was only half listening, his attention clearly focused elsewhere.

"What you did on this night is the straw that broke the camels back, as they say. You attempted to free your mother and yourself from his clutches. The ocean was one of the talents you had, so naturally, that was your chosen path of freedom."

"It was my only path of freedom unless you imagine that we had a hope of escaping by just strolling down the road? I simply put too much haste into my actions, and failed to realize how futile they were, with my rabid hound of a father sniffing me down like prey."

Lucifer looked thoughtful. "Though I must ask, Jack. How is it that we are able to see this memory, even though you are clearly not present in this moment?"

His attention was now fully held. "After my mother's death, my father took great pleasure in regaling me with the tale at every possible opportunity. If there was any minute detail that he failed to supply, my excellent imagination did the rest. Needless to say, I could recite every word spoken in this memory in my sleep."

Suddenly the door banged open again, and Teague charged back in, with two men close behind him. One of them was tall but lanky, and the other was a short burly man with sweat pouring down his flushed face. In between the two was the eleven-year-old Jack Sparrow, writhing and kicking but to no avail.

Nikolina jumped out of her chair and attempted to push past Teague to reach her son, but he snatched at her arm and thrust her forward into the middle of the room. "No, useless woman. I told you that I was going to punish him, and how do you suppose that will happen if I allow either of you a moment of respite before this punishment is brought to completion?"

She stood trembling, her body shifting in and out of the lantern light, but her eyes held nothing but a fierce stubbornness. "You never did anything halfway, Teague." She then shifted her gaze to her son, who had lost the strength to keep struggling. "Close your eyes, Jackie, my final wish is that you do not witness this."

Finally, Jack opened his mouth to speak, but it did not come out in either a shout or cry. Instead, it
was a quiet, ragged whisper.

"No---no, no! You can't---no, you will not just give into him. You have to fight-

"Oh, she will just give in, boy. What precisely did you think she was going to fight with? Her hands? She already realizes that she has no hope of surviving, and as she has already pointed out, I do nothing halfway. Her death will be your punishment, which is very fitting considering the whole reason that she is in this mess is that you had to try and save her. Foolish!"

Jack’s head fell forward, his long hair obscuring his face. "I know that this is my fault, and I also know that no matter how hard she would try to deny it, she is aware of that too. I don’t want her to fight for me, but to ruin your satisfaction at being able to take her without one."

Teague chuckled. "Oh, you pathetic child. Did you really imagine that a few last attempts from her to gain freedom were going to burn any plans I had for her death? Because that is the ultimate goal, you realize. As long as I can gaze upon her broken corpse, I will have all of the satisfaction I need. So go ahead, both of you, fight for all of the good that it will do you."

A small, quiet voice made all of the men in the room turn their heads. "It isn't and never will be your fault-

Her words were cut off by a large hand making contact with her cheek, sending her head snapping to one side, and causing Jack to regain some strength to begin struggling again. Teague advanced on her, landing another blow to her stomach, a broken cry escaping her lips. She fell backward and landed on the wooden floor with a loud thump.

The last burst of resilience was leaving Jack, and he could do nothing but numbly watch as his mother was bombarded with vicious kicks. Then he remembered her last plea and resolutely squeezed his eyes shut, attempting to deafen his ears at the same time. The tears had been spilling for some time before he even registered that they were there, and the chaotic, frantic beat of his heart had become lost to him. Sound turned into one stream of roaring noise that he could not and did not have the motivation to distinguish.

Then, just before his consciousness had started to descend into blackness, all noise stopped, and Jack's eyes snapped open out of their own volition.

What he saw made his stomach jerk violently, and whatever he had eaten that day swiftly found its way onto the floor. His voicebox was evidently the next thing to regain function, and a steady stream of screams was now piercing the room.

He just watched his younger self wretch and sob, with an expression of worn out sorrow adorning his face.

Nikolina’s body was lying on the wooden floor, and nothing remained of the once beautiful visage. Her face was painted red with blood, and the rest of her body had crumpled into itself, twisted and destroyed.

“Take the body out to the ocean, and dump it in. Let the sharks have the rest.”

Teague watched the other two men haul her off of the ground, and as soon as they were gone, he rounded on his son.

“Now, you see what happens when you try to defy me, boy. Your mother paid the price for your foolishness and stupidity.” He paused and knelt down so that he was at eye-level with Jack.
"The way I see it now, you have two choices. You can either become a man, and accept that her death was of your own machination, and choose to act as you should in the future; above those who only exist to use and throw away. Or, you can be weak and choose to continue throwing your cards in with people like her, and I will see to it that you end up in the same grave she is now in. Fitting for you, being buried in the ocean. So, what is it going to be?"

They searched each other's eyes in resolute silence. A minute passed, then two.

"You're right, Father. I was wrong to go against your wishes, and I regret that it was because of my mother, as I now see that she was completely undeserving. I look forward to earning my place above women like her, with your guidance, of course."

Those words were spoken with absolute conviction, and Lucifer himself had trouble recognizing it as a lie, masterful as it was.

Teague searched his son's face for any kind of uncertainty, and evidently finding none, stood up and motioned for Jack to follow him. The door made the air rush around the other two men as it closed.

He arranged his face into a very grim expression. "No doubt you wondered why I chose that path, instead of staying defiant."

"It had crossed my mind, yes, when I first learned of your decision to turn your back on your mother. However, I now understand fully what your plan of action was. Quite clever, really."

He smirked, but there was no feeling in it. "I knew that only death awaited me should I continue to defend her, and escape was not an option, so I did the only thing I could do. Not that I did not have a motive going into it, as you know. I certainly wanted to avenge her, but I was not going to do it from the outside. I needed to gain my father's trust and make him believe that I actually respected him and wished to become like him."

His eyes clouded over in anger at the very thought.

"Well, as we will see in the memories ahead of us, your deceit was remarkably successful. However, we viewed this one for a reason. What is it?"

There was absolutely no hesitation in his answer. "I already told you that I believe myself to be dangerous to those that may get close to me. This is the root reason why. If I could put someone in danger like I did by trying to save them, how do you suppose they would fair around me should I actually want to harm them, which would inevitably be the case, given my sometimes volatile nature. Just because it has so far been directed at those that have deserved it, as you say, does not guarantee that it will remain that way."

Lucifer studied him sagely for a moment. "I believe that you give yourself too little credit sometimes Jack. I also believe that you have a supreme difficulty with trusting yourself completely. Both memories we have seen so far have been acts that were committed for good; to save another. The memories that we have yet to see contain events of a similar nature-"

He paused abruptly at the confused look on his face.

"You seem to be laboring under the misconception that I believe myself to have no self-control at all! I assure you that I would not harm another for no reason, or out of unjust anger. However, what if someone whom I love does something that could warrant harm? How exactly would I be able to reason that out with myself? Surely, I have no problem removing dangerous people. But how would I be able to bring myself to justify punishing someone whom I have grown close to?"
He stood close to the demon now and saw the look of dawning comprehension as soon as it washed over Lucifer's face.

“You love Elizabeth Swann. That is why you are having this whole dilemma. You still love her, and for all of your talk of doing it, you truly believe yourself incapable of harming her for what she has done. This is grave indeed Jack, very grave. I promise you, Elizabeth Swann does not deserve your love or forgiveness, and I will not permit you to give it to her. She is beneath you, pirate, and you would do well to see it for yourself.”
Ok, here is the ninth chapter! I actually had this chapter finished awhile ago, but for some reason I have trouble keeping this story here updated at the same time as the one I have on FF.net.

Hope you enjoy this chapter!

Just a note, anything you see in between apostrophes is a character's thoughts.

Previously in Chapter 4:

Swallowing thickly, Elizabeth spoke.

"Captain Sparrow was betrayed. He did not choose to go down with his ship willingly, the choice was made for him. That is why his soul is able to be rescued."

Her breath hitched, and she hoped that further explanation wouldn't be necessary. She wasn't sure if she could make it through anymore.

"Why did Tia Dalma share this information with you first Elizabeth? Why?"

Will's words were slow and deliberate.

She shook her head in pointless denial of what she was about to share.

"When I climbed into the longboat and told all of you that he had elected to stay behind, I lied. That much you already know. But there is another part of the truth that I have neglected to share with you."

She could feel their gazes burning into her skin, and she could hear the cogs in their brain turning.

"Will saw me kiss Jack, but it was not out of passion or grief. It was an impulse of trickery from someone who realized what had to be done in the spur of the moment. I shackled him to the mast of his own ship, forcing him to stay behind while all of our lives were saved."

Tears were now streaming freely down her cheeks. She raised her eyes to stare directly into Will's.

"I sent Jack to his death. I killed him, and that is why Tia spoke to me about this prior to any of you. I am the only one who can bring him back."

Empty stares gazed upon her, slowly filling with shock, and then disgust. Gibbs slowly shook his head back and forth, as though he was finding her information impossible to absorb. Even though her eyes were fixed on him, Will had stopped looking at her again, but that did nothing to mask the revulsion written on his features.

"Are you sure?"
Her eyes narrowed at Will's question. His words were laced with an accusatory tone that made her very nervous.

"Are you sure that the kiss you shared with Jack was only to accomplish sending him to death? If you expect me to believe that what I witnessed was not the passionate kiss of two people who have deep feelings for each other, then you have less sanity left than I thought."

"Will, I promise-"

"Don't insult me, Elizabeth. Your promises mean absolutely nothing, and I will never trust a woman who robs a man of his freedom."

"We all would have died if I had not done what I did! That vile monster was after Jack and only Jack. Removing him allowed us to get to safety. I stand by my actions, and I would do it over again."

Will rose from the small chair he was sitting on with his back to her. She stood with him and trembled from exhaustion and fear.

"Why are you so hell-bent on rescuing Jack? Is it out of love? Do you honestly think that bringing him back can correct the terrible error of judgment that you made? And what happens if you do manage to complete this ridiculous quest? Will Jack just forgive you for murdering him? Somehow I don't envision that being his reaction once he has you in his grasp. I assure you that if he enacts some kind of revenge on you, I will not stand in his way because if he doesn't make you pay, I will ensure that someone does."

Tears prickled at her eyes, blurring her vision, yet she did nothing to wipe them away. Instead, they tumbled down her cheeks like a delicate waterfall.

"If Jack chooses to punish me, I will take my punishment without resistance."

Will nodded curtly and then disappeared into the other end of the cabin.

A hand on her shoulder caused her to jump.

"Miss Elizabeth, I would be fearin' Jack should you bring him back from the dead. He does not take kindly to betrayal. As a first mate of the captain, I will not be protestin' the decision he makes regarding you. Just pray that the Locker has not robbed him of mercy."

She shivered as Gibbs walked away in the same direction as Will. What had she done, if not to try and save their lives?

The last voice to pierce through her racing thoughts was Tia Dalma.

"They now know what you have done. Now all that remains is to send yourself to the Locker. You will have to speak to Fate about the true understanding of what you have done, and then you must take this knife to your wrists."

She twisted her head around to stare at the strange woman. "Speak to Fate? You talk as though Fate is a being."

Smugness clouded over the witch's face. "Oh, there is much that you do not understand about the world, girl. Now, look inside yourself and think about the words that you wish to say to her. You must be absolutely ready to do this, or it will not work."

She nodded after a few moments. "Alright. Do you have the knife?"
The small black knife was procured from somewhere in the woman's dress. "Ah, girl. You needn't sound so confident when your soul is in such turmoil. You are terrified, and rightfully so. You may perform the ritual in my private rooms. There are preparations already in place," she said, motioning to the hallway behind her desk.

The knife was pressed into her palm, and then Tia turned and disappeared outside. Elizabeth stared down at the short blade, sweat starting to collect on her skin.

She counted the seconds as she made her way to the room through the dark hallway.

*Perhaps she could plunge the dagger straight into her heart so that Fate could send her directly to Hell...*

Ignoring the way the hair on her arms stood on end, she stepped inside, and the small circle on the floor caught her eye. Another desk was situated next to the circle, and another assortment of strange jars and hanging objects clung to every available surface. Blue moonlight pierced the air from the small window in the east wall.

The circle was a shimmering white and appeared to have been quickly drawn. The preparations that Tia had mentioned.

*Hopefully, all that was required was kneeling inside of it.*

After a quick look around the room, she cautiously stepped forward and came to a stop inside the circle. Standing absolutely still, her lungs expanded as she took a deep breath, and slowly exhaled it.

Without ceremony, she sunk to the floor on her knees, then started when the light was sucked out of the room by an unknown entity, save for a single candle on the wall in front of her.

*Was she only trying to convince herself that she killed Jack to save the crew because she was too cowardly to accept otherwise?*

She stared down at the small knife in her hand, her heart rate accelerating rapidly.

*What was she supposed to say?*

Her vision shifted to the dancing light of the candle and stayed there until the movement of the little flame burned itself into her eyes.

*The niggling fear that she had with the compass had become something much greater. The way Jack talked about it...it really did point to the object that you desired most. When she had held it, it pointed to him. Will had already realized the true reason she had shackled him to his ship.*

*It wasn't to save herself or to save any of them.*

*It was because she couldn't stand the fact that the man whom she had tried so hard to ignore had sunk his way into her mind like a parasite, eating away at it, at her very rationality. All she could think about was him, and how destructive her feelings for him could potentially be. It would have alienated her father. She didn't believe Will would ever recover from that kind of betrayal. Least of all, she didn't want to believe that Jack saw her as anything else other than a sexual conquest, so she convinced herself of that well enough that it had implanted a deep seed of anger within her.*

Her stomach was starting to feel slightly sick, and she was swaying on the spot like a dinghy in a storm.
Clearly, she was very wrong about all of her assumptions. Will possessed more deductive skill than she had realized. And Jack. Jack was capable of far deeper feelings than she had assumed, but she had truly known that all along. She knew that he was as frightened of those feelings himself as she had been of him not possessing them. If she had ended up being in love with a man who cared nothing about her, then she would have never been able to forgive herself for that betrayal of Will.

She took another withering breath and began.

"I killed Jack Sparrow because he challenged me. Saving the crew and Will was just a welcomed by-product. He was a threat; he threatened to destroy every plan and every assumption I had made about my life. I was not supposed to fall in love with him. I was supposed to hate him. He lied to me and used me. But everything about him made me ignore everything I should not have, and that was more of a threat than anything; one that I could not handle. I need control, and he made me feel out of control. And now I crave that which I realize was never a lack of control, but my first taste of freedom. I need it back, no matter the cost."

The candle started to spasm, and then the flame went out. She kneeled there, motionless, waiting for something. Then, she felt it.

A strange cold settled into her skin like a web, latching onto her veins. Her lips grew dry and chapped. Her breath became a wheezing struggle, and the silvery clouds of air that were being expunged from her mouth clouded her vision.

For a moment, she sat very still, unable to will her limbs into movement.

This was it. This was where she did. Please, let it work. Please let her words be enough.

She raised her arm slowly, hearing her bones crack like the arm of a skeleton rising from the dead. Her wrist was pale in the moonlight coming through the small window at the other end of the room. She could see the blue veins winding through her arm.

The knife in her other hand felt heavy, and the iron was cold against her skin as she lay the blade against the thin skin of her wrist.

The stream of red that poured from the wound as the black blade pierced through was too mesmerizing to tear her gaze away from, even as she began to feel light-headed.

A small puddle of blood was beginning to form on the floor next to her, and a black cloud was leaking into her vision.

It wasn't...wasn't nearly as terrifying...as she had thought...

Her head lolled forward, and then her entire body started to slump to the left. As the final tendril of blackness leeched through, she fell to the side like a lifeless doll and died.

So, she did it. Brave girl, facing her demons for Witty Jack. It is a pity that it will take Jack a long time to recognize that.

"Tia Dalma. Where is Elizabeth?"

She stared at Will, as though he was a strange creature that she had never seen before.

"Why do you care Will Turner? Just a moment ago you signed her death sentence."
The former blacksmith looked away, unable to formulate an answer.

"Ah, you are confused. Allow me to fix that churnin' that your mind is doing. Your young Elizabeth had to prepare herself to enter the Locker, where she will retrieve our Good Captain."

Will narrowed his eyes. "Where. Is. She?"

A strange grin stretched across her lips and a grim sparkle entered her eyes.

"She is dead, Will Turner. She is dead by her own hand, in that room behind me, and her soul is on it's way to Jack Sparrow's Locker."

All of the colors drained from Will's face. He took several steps back but did not seem to be aware that he was doing so.

"...Dead? That was the price she had to pay? Suicide? And she did it...she took her life willingly."

She nodded once curtly.

"I will tell you as I told her. The only way to arrive at the Locker is to be betrayed by the one you love most and to take your own life accepting the guilt you feel. I imagine you can guess which path your dear Elizabeth took."

He took several more steps back and numbly sat down in a chair by the wall.

She shook her head. "You wanted to know where she was, and you also want to see her. Come, Will, I will show you."

He rose again, and followed her to the room, pulled along by something that he was not in control of.

At the sight of her slumped body, he turned and held his stomach, slapping a hand over his mouth. Blood covered the floor, some dark brown, and some still bright red.

"I assure you, Will, she will return. She will return with the Captain, and then you will have the opportunity to save your father. According to you, that is all you care about now. So I am confused about your reaction to this," she said, waving her hand in the direction of the body.

Bracing himself against the wall, Will sneered at the witch. "I nearly married this woman. Seeing her covered in her own blood, slumped over on the floor of a river-witch is slightly disconcerting. Sorry."

A dark chuckle escaped her lips. "If you say so, Will Turner. Remember, you need not try to convince me of anything. I know enough already."
Hello readers! Sorry this update took so long. Over the course of the semester I had to write something like 125 pages with all of my assignments combined. So I did not have any energy left to write this. But now that school is over for a little while, more fun writing for me!
The latin phrase used in this chapter is this:

Title: Facem Et Navis Nigrae = Burning Brand Black Ship

Hope you enjoy this chapter, and always I love reviews, and I try to respond to all of them!

Previously in Chapter 8 -

"Lucifer studied him sagely for a moment. "I believe that you give yourself too little credit sometimes Jack. I also believe that you have a supreme difficulty with trusting yourself completely. Both memories we have seen so far have been acts that were committed for good; to save another. The memories that we have yet to see contain events of a similar nature."

He paused abruptly, at the confused look on Jack's face.

"You seem to be laboring under the misconception that I believe myself to have no self-control at all! I assure you that I would not harm another for no reason, or out of unjust anger. However, what if someone whom I love does something that could warrant harm? How exactly would I be able to reason that out with myself? Surely, I have no problem-removing dangerous people. But how would I be able to bring myself to justify punishing someone whom I have grown close to?"

He stood close to the demon now, and saw the look of dawning comprehension as soon as it washed over Lucifer's face.

"You love Elizabeth Swann. That is why you are having this whole dilemma. You still love her, and for all of your talk of doing it, you truly believe yourself incapable of harming her for what she has done. This is grave indeed Jack, very grave. I promise you, Elizabeth Swann does not deserve your love or forgiveness, and I will not permit you to give it to her. She is beneath you, pirate, and you would do well to see it for yourself."

His lips twisted into a sneer, glaring at Lucifer as though the demon has just upturned his rum.

"Love her? You clearly are a couple of oars short of a dinghy if you think I am in love with that wretched woman."

Lucifer turned away, chuckling. "Love is one thing, Jack. Denial of love is quite another. Sad, really. No matter, as I have already said, you cannot love her."

"If you were not who you are, I would bury the barrel of my pistol into your mouth and pull the damn trigger, and then finger paint in what remained of your head on the wall."
That drew a full-blown laugh from the demon. He turned back to him with a shit-eating smirk on his face. “What pistol?”

His hand was already at his belt when he realized that said pistol had mysteriously disappeared.

After a healthy moment of glowering, he decided that dwelling on Elizabeth was going to get them nowhere.

“Which memory are we delving into next, oh evil one?”

All of the light in the room was extinguished with a wave of Lucifer’s hand. “This one will be a mite further in the future. Exactly ten years, in fact.”

He paled slightly but kept his composure. “What could possibly come of seeing that memory again? I have no confusion or misdirected thoughts about it. Everything on that day happened for extremely clear reasons, and I regret none of those reasons.”

Lucifer began to walk in a slow circle around the pirate, keeping his red eyes trained on his face.

“You are honestly trying to convince me that you feel absolutely no insecurity about obtaining that brand on your arm due to your inability to follow simple orders?”

He bristled. “Those orders were for me to allow innocent people to be traded as slaves. Those orders came from an inhumane selfish prick, one that even you would not want anything to do with.”

“Ah, quite the contrary, Jack. There is, in fact, a shiny gold seat just begging for Cutler Beckett to sit on it deep in the bowels of Hell. And I would want everything to do with him. I find the man fascinating in his disregard for humans in the name of business.”

“As much as I would like to stand here and engage in mutual dislike for that man, the faster we get through this memory, so that you will realize that there is nothing to gain from it, the better. How are we going to proceed this time? Shall we walk through a magical teleporting door, or do you have something better in mind?”

The demon smirked once again. “The door was simply to add variety, pirate. Since this is all happening inside your head, I really could do just about anything I wanted to instigate transportation from one memory to the next. This time, I think closing our eyes and wishing for rainbows might do the trick.”

He stared at the offending demon, and then rolled his eyes dramatically. His lips twisted into a smirk as he made a show of gesticulating his hands into a meditative posture, and miming a monk practicing deep breathing.

“Really Jack, sometimes I truly wonder how you have not been shot to death on account of your cheek.”

His smirk grew wider. “I try. Now, are you going to follow suit?”

It was the demon's turn to glare. “Picture the memory in your head clearly.”

It took a few moments, but suddenly the air smelled quite different.

“Oh, nothing like the smell of perfume adorning the heads of housewives, or the lingering cigar smoke of self-important egotistical men.”
The room held a desk at the north wall, and a large map adorned the east wall. The floors were covered with handsome cherry wood, and the tables that stood on the south and west walls held sailing accessories. An attractive gold spyglass, a pristine sextant, and several smaller maps.

A quiet chuckle made his eyes snap open.

“One might think that you were describing yourself with that last one.”

He turned away from his traveling companion to walk around the edge of the room.

“The difference is, I am important. They just think they are. And I do not smoke cigars.”

The cigar smoke smells fresh. This must be just after the meeting that delayed my meeting with Beckett. Strange that the memory starts here.

“Yes, I did, in fact, choose to start this memory at that point in your timeline, rather than the point where the head of the harbor noticed that you were captaining an empty ship. Oh, did I mention that I can hear all of your thoughts during these memories if I choose to? Oops, must have slipped my mind.”

He turned very slowly back to the demon, deciding to douse his temper once again.

“Then you might take care to notice that the fun part of this memory is just beginning, and if you wish to gain anything from it, I suggest that we both be quiet.”

Lucifer nodded his head just as the door opened.

A man adorned in a white and blue uniform stepped through, with a sour look on his face. His black hair was held in a ponytail at the base of his neck, but disheveled. He was clean-shaven, yet his uniform was wrinkled.

He stepped over to the desk sitting on the back wall of the room, and rested both hands on top of it, dropping his head to stare at the floor. The lines on his face spoke of a far older man than his mere twenty-one years.

Another man stepped through the door, looking quite different from the man that was already there. He wore a white wig, with a pristine uniform.

“Lieutenant Sparrow. I have just now heard a very intriguing tale about you. Since it is my duty to act upon suspicious knowledge of people under my command, I have called you hear to...discuss this story in more detail straight from the source. As a disclaimer, lest you make the mistake of thinking that this belongs on a personal level, any result of this discussion is merely because I have a drive for pursuing the best business decisions for the Company.”

The lieutenant's hands tightened on the edge of the desk. “For the Company? I suppose it was a good business decision to force your captain into transporting two hundred slaves.”

“You might remember when you were accepted into my command, I explicitly informed you of a policy which you explicitly agreed to. It is not necessary for you to approve of what cargo your ship is holding, but you are required to transport the cargo that I order without resistance, before or during the voyage.”

Jack spun around, knocking several things off of the desk, causing Beckett to glance at them distastefully.
“I agreed to that stipulation without knowledge of the lengths you would take my service to. When I saw those people, humans, packed into that hold like cattle for slaughter, I made a decision. I was not going to condemn them to a lifetime of servitude. I was not going to condemn them to a life without freedom.”

Beckett scoffed. “Freedom is an illusion. Tell me, Jack. Why were you so eager to serve under my command? Furthermore, why were you so vigorous when you walked down your father's path? Neither of those choices involved any freedom of your own, let me assure you. Yet, you throw your entire Navy career away, and possibly your life, for a couple hundred people? I did not take you for the self-sacrificing type.”

Jack narrowed his eyes. “You cannot seriously expect me to believe that the punishment for this will be death, Cutler. My choices, everything I do, are carefully calculated moves. I only sacrifice my freedom when I know that the outcome will result in something better, let me assure you. Being that I find myself on the side of self-awareness, I can see right through you, and I am no more under your command than I am under anyone else.”

Beckett took a step toward Jack, who tracked every second of his movement carefully. “What, precisely do you expect to get out of this calculated move? I believe you underestimate my disregard for your position. While I may not kill you, I will assure that you die at some point, when it is most painful for you, and until that time, I will see to it that you do not have a life in which to experience any freedom.”

He and Lucifer both saw the flash of fear in the lieutenant's eyes, but like the flicker of a candle flame going out, it was instantly gone.

“You are going to brand me.”

Beckett was standing in Jack's face now. “Ah, what a waste of intelligence. Your mind could have gone on to do great things under my command. You may last a couple of years avoiding the noose, but your time will come.”

He turned away, and headed towards the fireplace. He rang a bell that was hanging from the mantle, and several more men stepped into the room.

“I do hope you do not mind that I have called for an audience, Jack. I wanted this moment, where I crush the man who thought he could beat me, to be witnessed.”

Jack turned towards the newcomers. “My first mate, and a pirate. The perfect choices.”

“Joshamee Gibbs seems to see some kind of greatness in you, which must be why he continues to follow you around like some kind of watchdog. And Sao Feng is a personal friend of mine, one that you will come into contact with quite frequently once you have your brand. I imagined that he would like to see his competition, even though I attempted to explain to him that none existed.”

“I suppose your friendship with Feng is just another of your business decisions?”

Beckett's sinister grin seemed to cast a shadow over the room. He reached down and pulled a long metal rod with a 'P' on the end of it, and admired the glowing hot metal for a moment.

“As I am a considerate man in most circumstances, I have decided to give you the option of having something to bite down onto, lest the pain becomes too much for you. Are you going to accept this offer, Lieutenant?”

Jack leveled his piercing glare at the man.
“No.”

A look of surprise flitted across Beckett’s face just for a moment before it was replaced with a look of satisfaction.

“Well, I suppose not many men can say that they chose to take the pain without any aid, so regardless of how stupid that decision is, I have to give you credit for your willpower. Should you pass out from the pain, and hit your traitorous head on my floor, I shall have no sympathy for you. Now, let us begin.”

Jack eyed the brand as Beckett walked towards him.

“Get on your knees, roll your jacket sleeve up, and hold your wrist out.”

Jack sank down slowly, keeping his eyes on Beckett the entire time. He rolled his sleeve up, keeping the brand in his peripheral. Then, he paused.

“This isn't my only punishment, is it?”

Beckett tilted his head only slightly.

“Once again, wasted intelligence. No, Jack, there is something else. Whenever I rang that bell, it not only signaled some of my men to escort your audience here. It also gave notice for my selected group of men to prepare for starting your precious ship on fire. Do not worry, they will not begin until you are there watching.”

Jack tensed as though he wanted to launch himself at the man.

“You can brand every inch of me and make it your life conquest to burn down every ship I touch, but know this. You are going to die by my hand, and any plans you may have for my death pale in comparison to what you will suffer before I kill you.”

The glowing metal of the brand reflected in the Lieutenant’s eyes, like a beacon of death, as they pierced into Beckett’s. Then, his wrist rose without hesitation.

Beckett leaned down so that he was level with Jack’s face.

“I look forward to it.”

He rose, and brought the hot metal down, letting it hover just above Jack’s skin.

“I hereby brand Jack Sparrow as a pirate under the watchful and just eyes of the Royal Navy, and any other laws across the vast oceans. May they be merciful to him in providing him with a quick death, and may the noose do its job well should he meet it.”

The smell of burning flesh permeated the air immediately as the brand touched his skin, but he did not make a sound. Tears flowed down his cheeks, but no cries of pain escaped his lips. His shoulders shook, but he did not break.

Breath left his mouth as he exhaled upon the brand being lifted away from his seared flesh, and he fought the urge to rub at the mark.

Beckett appeared to be disappointed as he placed the metal rod back into its holder next to the fireplace.

“Every man I have ever marked has screamed themselves hoarse, except for you. Once again, I
lament the fact that you will not have a continued place among my men. No matter, I am sure there will be replacements. Now, onto the subject of your ship. Since my generosity does not extend to giving you time to recover, I think we shall attend to that matter of business right away.”

The three men in the room watched as the now-branded pirate rose to his feet on shaky legs, clutching his wrist.

“Lead the way.”

Gibbs glanced back at Jack continuously as they made their way out of Beckett's office with a sympathetic look, but Jack ignored him, choosing instead to glare hatefully at the back of Sao Feng's head.

The other officers stared at the passing group as they moved through the house, looking mildly surprised at Jack.

He and Lucifer trailed behind them, making a point to catch any whispers or comments that the crowd made.

“I do admire the willpower that you displayed back there, Captain. I imagine that you will have great satisfaction when you finally seize the opportunity to...what was the terminology you used...ah, yes, make him suffer. You must share your ideas for that with me at some point.”

He scoffed, amused at the demon's amusement.

“Care to share with me the point of seeing this memory again?”

Lucifer glanced sideways at him. “There are several reasons, though I admit they are a mite more obscure than the last several memories. One, I wanted you to objectively see yourself next to a truly evil person that you have no personal attachment to, so that you can see that your choices are on a completely different spectrum than his.

“Two, I wanted to reinforce the idea that you must seek...revenge, for a lack of a better word, on those who have wronged you. Here you accomplished this by remaining unbroken despite the lengths that Beckett took to see that it happened. You will accomplish it again when you kill him.

“Three, and this one is important, Jack. When you are reunited with your murderer, you must see her as equal in evil as Beckett, because his burning of your ship and branding of your wrist is equal to her robbing you of your freedom and taking your life away from you.”

He clenched his jaw. “I do not think that she is innocent, demon. I do not think that she deserves to live. However, I will concede on an earlier statement of mine. I may have...certain impulses towards her that stall me from wanting to kill her myself. Make no mistake, when the time comes for that to come to pass, the decision will be mine and mine alone.”

A frustrated look passed over the demon's face. “You can disguise the word love any way you want, and you can bury it as deep into your head as you feel necessary, but it is there. I just hope that you make the right choice, pirate.

“There is another point I wanted to make with this memory. You said that you were afraid of becoming your father because of the choices you make. I assure you, that man would have never freed two hundred slaves from his own ship under the knowledge that he would be punished this extensively. You can kill all those that deserve death, yet it is acts of kindness like these that truly set you apart.
“And you mentioned earlier that you are extremely self-aware at all times, and that every decision you make is a carefully calculated one. While your father was a reckless brute, albeit smart, you are a quiet predator. You are not a murderer, but a reaper of those men who will continue to live without your interference.”

He was quiet and remained that way, lost in a new array of questions.

When they reached the entrance to the building, Beckett turned to face Jack. To Jack's left, Feng removed a pistol from his coat, and pointed it at the pirate's head. By this point, a rather large crowd had gathered to watch.

“Before we proceed any further, I will be needing your uniform, your pistol, and your sword. Standard protocol for officer exile. Remove them slowly and place them on the ground to your left. I suggest that you refrain from any attempt at escape, as he is extremely quick on the trigger.”

Jack glared at Beckett as he did as he was told.

“It might have been hard for him to squeeze that trigger with the barrel of my pistol buried in his throat, had you actually allowed me to keep it.”

That earned him a sharp rap on the head from the pirate in question.

“It may be in your best interest to remain quiet for the rest of this, Sparrow.”

Beckett's lips curled up in disgust when Jack spat on the floor.

To Jack's right, Gibbs was making a valiant effort to contain his smirk.

“Come, Sparrow, your ship awaits.”

Beckett took the pistol from Feng and kept it trained on Jack's head as he led the pirate out of the building.

The sun was shining on the group of men as they walked through the town towards the docks, where Jack's ship was anchored. Whispers followed them, some of them confused, some malicious, and some harmlessly curious. Eyes lingered a second too long on the fresh pirate brand, and hands reached instinctively for their hidden firearms.

When the clear blue Caribbean water was in sight, the whispers turned into shouts of anger, and jeering taunts from the dock hands.

“...Pirate!...”

“...Traitor!...”

“...I bet that scum planned it all along! Thank goodness the law has prevailed once again. I hope he meets a noose not a moment too soon!...”

With each remark, the smirk on Beckett's face grew.

“You see what heroics get you, Jack? Nothing. They don't even know what you did, and I would wager that they do not care, as long as they can join each other in condemning yet another man to death due to piracy. Keep that in mind should you ever think of playing the hero again.”

When they were standing in front of his ship, Jack turned and met Beckett's eyes.
“Go to hell.”

Beckett sneered at the pirate and waved his hand to someone behind Jack.

A group of men stepped past, all carrying torches. Once again, Jack appeared as though he wanted to beat them all to a bloody pulp, but remained still.

“Just count yourself lucky that I am not forcing you to go aboard. I trust that you don't fancy the idea of being burned alive.”

Finally, Jack began to lose his composure.

“I swear to God, the next time I see you I am going to gut you with your own damn sword-”

His words were cut short as the butt of a gun connected with his head, sending him reeling forward. Beckett knelt down and yanked at Jack's collar, dragging the front half of his body upwards.

“Sparrow, your mouth is going to do you no good here. It will be best if you shut up and accept your punishment! No man here is going to stop me from killing you if I choose that course of action.”

The pirate's collar was released violently, sending him pitching forward. Coughing, he managed to stand up just as the side of the ship began to go up in flames.

Instinctively he ran in the opposite direction, only to be caught by Beckett. He was dragged to the man's side, and just then, he could see his entire ship, his beautiful ship, as it was engulfed in flames.

Jack shook his head back and forth.

“...my fault...this is my fault...”

The wood began to turn charred, and transformed to black, as black as charcoal. Then the ship began to fold in on itself. A loud cracking pierced the air, and the water seemed to raise up to accept the drowning vessel. She was sinking.

The light of the flames dancing in Jack's eyes even more brilliantly than the hot glowing metal of the brand, and their viciousness seared itself into his very soul.

As the mast of the ship disappeared beneath the waves, Jack yanked his arm from Beckett's grip, and turned to face the man again.

The pirate's face had lost all of its color, and his eyes were wild.

“Why are you not condemning me to the noose now? Why not save yourself the trouble!”

The barrel of Beckett's pistol was trained on Jack's forehead within seconds.

“Do not tempt me Jack. I will put a bullet between your eyes right now if you wish to be dead. I am not giving you the noose because it will cause me greater satisfaction to see your life squandered away on the run, as a criminal; as a wanted man, branded as a pirate.

“I am going to give you until nightfall to arrange a way out of this town, and if you are not gone by then, I shall have to reconsider my decision to have mercy on you. And I promise you that if you do meet the noose in my gallows, you will not escape. I suggest you make haste, Sparrow.”

With that, he turned and walked away, signaling the other men to follow, sending a burning glare at Gibbs when he hesitated.
“Quite a sight isn't it? Watching a ship burn down...”

He turned to stare at Lucifer, before rolling his eyes.

“Leave it to you to make humor at my ship's expense.”

The black cloth of the demon's robes swirled around him as he paced around the dock.

“Oh, don't pout. You got your ship back eventually. The mighty Black Pearl was raised by Davy Jones himself, upon your request. Don't worry, we will be seeing that memory next.”

He raised his eyebrow.

“What, do you hope that by seeing my mistakes, I will learn from them and become a better man?”

The demon chuckled, but it was humorless.

“No Jack. I have no gain for you in this memory. I only wish to observe your reaction to one of the greatest mistakes you made. And do not argue, for it was a mistake. One that cost you very dearly the last couple of months.”

He rubbed his forehead, shifting his red bandana around.

“Please don't remind me. That black mark on my handmade my skin crawl for weeks. Let's get on with it shall we?”

Lucifer looked around at him in surprise.

“In a hurry, Jack?”

He grunted in frustration.

“No, not at all.”
Yay, Chapter 11 is up! Sorry about the length of this one, but I just did not see much point in drawing out this scene for more than I did. Chapter 12 will make up for it I swear. Also, the title means "Fate Revealed"

Enjoy!

It was a strange this seeing her own dead body...

She was standing in the room, staring at her corpse. Her hair, which was spread out on the wood floor where her head rested, was matted and caked with fresh and dried blood. Her skin had lost all of its color, and her eyes were soulless.

The knife lay sparkling in the candlelight next to her pale hand.

Did she qualify as a ghost?

The air around her did not envelope her skin with a sticky residue as it had when she was alive. The colors of the room seemed void of life, as though they had also killed themselves when she had.

There had been a smell to the room when she had stepped through, like a musty sweetness, almost what one would expect old honey to smell like. Now, there was no smell.

Then, with a start, she realized that she had not taken a breath since she had opened her eyes to find herself staring at the corpse in front of her.

That wasn't her anymore. That thing was just a sack of skin and bones, hollow without her soul.

She was dead.

Had she been alive, she would have rushed over to the window, thrown it open violently, and wretched the contents of her stomach into the murky yellow waters of Tia Dalma's moat.

But she was dead.

The door to the room was pushed open just then, and two figures stepped through.

Will...

His shoulder-length hair was plastered to his skin with sweat, and she detected a hint of exhaustion behind his eyes.

When they landed on the dead corpse, he slapped his hand over his mouth and clutched at his stomach.

Oh, Will...She never meant for him to see this. She never meant for any of this to hurt him. She was careless, and he didn't deserve a moment of it...
Tia Dalma, who had entered the room with Will, watched him speculatively.

“I assure you, Will, she will return. She will return with the Captain, and then you will have the opportunity to save your father. According to you, that is all you care about now. So I am confused about your reaction to this,” Tia questioned, suspicion lacing her voice, waving her hand through the air in the direction of the body.

*Why was Tia so confident that she was going to successfully rescue Jack? Why does she seem so confident that Jack even wants to be rescued?*

She watched Will lean against the wall, now freely staring at her body. After a moment he shot a nasty look at Tia. “I nearly married this woman. Seeing her covered in her own blood, slumped over on the floor of a river-witch is slightly disconcerting. Sorry.”

Tia’s eyes narrowed, and a sound came out of her mouth that was halfway between a chuckle and a grunt.

“If you say so, Will Turner. Remember, you need not convince me of anything. I know enough already.”

*What did she know?*

She watched them turn to walk out together, and had half a mind to reach out to Will, then thought better of it.

*He couldn't even see her...*

The door closed behind them, and she let her eyes fall shut.

“Miss Swann, it is a pleasure to meet you at last. The circumstances are less than desirable, but there is nothing for it.”

She spun around, searching for the origin of the ethereal voice, and found a tall thin woman standing by the window, looking out into the swamp. She had long black hair, and wore a simple white dress.

“Who are you?”

The woman turned and looked at her with a wistful smile.

“I am the one that you wished to speak to, dear. Surely you haven’t already forgotten?”

‘*You will have to speak to Fate about the true understanding of what you have done, and then you must take this knife to your wrists.*’

“Oh my God...”

The woman shook her head playfully, strands of black hair falling on her face.

“Yes, Elizabeth, some call me Fate, some call me Destiny, and some don’t believe in me at all. But you do, because you are here, and your corpse is over there, and you want to rescue Jack Sparrow. Is that about the right of it?”

She opened and closed her mouth for a moment before collecting herself.

“Yes.”
Fate nodded, surveying the young woman.

“I must warn you, Jack is in a right state at the moment. I have no doubt that he wants revenge, as baseless as that need is, on you. He has had some…outside influence that I don’t approve of, but unfortunately there is nothing I can do about that.”

“Outside influence?” she questioned.

A long sigh floated through the air.

“I cannot tell you. I just know that based on the little I have spoken to Jack-“

“You spoke to Jack?”

The woman turned to fully face her.

“Yes, I did, briefly, although I was disguised as you at the time. I appeared to Jack as a visage of you on the brink of death due to suicide in hopes to make him realize that electing to withhold his forgiveness from you is a grave mistake. I cannot say that I convinced him, but I am cautiously optimistic.”

She watched the woman from where she stood and chose her next question carefully.

“Tia Dalma said that the price for this mission was part of my soul, yet she neglected to explain the consequences of that. Perhaps you could enlighten me?”

Fate arched an eyebrow. “It is not as black and white as you are hoping, Miss Swann. Losing a soul fragment does not take away all of your humanity, it only bends it. The changes in you will be quite subtle in fact, and you will not notice them until you are forced to make decisions that you would not otherwise make.”

“What about Jack’s soul? What state is it in?”

Another long sigh.

“He is very broken, and it will take nothing short of a miracle to bring him back, which is why Jack cannot kill you. His current companion, damn him, has been attempting to convince him that you shackled him to his ship only for a desire to save yourself, and nothing else. Jack was already incredibly conflicted about the course of action for you, due to events in his past, and his…regard for your person. I fear that his companion may have tipped his mind too far down the wrong path already.”

“I did not condemn him to save myself from death-“

“I know, Elizabeth, I know. You killed Jack Sparrow because you felt something for him that consumed you, terrified you, and viciously tore at your seams until there were none left. You have always yearned for control, and that control was swept away on the waves of the sea every time you looked at him.”

She reared back and stared at the woman in shock. Her black hair was rippling from an invisible wind, like an inky waterfall.

“I now see that it was never losing control that scared me. It was tasting freedom, and it excited me.”

Fate looked at her directly, her eyes suddenly turning hard.
“Are you in love with him?”

She waited for a moment, processing the question, and then nodded her head once resolutely.

“Yes.”

“Then there may be time to save him yet. I will take you to the Locker, but you must find your way to him from there. I must warn you, you may face trials and challenges in that dastardly place that you are not prepared for. Just keep focused on your goal. It will do no one any good for you to become defeated.”

Fate held out a pale hand. “Come, take it. Your mission will begin now.”

She intertwined her fingers with Fate’s, and the room around her disappeared.
Alright, here is Chapter 12! Sorry for the slight cliffhanger! I wanted to include the rest of her journey to find Jack in a separate chapter. Hope you enjoy, and don’t forget to drop me a review!

It was cold.

A biting cold. It penetrated the skin and froze the blood as it ran.

Tunnels stretched endlessly before her, firelight from the torches only illuminating them so far.

Her voice would have come out warped; her words disjointed from her constant shivering, had she been alive.

"Jack was trapped... here?"

*She sent him here, to be entombed in his own personal dungeon. She didn't have any right to feel angry about her actions.*

“No, you don’t.”

She spun around, only to be confronted with the tall woman behind her with piercing silver eyes. She could find nothing to say in response.

“If you expected me to feel sorry for you, or be on your side, you are unfortunately mistaken. I do not feel anything towards you; I am a neutral party. I only see the exact truth as it is. You killed Jack out of fear and selfishness. However, the act was also committed out of a fear of love. One would find it more difficult than usual to find enough flaws in your act to elicit any strong emotions.”

*Except for Will...*

A harrowing scream echoed off of the walls in the distance, and her head whipped around in the direction of the sound.

Fate stepped forward, clasping her wrist.

“That was not Jack, I assure you. He is far too stubborn to give into any pain that may be inflicted upon his person here quite that violently.”

She wasn’t convinced, but nodded anyway, still staring down the dark tunnel. The endless void provoked a question that had been brewing in her mind since Fate had admitted to her that she had spoken to Jack.

“What did you hope to accomplish by masquerading to Jack as...me?”

The long black hair caught the firelight as Fate tilted her head curiously.

“I have been waiting for you to ask about that. I hoped that if I managed to intervene in time, I could
maintain his doubt of the anger he feels for you, and give him the idea that withholding his forgiveness from you will only hurt the both of you before his...companion dragged his mind in the opposite direction. He does want to forgive you, Elizabeth, but the urge to do so remains buried under countless layers of complexities that even I struggle to understand.”

She nodded, processing.

“What exactly is his...companion doing to sway his judgment?”

A dark look passed over the pale woman’s face.

“He is taking Jack through his own memories. He believes that by showing Jack key points in his life, he can construct an argument that will leave no remaining doubt in Jack’s mind about his position regarding you.”

Jack's life...she knew nothing about his past besides his marooning, and the countless stories that she had heard.

“I assure you, the real truth to those stories would be far more interesting than the lies spun by the countless people that have contributed to them, but that is a tale for another day.”

She looked up sharply.

“You can hear what I am thinking.”

Fate looked satisfied, as though she had been waiting for that realization.

“Yes, I indeed can. Jack is struggling with a countless number of things regarding you, to answer your next question, but the main one, supported by his companion, is whether or not he should kill you on sight.”

"Kill me on sight? Just who is this companion?"

A dark chuckle escaped from the tall woman.

“Oh, don’t worry. You will get the opportunity to meet him when you find Jack. He is aware that you are coming, but he is still going to throw quite the fit. He believes that if Jack forgives you, it will upset the balance of darkness or chaos, or whichever name he is using these days.”

She shook her head in confusion. “I don’t understand.”

The long white dress scraped against the ground as Fate began to circle her.

“Jack has the ability to make immediate decisions when a situation concerns life or death. He can kill when deserved without hesitation, and he can save when necessary. His soul is made up of pure darkness. The problem is, the mental turmoil he experiences afterward does an incredible number on him. He finds it difficult to grow close to anyone, in fear that he may find a reason to hate them. See, he is exceptionally good at reading people, and finding out everything there is to know about a person.”

Was that perhaps why he was struggling with the idea of forgiving me? Because he had a reason to hate her now, and couldn't move past it?

“ As astute as ever, Elizabeth. It is a little more complex than that, but you have got the bare skeleton of it.”
She eyed the woman.

“Pure darkness...but not evil? It all seems a bit supernatural to me.”

Fate nodded, apparently satisfied with her level of comprehension, and let out a small bark of laughter at her.

“There is nothing supernatural about it. Jack was not given this ability by anyone, and darkness isn’t living inside of him. He simply sees the world a little differently, for what it is. Besides, have you not had your fair share of the supernatural by now?”

Something in the tunnel to her left sent a wave of dread through her. A human-like shadow was creeping up the wall, towards them.

Fate followed her eye direction, and smirked.

“This place will play many tricks on you. It is best if you ignore the less intrusive ones. Speaking of which, Jack did see another vision, but this one was not an entity.”

Distracted by the shadow, she responded in a dismissive tone.

“Of who?”

“Your ex-fiancé.”

_That_ got her attention.

“Jack saw... _Will_?”

Another chuckle from the tall woman.

“Yes, and it was a completely useless meeting. Somewhere in Jack’s mind, he believes himself to be undeserving of you even still. _William_ was simply playing the tune as a trumpet in that symphony. I do not think Jack became convinced of the theory, possibly because he dislikes anything that comes out of the blacksmith’s mouth.”

They both stood in silence for a moment, before another question was spoken, hesitantly.

“When Jack killed Barbossa on Isla De Muerta...did he have any other reasons for doing that besides the marooning?”

It was Fate’s turn to look surprised.

“A curious question. No, the marooning was the only reason that Hector was killed. Good riddance I say. He is one of the few that Jack only killed because of a grudge, due to Hector’s uncanny ability to keep the majority of his actions a secret. It was a mere coincidence that Jack sent his soul, a wanted one, down to Hell. You see, Hector ordered an attack on a small village a couple of years ago. Normally that would be egregious enough, but living in the village was his estranged wife and six-year-old son.”

She gasped, shocked that the man could have done such a horrible thing.

_Then again, he did plan to sacrifice her just to get that awful curse removed. Who knows what he did to the other owners of those coins..._

“Obscene things that you want no knowledge of, I promise you.”
Her steps reverberated off of the walls as she turned around and walked over to the nearest torch holder, inspecting it.

“You mentioned that I am going to face...trials of a sort before I find my way to Jack. Care to elaborate?”

Fate stepped up to stand beside her.

“You will be shown every fear, doubt, and worry that you have experienced regarding yourself and Jack. I suspect a few visions will be coming your way too. Do not let them convince you of anything. It will be the end of you.”

Seeing the look of doubt pass across her face, the pale woman continued.

“I would not have allowed you to come on this quest if I believed that you were going to fail. Elizabeth. Yes, you may have killed him, but it is only you that deserves to be here to rescue him.”

She looked away, unsure of how to respond.

“Thank y-”

She was gone, the spot she had occupied now an empty space, void of life.

Echoes of murmurs and faint footsteps trickled through the air to her ears, and she turned around slowly, inspecting the never-ending blackness of each tunnel.

Jack was somewhere in this awful place.

She stopped turning and chose a tunnel to wander down. The torchlight flashed and flickered against the stone walls as she walked.

She whipped her head around to strain in the darkness, listening for what she had thought were footsteps following her.

When she turned around again, she was no longer faced with the tunnel, but a dark wooden door instead, handsome and intricately carved.

The handle gleamed gold, and she hesitantly reached out to turn it.

*She couldn’t turn back now, not when the dreadful place had just given her the first obstacle...*

With a sharp twist, she opened the door and listened to it creak as she pushed it open.

What she saw made her stomach shrivel into itself.

She was in a small room, a lodging room in Tortuga most likely, and against the wall sat a handsome queen bed. *On* the bed lay a woman with deep red hair and pale alabaster skin. Her legs were wrapped around a man as he thrust into her almost viciously, and her hands gripped the red silk sheets like lifelines.

Moans tore from her lips that dripped with animalistic pleasure.

Watching them in morbid fascination, Elizabeth stepped forward until she was standing at the edge of the bed.

When they had finished, the man rolled off of the ginger-haired woman, confirming her fears.
“Will?”
Lust, Splintered

Chapter Notes

Here is Chapter 13! Hope you enjoy!

She had been in Tortuga briefly. The town had smelled like rum-infused sweat and gunpowder, with an undertone of scents that she cared not to identify.

Her mission? To find Jack. Instead, she had found James Norrington, neck deep in a bar brawl evidently hell-bent on killing Jack, which would have been impossible seeing as how James was filled with alcohol up to his eyeballs. With a rush of adrenaline, her sword had been unsheathed, and she was fighting off drunkards like the best woman pirate in the Caribbean.

Then she had been forced to break a bottle over James’ head, only for him to end up sleeping with the hogs, from where she rescued him. Rescued the man that had caused her to fall over a terrace into the ocean, just missing the rocks in the water. She thought that irony had strange ways of working.

During her visit, she had become rather well acquainted with the various...harlots that populated the streets. If anyone had information on Jack’s whereabouts, it would have been them.

They did not disappoint. A blonde named Giselle complained loudly for the entire town to hear about how Jack claimed that he wanted to marry her, but kept going off with other women. Then, a woman named Cleo countered with her proposal of marriage from Jack, arguing that it was more genuine. Needless to say, the two women had had a physical altercation.

Then, one named Scarlett had sought out her and claimed to have just been with Jack the night before. She would never admit to the twinge of jealousy that crawled up her spine at that admission.

She would also never admit the sudden ridiculous urge to ask questions about Jack’s...bedside manner. She absolutely did not want to know anything about that at all.

Nonetheless, Scarlett was able to point her in the direction of the Black Pearl, complete with a knowing smirk and eyes that spoke of too much insight.

She suspected that Jack had been inside the Faithful Bride during her sword fight, but due to his surprise at seeing her on the dock next to his ship, he had not noticed her presence.

If he was so well-acquainted with Scarlett, then why was the dastardly woman currently laying on a bed, naked, with her fiance?

Ex-fiance.

Hallucination or not, Will would never lay with her sort. He was far too proper and self-righteous to lower himself to that level.

“Are you sure about that, Elizabeth?”

She first looked at Will, expecting him to be the one talking during this episode, but the question had come from Scarlett. Will was sitting on the left side of the bed staring at the wall in front of him,
completely motionless.

At first, she considered answering but chose to simply raise an eyebrow as a sign to continue.

Scarlett rose from the bed and began to pace around the room slowly, with emphasis on her footsteps.

“Now that you are clearly not in his line of interests, how do you suppose he is going to cope with your loss? Certainly not by trying to find a new love interest. No, your dear Will is going to drown himself in whores and alcohol in an attempt to take the pain away that you caused.”

The woman smirked as she reached for her cutlass.

“That will do you no good here, girly. Perhaps when Jack runs it through your heart, it might, but here it is useless.”

“Will is stronger than that.”

A simpering chuckle made her blood boil.

“Your precious Will courted you for five entire years before actually working up the courage to talk to you in front of your father. I think it is safe to say that he will not be pursuing another romantic venture again. I think it is also safe to say that the reason I am here, talking to you, is not because of Will at all. See, he looks as good as dead.”

Will was frozen in the same position that he had been earlier, eyes dead to the room.

“I am here because you still have a lingering fear that if Jack miraculously decides to not kill you, he will simply tire of you, and return to the more experienced arms of me. I can’t imagine that you could satisfy him. Virgin.”

That word stung, but the woman was right. Even though Jack had expressed interest in bedding her in the very least, she had a niggling doubt that if he was unaware of her intact maidenhead, he would cast her aside the second she alleviated that unawareness. Even if he didn’t, her lack of sexual experience, aside from the few times she had caught glimpses of...activities in the mansion back home had the possibility of making Jack frustrated.

But if he loved her, then…

“Ha! You really think that Jack is capable of actually loving a woman? Like forever together, for eternity. Clearly, you are ignorant and delusional.”

No, she didn’t dare to hope that he loved her, but he felt something for her.

“I harbor no delusions about Jack’s animosity towards me, and I certainly have no confused idea of Jack’s lack of romance. However, I think that you paint him as a simpleton who just wants sex and rum. He is far more complex than that, I am afraid.”

The self-satisfied look vanished off of Scarlett’s face.

“Yes, I suppose he is when you have the blacksmith as a comparison. I promise you, Elizabeth, that you will never know the feel of Jack Sparrow’s arms wrapped around your body as he takes you. You will never see the way his coal-black eyes burn into your soul. And you will certainly never know the words he whispers in your ear when the end comes. You are beneath him, and you would do well to admit it to yourself.”
Her temper reached a boiling point, and just as she was about to cross the room to wrap her hands around Scarlett’s pale neck, the room disappeared, leaving her standing in an empty cell.

The temperature dropped considerably, and she stood there, shivering.

True to the prostitute’s words, she doubted that she would ever get the chance to see the inside of Jack’s cabin, nevermind know his bed.

The images she had implanted in her mind of Jack in any bed, with a woman, however, were not going away easily.

Of course, she had taken up much of her time while she had been aboard the Black Pearl entertaining fantasies about Jack, much to her shame, and she had half an inkling that he knew to some extent what her thoughts contained.

Every time he had looked at her, it was as though he was privy to a secret that she had never shared with him. And she hadn’t cared. She had wanted to tell him, in great detail, exactly what her fantasies were comprised of so that he could make them a reality.

A blush was beginning to creep up her neck.

She had wondered what his skin would taste like when her lips touched it. Salty like sea water and sweat, or spicy and sweet like rum?

She could tell just from what she could see through his clothes that he had a sailor’s muscles. Not bulky, but strong and lean, obtained from performing duties on a ship for as long as he had. She had become lost in his eyes plenty of times, and she had caught herself staring at his lips more times than she would like to admit.

But it was one part of him that fascinated her like nothing else. One part that she felt simultaneously dirty and excited to think about.

She had seen a man’s cock before. In her late night attempts at adventuring, which were limited to the mansion and grounds, she had caught the housemaids and guards in several compromising positions, speaking a litany of words that burned her ears.

While she had been in the company of the Tortuga whores, she had heard whispers of Jack and his sexual prowess. Although out of all of the stories and legends about him, that was the one that he very rarely promoted.

Were those women telling the truth? She really did long to find o-

The temperature swiftly began to rise again until it reached a musty heat only fit for the brig of a ship.

Bars were in front of her, and water sloshed around her wet boots.

Through the bars, splintering her thoughts and searing her to embers with his glare, was Captain Jack Sparrow.
Previously in Chapter 10 -

The black cloth of the demon's robes swirled around him as he paced around the dock.

"Oh, don't pout. You got your ship back eventually. The mighty Black Pearl was raised by Davy Jones himself, upon your request. Don't worry, we will be seeing that memory next."

The pirate raised his eyebrow.

"What, do you hope that by seeing my mistakes, I will learn from them and become a better man?"

The demon chuckled, but it was humorless.

"No Jack. I have no gain for you in this memory. I only wish to observe your reaction to one of the greatest mistakes you made. And do not argue, for it was a mistake. One that cost you very dearly the last couple of months."

Jack rubbed his forehead, shifting his red bandanna around.

"Please don't remind me. That black mark on my handmade my skin crawl for weeks. Let's get on with it shall we?"

Lucifer looked around at him in surprise.

"In a hurry, Jack?"

The pirate grunted in frustration.

"No, not at all."

The demon was in the middle of conjuring another door when he stopped and squared his shoulders. A hiss escaped from under his hood.

"Something the matter? Did you forget to leave torture instructions down in Hell?"

Lucifer whirled, his cloak billowing out around him, and jerked his hand in the direction of his face, sealing his mouth shut.
"We have a guest."

He raised his eyebrows, while his chest shook awkwardly from the laughter that was forcibly contained.

"You might recall that I did say you would be getting rescued from this place."

His tilted back in acknowledgment.

"I do hope you can keep yourself occupied until I deal with her. You can take that whichever way you choose."

A flash of concern flitted across his face, and then it was gone. Lucifer waved his hand again and a whoosh of breath came out of his mouth.

"I would rather know what she is going to endure from the likes of you. Not out of concern, but simple curiosity."

Lucifer regarded him for a moment, searching his face for any sign of subterfuge.

"I think that a little bit of mental torture should do the trick quite well. Could you do me a favor and describe that red-headed strumpet you frequent in that pirate hovel called Tortuga?"

"Red hair, as you said, pale skin, always done up in kohl and red lip stain...why?" But the answer came to him the second the last syllable rolled off his tongue.

He was going to appear to Elizabeth as Scarlett, though what he hoped to accomplish there was a complete mystery...

An amused look had occupied the demon's face as the thought occupied his mind.

"Perhaps you would care to enlighten me about why you think that I will be wasting my time?"

He began pacing, casting his gaze around the docks, and admiring the moon's reflection against the seawater. It was nightfall.

"Scarlett and Elizabeth know nothing about each other, and they have had little if any interaction. Unless you suddenly believe that Ms. Swann's compass has started pointing the other way, as it were, then there is nothing that you can accomplish."

Unless...

"I assure you, Jack, appealing to the girl's lack of desire for the female creature is not what I intend to do. I also assure you that there is far more to be gained by stirring the pot, as it were, between them than you can apparently deduce."

His hair beads clinked together as he turned sharply to face the demon. "She consulted Scarlett about my whereabouts, didn't she? When she was trying to find me so that she could convince me to save Will...a specific interaction that they had is fueling this plan of yours. Let's see, Scarlett enjoys bragging, and she enjoys making a show of it." His smirk was growing the more he spoke. "Elizabeth is also incredibly inquisitive, and when you throw me into that mixture, you get the rather detailed accounts of my interactions with the wench..."

His eyes flashed, and his smirk changed to a full-on grin.

"Ah. You want to appear as Scarlett because Elizabeth will be forced to face a person that has
experienced what she wants to experience, and by doing so, will remind her that she can never have it because I hate her down to her murdering bone marrow. And then you think she will turn around and give up."

Lucifer arched an eyebrow and reflected his earlier smirk. "I take my deducing of your lack of deducing back, pirate. However, what Elizabeth is going to believe, and what is actually the truth, are two very different things. I cannot allow Elizabeth to rescue you because then her guilt has a chance of being relieved. You will be returned to the living, but it will be by my doing, not hers."

A confused look passed over his face. "You said there was no chance of her guilt being-"

"Yes, I know what I said. However, I like dealing in absolutes, not assumptions."

He rolled his eyes dramatically, attempting to hide the shimmer of doubt in his voice. "You actually still think that I want to take that spawn of Satan, sorry, to bed with me?"

There was no other option besides hating her.

The demon let out a full chuckle, before jerking his head. "To each his own, Jack. Now, if you will excuse me. I expect I will be returning...at some point."

"Are you suggesting that you are going to spend a reasonably long length of time with a corset on? Perhaps you could summon me an easel and a paintbrush?"

Lucifer tipped an imaginary hat at the pirate. "You don't even know how to paint. Besides, I didn't say that your wench is the only person that I am going to be masquerading as. Don't worry, Elizabeth is going to have a very fun time."

He opened his mouth to respond, but the demon was gone, and so were the docks and sea, replaced with another empty hallway. He slumped against the stone wall and waited.

Several hours later...

She stumbled back from the bars under the intensity of his glare, waving her hands for something to grip to steady herself.

"Jack...what...why are you here?"

The pirate captain looked mildly hurt, but it was a teasing expression. He lifted one bronze finger, and trailed it across each bar slowly, from left to right.

"You are here to rescue me, are you not? Though, it appears that you are relying on me to rescue you, with these bars separating us."

She shook her head lamely, sweat trickling down her neck.

"It's too soon. You're here too soon. Something is wrong..."

He nodded once, a jerky motion. "Yes, something is very wrong." He lowered his voice and moved his face as close to the bars as he could. "You killed me."

She drew in a sharp breath, searching for something to help...

"I am here to rescue you, Jack." She made a lame attempt to sound confident, but her voice came out cracked and trembling.
He bit out a laugh, slapping one of the bars, rings clinking against the warm metal.

"I don't want to be rescued."

Her eyes widened, the whites glowing like pearls.

"Excuse me?"

Jack turned away from the bars, and she stared at his retreating back, questioning every decision that she had made up until that point.

"The only reason that you are here is that you feel guilty for what you did. You are not here for me, you are here for you, Elizabeth. You are not rescuing me, you are rescuing yourself. I cannot allow that to happen. I must remain here so that the mind-numbing guilt that you are feeling will crawl so deep into your brain that you will never be rid of it. I assure you, being dead is a small price to pay for that."

Coffee-colored eyes turned into slits. "Are you telling me that you would rather make me suffer for the rest of my life over regaining your freedom? I assure you, I am in love with Jack Sparrow, and you are not him. If you really thought that you were going to frighten me into giving up on him because of a scary speech, you are drastically mistaken."

The pirate captain spun around and wrenched the bars open with his bare hands, and then she watched in awe as Jack's clothes transformed into a black cloak, and the dreadlocks shortened into shoulder length black hair. Suddenly the man's hand was wrapped around her throat, lifting her several inches off of the ground, grinding her back into the stone wall.

"Listen to me, you ridiculous girl! Jack does not need to be rescued by you. I can accomplish that task without your interference. When I release you, you are going to return to your river-witch empty-handed, and you will explain to her that the next time she feels like intervening in my affairs, I will personally see to it that every single living Pirate Lord tastes the fire of Hell!"

He abruptly let go, and she dropped back to the ground, coughing and spluttering.

"I gave up part of my soul to complete this task-"

"Yes, the lengths that the guilt-ridden go to alleviate that awful emotional burden. You will experience that guilt for the rest of your life, girl. You killed a man for your own selfish ends, and that sin does not get washed away so easily."

She straightened up, and glared at her assailant, delicately rubbing her throat. "You're Jack's... companion, aren't you? The one that has been poisoning Jack's mind against me."

The figure looked surprised.

"Jack's mind was already poisoned against you. You killed him, or did you forget? I am just making sure that he continues down the right path."

"Which is?"

A long pale finger came up to stroke lightly across her cheek.

"You need to die."

She reared back and then calmed. She understood.
"You want Jack to kill me, just like he killed Barbossa."

A flicker of doubt crossed the pale face, and she saw it.

"And you have doubts that he will be able to do it. That is why you don't want me rescuing him. That might soften his mind towards me. I assure you, rescue at my hands or not, Jack will continue to hate me. You convinced me of that earlier. At least, I presume that Scarlett was in fact you."

The figure grunted. "Yes, that was me, and yes, I have my doubts. Under all of that hate, Jack still possesses an admiration for you, and dare I say it, something bordering on love. However, I cannot allow him to continue harboring those feelings. You do not deserve them. As I said, I will be returning him to the land of the living, and you will go back to your dead body that is currently sprawled out in that cabin."

He stalked out of the cell through the open bars.

"No."

The figure turned and looked sharply at her. "What did you say?"

Her eyes grew steely.

"I said no." She stepped forward and stood her ground in front of him. "You are going to tell me who you are, and then you are going to tell me where-"

"Lucifer. His name is Lucifer."

They both snapped their heads to the right, one wearing a look of frustration, and one wearing a look of fear.

There stood Jack, wearing nothing but his breeches, white shirt, and red bandana. His black eyes were staring at her with a weariness that she had not yet seen in anyone's eyes.

"My charming murderess. No mast to speak of here, and certainly no Kraken. Whatever will you do?"

Lucifer opened his mouth to say something, but Jack shot him a rebuttal without even looking at him. "Do be quiet."

The demon snarled but obeyed Jack's order. She looked warily at the cloaked figure standing next to her.

"...Lucifer...tells me that he requires you to kill me. So, I propose that you do exactly that. Right now. Send me to hell, Jack."

Jack's eyes narrowed.

"Gladly."
Fear spiked, accelerating her heart beat by a fraction. A second passed. Then another.

He wasn't moving. He was watching her, studying her, but had not advanced even an inch towards her.

Finally, his blistering gaze swung to the figure next to her.

"So, you truly don't believe me capable of killing her, do you?"

Lucifer seemed to collect his patience, or at least what little of it was left.

"Allow me to remind you that you are a human, Jack. You are still flawed, and you still want to forgive-"

"No. No, I do not. I just do not want my life to be dictated by a puppeteer." His fists were clenching and unclenching.

"I already explained this to you, pirate. You need this guidance, from me, to help you realize that the choices you make are the right ones. Your memories, you saw that everything you did was right-"

Jack shook his head. "No. I saw that everything I have done, every person that I have killed, every choice that I have made, I made on my own. I did not come to the conclusion that I need you. And whether or not I choose to kill her will be my choice, because that is what it all boils down to, isn't it? Whether or not I send her soul to you for your personal amusement."

He paused, watching Lucifer's fury rapidly accelerate.

"Looking back at those memories, I realized one crucial mistake that I have made. I looked for validation for everything I did from someone else, or something else. But there was never going to be any. They say that doubt is a crippling enemy. Unfortunately, it seems that I fell prey to it for too long."

Jack stepped closer to the demon so that he was looking him in the eye.

"You are just like her, in a way. Your speeches about find the right path and balancing darkness were just disguised for getting me to give you her. You wanted to torture her because she dared to act against your precious pirate captain. However, you lost sight of the one thing that I hold on to."

Lucifer's hand shot out to grip Jack's arm. "Listen to me, pirate. You-"

"What I need is for you to cease your attempts to dangle me from strings so that I dance to your tune. I never had any doubt about the acts I committed, you wretch because I had control over them. I had
freedom over my choices. Doubt comes when that control is taken away from me when something happens that I cannot rationalize-"

"Like love..."

She had said it in such a small voice that she wasn't sure anyone had heard her. Then Jack's eyes slowly slid over to stare at her.

Quickly regretting speaking at all, she watched as Jack stepped towards her slowly, after wrenching Lucifer's hand away.

"That you would presume that I have no control over her proves to me that you are not even worthy of giving me guidance. You want to control me, and I am not a person who enjoys being controlled. I would make every choice over again if presented with an opportunity to choose differently. And I will navigate the rest of my life without you, demon, regardless of the trials that I am going to face. I do not need you."

He was now standing right in front of her. She shivered when he trailed his finger down her cheek. "I assure you, she will get the punishment she deserves, when I decide what it shall be, and she will not resist."

It was deathly quiet for a long moment.

"If it is your choice to be taken from this place by her, then I will not intervene. But I hope for your sake that you are able to navigate the mess that is your mind and make the right choice with regards to her. And I hope that the memories we revisited did you some good in sorting out your mind."

Then he was gone, as though he had never graced the dark hallways with his presence.

His finger retracted from her skin as though it had been burned, and turned away to walk a few steps in the opposite direction.

Now the silence was its own entity, threatening to suffocate them both.

"You assumed that I wanted to be rescued. Interesting."

She shuffled her feet. "Lucifer, when he was pretending to be you, said you didn't."

He snorted softly. "Did he? Trust me, I want nothing more than to get out of this place."

"Jack, I-"

Her words died in her throat when he turned to her, eyes glinting.

"Do not say you are sorry. You told me you were not, and while you lie about quite a lot of things, I would wager that that was not one of them."

Her facial expression receded into bleak sadness.

"I just hoped that you would see that I did the right thing and-"

A blur of color flashed before her eyes and then he was gripping her shoulders.

Now that she could see his face closer, she noticed that all of the kohl had been rubbed away from his eyes, and his lips were dry and cracked.
“You killed me. You played a ridiculous cheap trick and shackled me to the mast of my own ship. What kind of fantasy world are you living where I feel anything besides hatred for you, especially when the only thing I wanted before was to get you in my cabin. Can’t say I had too far on the ladder to fall from that.”

“You were going to doom us all by trying to escape with us! I was doing the noble thing by making you stay behind!”

“And you demonstrated that you had absolutely no faith in me.”

“I had no reason to, Jack! You lied to me about Will, used me to find the bloody heart, and failed to make everyone privy to the knowledge of the giant red target painted on your back!”

He released her shoulders, shoving her a couple of inches back.

“I didn’t tell you about my involvement with Will because believe it or not, I knew Will was going to be safe with Jones. I sent Will to Jones in the first place because I knew that he could acquire the key, and because then he would finally get to reunite with his father. Without that key being in our possession, Davy Jones would still be a threat to all of us, and if you went gallivanting after Will on some kind of heroic mission to rescue him due to being angry with me, then he would have failed. Perhaps if you took more than five seconds to think about my actions, you would reach a different conclusion other than me being untrustworthy.”

She was trembling with nervous energy.

“I couldn’t put the lives of the people that mattered to me at risk for a slight chance that you might actually do the right thing.”

His eyes turned to slits, and all breath was sucked out of her lungs. He looked disgusted with her.

“If there was even a smidgen of nobility in you, Elizabeth, you would have stayed with me. But you didn’t, you ran like the coward you are, and I hate you for it.”

“Then kill me.”

The corner of his lip turned up in a slight smirk.

“I will, at the opportune moment. I will end your pitiful life when it suits me, and trust me, you are not going to enjoy it.”

Her brain felt numb.

Seconds ticked by.

“You didn’t happen to bring along instructions for escaping, did you?”

“I…I was never given any.”

Jack gave her another hateful look and brushed past her. “How did you get here?”

She watched him walk away without any aim. “I killed myself.”

He stopped walking abruptly. “You what?”

“I confessed my crime to the crew, took a knife to my wrists and died. Now I’m here.”
It was a full minute before he spoke.

“We need to find your body. It is the only logical conclusion because it is the only thing connecting you to our world.”

The stark emotionless tone of his voice chilled her.

They wandered about the halls for what seemed like an eternity. She pondered his time with Lucifer, his memories, and what was going on inside his mind when suddenly he stopped walking.

There she was, her pale dead body sprawled out on the dark stone, almost ethereal, shimmering like some kind of antique pearl, caked with blood, her skin glowing a pale orange from the lone torch on the wall.

He was staring at it with a strange expression on his face, as though he could not decide what to think.

“Sad that you went to all of this trouble for forgiveness that you will never have. I suspect that just touching your skin will teleport us, for lack of a better word, back to Tia’s cabin.”

She nodded. “So what happens now?”

He turned towards her, scrutinizing her. “To what are you referring to?”

“What happens when we return, for everyone?”

A rush of air swept past her as he crossed the room, and released the torch from its receptacle. The fire lit up different corners of the room as Jack reached them. He was inspecting it for unseen traps, she realized.

“I would imagine that there is going to be another Brethren Court meeting at some point, due to events that you do not need to be privy to. In fact, that may be the only reason that Tia actually agreed to send you here.”

“As for everyone else, we are pirates Elizabeth. The crew will most likely return to Tortuga, get drunk, and lose themselves under the skirts of every whore on the island. Young Turner is probably concocting some vexatious plan to steal the Pearl so that he can rescue his father. A neat trick that will be, seeing as how my ship is currently resting in the belly of a Kraken.”

She tilted her head. “And you?”

He turned to face her, the torch lighting up his face like a beacon. “Why do my plans concern you? When I decide that they will involve you, I will give you due warning. Until then, don’t worry your pretty head about them.”

“You are shutting me out?”

A range of emotions passed over his face. Anger, exhaustion, annoyance, among others.

“Why wouldn’t I? You are not particularly trustworthy, you don’t know very much about subjects other than tea parties and lacing corsets, and I certainly do not want to be the one put in charge of protecting you when you decide to do something foolish. I cannot say that I would step in to fulfill the role should the need arise. I may just let you fall overboard as it were. So the question is, do you really want to involve yourself with me at this particular interval in time, since it puts you at a great personal risk?”
“I know plenty about pirating, Jack. I spent two months on a ship dressed as a boy to find you—"

“A merchant ship, you insolent chit. Do you really suppose any of the men on that ship were inclined to rape you while you slept? I promise you that as honorable as my crew is, not every pirate will treat you the way they do. Most will see you as a free moment of fun to drag down to the rum cellar; a free easy fuck against a barrel.”

She winced and said nothing. He waited.

“As I said, this world, my world, is no place for you. While chaining me to the mast proves that you have at least some inkling of survival instinct, an inkling will not save your life. It will get you killed, and I will not be there to save you this time. In fact, I might even be the one holding the gun to your head. I suggest you re-evaluate your position. Now, can we get out of here?”

Her mouth was hanging open, and then she snapped it shut, choosing to argue no further.

They kneeled down and selected an area to touch. As soon as they made contact, a shot of pain spiked through their arms, and then the room spun, before going black.

The wooden floor was hard under her back when she opened her eyes, and her skin felt clammy.

*She was back, in the same state she was when she had left...*

Blood was still caked in her hair, and the wound on her wrist was only just beginning to crust over.

*How long had she been there? It couldn't have been more than a couple of hours...*

The better question was, where was Jack? She heaved herself up, and immediately stumbled back down. Her muscles were quivering, having been technically dead for an undetermined amount of time. This time she slowly stood, testing each limb as she ascended. Small flecks of dried blood speckled the floor as she raked her fingers through her hair.

Her eyes snapped to the door as it opened, and then she sighed in relief when she only saw Tia Dalma, carrying a large bowl of steaming water.

“For your skin, Elizabeth, and your hair.” She took the bowl gratefully and lowered herself back to the floor, placing it next to her. Tia handed her a washcloth.

“I will leave the room so that you can remove your clothes and wash.”

“You wouldn’t happen to have a fresh set of clothes would you?”

Tia looked thoughtful for a moment, then turned and disappeared somewhere in the depths of her cabin.

She returned a couple of minutes later with a pair of black breeches and a bronze colored shirt. “A young thing like yourself left these here some time ago. You may have them now.” Tia placed them next to the bowl.

She nodded gratefully. “Thank you, really.”

Tia inclined her head and stepped out of the room.
She immediately began to peel off her soiled clothing, and after dipping the cloth in the bowl of hot water, she welcomed the relish of the liquid against her skin, washing away all of the dirt, blood, and numerous other things that adorned her skin and hair.

Once she was clean, she gingerly put the new clothes on. Standing up once more, fighting the wave of dizziness that washed over her, she stepped over to the door, wrapped her hand around the handle, and stopped.

*She wasn't ready to go out there yet. She needed to make sense of what happened in the Locker first...*

She released the door handle and turned around to lean against it, her caramel blonde hair fanning out next to her shoulders.

Jack was different. He wasn’t sarcastic, he wasn’t tongue-in-cheek, he wasn’t adventurous…he was broken. His words were cold and unforgiving, not laced with the usual smirk, and his eyes…they were stone sober…

*Perhaps if she hadn't shackled him to the mast when he had planned to stay in the first place, she wouldn't be in this mess...*

Was this the real Jack? Was this the Jack that was always hidden behind the mask?

Was what he said true? Did she know enough to pursue his kind of life? Or was she destined to return to corsets and ceremonies?

*No. That* was not her future, regardless of what Jack said. She just couldn’t believe that after what he had seen her capable of, he still thought that she was the same girl he fished out of the harbor in Port Royal.

Perhaps she could live with him being her enemy for a time if it meant carving out her freedom. It would take a massive amount of subterfuge and cunning, but she believed she could *survive* without him as a pirate.

She turned, opened the door, and stepped out into the cabin, where two pairs of eyes were watching her with deadly seriousness.
Words Are Striking Whips

Chapter Notes

Here is Chapter 16! Sorry for the small wait! School bogged me down something awful, but now I have the entire summer to write my little heart out! Hope you enjoy this one!

What were they thinking?

Two men, one of whom she loved, and one of whom she had loved.

Jack, she was sure, was entertaining images in his mind of her shackled up to the mast, while he stood over her and laughed a dark vicious laugh. Will must be thinking about how he had allowed himself to love a monster such as her that would send a man to his own death.

She wasn't a monster. Love couldn't make someone a monster. She had been terrified of the magnitude of what she felt for the pirate standing before her. Images of her awake in her little cabin, her hand sneaking under the sheets with a pirate on her mind, images of her catching glimpses of him across the deck. Too much, she remembered thinking. It had been too much. When she had met Will, it was like a little flame had been lit inside her. She would steal glances at him whenever her father wasn't looking, sneak out to the beach at night with him to get sand between their toes.

When she had met Jack, soaking wet on the dock with him looming over her, his hands traveling dangerously close to her breasts to fetch the medallion that hung around her neck, that little flame for Will had been snuffed out, strangled, overtaken by a raging wildfire that invaded every thought, every movement of her limbs, and every moment, awake or not. The truth was as plain as day ever since Jack had pressed the barrel of his pistol against her head. There wasn't a single fiber of her being that could ever process taking Will over Jack. It took killing him for that admittance, so she wasn't about to deny it now. It was Jack that made her chest feel tight, as though it was collapsing in on itself. It was Jack that made her belly fill with a throbbing ache that wouldn't be quenched by her own ministrations. It was Jack that made her feel out of control.

And it was Jack that was looking at her now with a stare that was carefully devoid of any emotion besides disgust, as though she was a particularly unappealing slug that had chosen the wrong time to slide into his line of sight.

She tensed her throat up and narrowed her eyes to fight off the tingle of tears. Will looked away from her, his face set in a hard mask, and the little pocket of hope that she had reserved died on the spot. Despite his dislike for Jack, his hate for her ran deeper.

Her gaze lingered on him for another second. His hair, once a soft brown color, wavy, was now dirty and scruffy. His skin was smudged with dirt, and there were lines on his face that were new to her. She knew he was starting to really see the world. Gone was the storybook tale where the young blacksmith falls in love with the sweet governor's daughter. A far darker tale of reality, one where love was something that was snatched from him, and family was always just too far away, was now unfolding.

Should she stand there and attempt to reason with either of them? Will, I was so madly in love with the pirate that you only hate a little less than me now, that it consumed me and resulted in me
condemning him to death. Never mind the fact that you had your heart ripped out of your chest because of it. Please forgive me?

She shuffled uncomfortably under the scrutiny of the pirate captain's intense glare.

Jack, you may hate me now, but how bad is killing someone really? I rescued you, didn't I? I brought you back from the Locker in one piece. I lo-

No. She didn't think that sentiment deserved to be uttered to him in her imagination, never mind in reality. That sentiment might never pass from her mouth in his presence, because she could only utter it in scenarios that were never going to come to pass, such as him forgiving her, subsequently followed by the loss of her maidenhead in a glorious rapturous whirlwind.

From the way he was looking at her, she thought he might rather hang her from the mast of the Pearl if it was still in one piece.

She was staring at the floor, following the lines in the wooden boards, when two bronze fingers pressed into her chin, forcefully lifting her face up.

She attempted to appear far more confident than she felt, staring into his dark eyes.

"Are you going to just stand there and look pathetic, or are you actually going to formulate words? Not that I have any interest in hearing them because no doubt any words of yours are worthless." She arched an eyebrow and tightened her lips.

"I rescued you." It came out as more of a pleading than a hard reminder that he should be thanking her.

His lips curved into a dangerous smirk. "You rescued me, yes. After you sentenced me to death in the first place. If you are even going to attempt to suggest that your rescuing cancels out your killing, then I fear that you should probably just be left here with Tia. I am sure she can find some use for you."

Her eyes strayed to a hanging jar of something flesh colored.

"I might be safer here with her."

He released her chin then and stepped back. "You confuse me. First, you think that you might gain my forgiveness by reminding me that you killed me and rescued me, and now you think that you might be safer with a voodoo priestess known for occasional human sacrifice than with me? I think you might want to reevaluate your idea of me, Elizabeth. I don't think you quite know me as well as you think."

Words sometimes took the form of a whip, thrashing her train of thought before she could even judge what was coming out of her mouth.

"Are you going to kill me?"

She watched his eyes and could see how he retreated into his mind to consider his answer. Then, she could see the moment of clarity when he realized that he didn't know it.

"I don't know. Ask me again tomorrow. Until then, I suggest you figure out where you are going to go once we drop you in Tortuga if you make it that far."

Tortuga? They were dropping her off in Tortuga. She might as well shack up at one of the brothels.
But what about him? The demon. Lucifer.

"You spent all of that time in the Locker with-"

He was on her then, suddenly, with his hand clamped over her mouth. Will had whipped his head around to watch him drag her into the room she had just come out of, and just sat there, disinterested in her fate.

The door slammed shut with a thud, and he released her with such force that she stumbled a few paces into the room.

She turned to watch him stand there, hand tightened into fists, his normally bronze skin a few shades lighter. Her body tensed when he began to step towards her, and before she realized how fast he was moving, he had her pressed against the wall, his face inches from her own, one of his hands applying pressure to the creamy column of her throat.

"I am going to warn you one time, Elizabeth, and only one time. The events of the Locker are to stay between us, and only us. If I even think that you have revealed any of that information to anyone else, I will not hesitate to yank your vocal cords out of your pretty little throat."

She was nodding furiously, unnerved by the fire in his black orbs. His hand released her, and she sucked breath in as though she had been deprived of it for days. He left her as quickly as he had dragged her in there, but not before pausing at the door to turn and look at her.

"Whatever we had, it's dead. You are nothing more than an afterthought now, to me. Though I might still entertain thoughts of your-well, let's say that certain parts of you may keep me going when the faceless strumpets of Tortuga just won't do it, as long as you also remain faceless, and I really will have to keep that damn voice of yours out too."

Now it was her turn to be furious. How dare he use her as inspiration and hate her at the same time. That just wasn't fair.

She heard rustling and watched his hand fumble around for a moment, before realizing what it was that he was doing. The cords wound around his compass came loose from his belt, and he threw the small object at her feet.

"Here, take it. I am curious as to whether your heart has doomed you to a possible death at my hands."

She stared at the object, sitting on the ground. "What do you mean?"

He was smirking at her again, and it was that smirk that turned her insides to jelly. "I have the sneaking suspicion that you feel something for me, Lizzie, and if that is true, then I am afraid that you have no sense of self-preservation at all. You are going to attempt to follow me regardless of where I go because even if you don't know it, you find it very difficult to give up on things. Perhaps one of those times when you turn up crawling after me, I will grow too irritated with you to keep letting you do it. Maybe you will be begging me to let you go be a whore in a brothel, as I tie a cannonball around your ankle and slowly lower you into the water, just so I can watch the hope that I might be a good man leave your eyes."

After his words struck her and washed over her like a spray of poison, she raised her chin and narrowed her eyes at him.

"I am not going to follow you like a lost puppy, Jack. When I shackled you to the mast, you called me a pirate, and I intend to give myself a more deserving reason to have that endearment besides sending you to the Locker."
His smirk grew just a little bit wider.

"Not like a lost puppy, no. Like a woman with a burning that can only be soothed by one man. Unfortunately for you, that man really would rather see you hang from a mast."

With that, he stepped out of the room and slammed the door. She sank down the wall, wanting nothing more than to erase the very idea of him from her mind. Though she suspected that even then he would leave traces.

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Lies. It was all lies.

Well, not all of it. He had certainly entertained fantasies of killing her in various ways because there was no doubt that she deserved it. But as far as there being nothing between them, that was a lie. He almost wondered if he had a split personality with the way one part of him wanted to do what Lucifer had practically begged him to do, and one part of him wanted to let her consume him, let her run her hands across his skin, let her explore him.

He just could not let her know that a part of him, regardless of how much he ignored it, still...felt...connected to her.

Fuck, he couldn't even let the word into his mind without a hundred fantasies of silk sheets and candlelight invading immediately after.

Lucifer had been convinced that he still...loved her, which is why he so adamantly tried to convince him to kill her. The two different halves of him appeared to be doomed to an endless battle of superiority. Perhaps he could kill her after he….

A hiss left his lips, and he glared Gibbs down after the man had sent him a worried glance from his corner of the cabin.

His memories had done nothing besides showing him that he was made out of a different fabric than other people. Killing came easily to him when it involved certain people.

Just not her. Damn everything.

He still had other problems besides his mental battle. His ship was in pieces on the bottom of the ocean. Without the visual of cannons and black sails, it was going to be far more difficult to persuade people to do what he needed them to do.

He suspected that he might have to resort to what he did before he earned the title of Captain. During the time that he spent attempting to gain his father's favor, he had learned the delicate art of intimidation with nothing more than his voice, and a small knife, and he had certainly not lost that skill, despite what some may think. He had constructed a mask of cowardice that led some people to believe that he was a witless coward who would run from a fight before participating.

Sometimes it was better to be behind a mask than it was to bare yourself for everyone. You let everyone see what you can do, and they learn how to counteract you, how to defeat you. But if you keep yourself unpredictable, and strike when they least expect it, they might as well be chasing their tails for the good that tracking your behavior will do them.

The first order of business was to get rid of his crew. Will was going to wail and whine about finding his precious father, and he would be forced to drown the boy after the first week of that. Gibbs was
going to attempt to act as his moral compass, and as much as he respected the man, that would only get in his way. Pintel and the other one would only screw up any plan he made, and then there was Elizabeth.

He had the sneaking suspicion that she might as well follow him around while shoving her hand down his breeches every five minutes because that would be the equivalent to how much she would distract him just by being there.

His teeth clenched together, working the muscles in his jaw until they were sore. He cast a look around the cabin and found that everyone was too obviously absorbed in whatever they were doing to be actually doing it.

They were wary of him.

Well, he wouldn't be around much longer for them to be wary. As soon as they left this wretched swamp, and Elizabeth was deposited in Tortuga, he would be on his own.

There was only one name that had been permanently stamped on his murder list, and it had been there since he had watched his ship sink the first time.

Cutler Beckett.

Cutler Beckett was going to die, and it was going to be a death that would even make him shudder.

He walked out into the swamp, breathing in the musty but fresh air, and slammed the door behind him.
Flammam In Corde Viri

Chapter Notes

Yay, chapter 17! Sorry for the wait, been quite a bit busier than I imagined. Anyways, hope this chapter is good! The title means Flame in the Heart of Man :)

Five days.

Five bloody days in this wretched swamp, and no matter where he went, she seemed to flit around him like a blood-starved mosquito.

He was lying in his designated room, on the right side of the cabin. It held a dingy little bed, a table, and a lantern. Tia had possessed enough intelligence to separate the two of them.

It was currently nightfall.

The crew was still glancing at him out of the corner of their eyes as though he might spontaneously transform into a werewolf and rampage. Once in a while, one of them tried to speak to him, but evidently, the looks he was sending them were silencing them effectively enough.

He needed to leave, now. Perhaps he could grow wings and fly away if he willed it hard enough. Maybe Lucifer could appear next to him and just poof him to Tortuga, lecturing him all the while about how Elizabeth deserved to die or how he was born to balance evil.

Contrary to Lucifer's belief, his list of victims only contained people that had been unfortunate enough to get in his way. It was mere coincidence that most of the people he had killed had deserved it.

Of course, the next question Lucifer would ask would be why he went back to the ship. He was always countering his arguments like some demented chess opponent.

'Well, Lucifer, I went back to the ship because I hoped that my debt with Jones would be square if I died. It was certainly not a grand heroic gesture. Saving the rest of the crew was simply a welcome side effect.'

He snickered to himself. That infernal demon had actually suggested that he was confused and traumatized because of the lives he took. Well, that entire line of his thinking was wrong from the start. Sure, maybe he got a little colder every time he killed, but he was not some kind of unhinged madman.

The only thing that Lucifer got right was that he was in constant fear of finding the one person that he would not be able to...move on from. He had known for a long time that there would be a person out there that would be a permanent thorn in his side, a permanent shadow in his mind. They would possess the ability to unravel him, to embed themselves in his thoughts and actions. They would possess the ability to shatter him.

Now he feared that he had found that person. She was sitting in the room across from him, and somehow she had survived killing him for more than a week.
"I am guessing Elizabeth should be counting herself lucky right about now?"

His head whipped around to stare at the doorway, and then he rolled his eyes skyward.

"I am surprised that one of you are actually talking to me in a closed room, away from everyone else." He studied Will's reaction, trying to gauge where the blacksmith stood with him.

"You just came back from the dead, and you were betrayed by someone in close proximity to both you and them. I think they are a little justified in being wary of you."

He snorted. "They are a little more than wary. They won't speak to me for more than a few seconds at a time, and always with witnesses. Suppose I fashion myself some fangs just to rile them up a bit? And to answer your question, yes, I hope she does feel lucky that she is still among the living. Speaking of her, where exactly do you stand?"

Will stepped into the room fully, and swung the door closed, but didn't latch it. "She killed you. Maybe to save herself, maybe to save us, or maybe for some other selfish reason, I don't know. I do know that she robbed you of your freedom of choice, and I resent her for that."

The bed sagged as he rose from it. "I actually rather think that you resent the fact that she didn't tell you her plan more than you resent my lack of choice in the situation. You can't trust her for a multitude of reasons, but the main one is that she is no longer transparent to you."

The blacksmith's hands clenched at his sides. "I won't stop you if..."

He raised a hand, cutting him off. "The first thing we need to do is get out of this swamp. We can worry about what she deserves later."

The air rushed back into the room as Will opened the door. He brushed past him to stand in the middle of the cabin. He scanned the room, searching for something, anything that could help them leave.

All conversations stopped, and six pairs of eyes focused on him. Then, a door behind him opened, and a seventh pair of eyes appeared.

Abruptly he turned and stalked over to Will. "How interested did Beckett appear to be in my compass?"

Will raised his eyebrows, surprised at the question. "He was willing to trade my life for it if it came to that. But he has already acquired the object that he originally wanted to use the compass to find."

He shook his head in exasperation. "Do you really think that a man would simply become content with life if he possessed an object that could lead him straight to whatever he wanted? No, Beckett still wants that compass, because he still desires something that he cannot find without it."

"Which is?"

He smirked. "Eternal life."

Candlelight flickered as he stepped forwards, seemingly searching for something. Everyone in the room held their breath, watching him with a wary eye, racing to try and pinpoint the object of his search before he found it.

Finally, he stopped, gazing down at a small metal can with a spout on one end. "I would imagine that Beckett has learned of my…rescue by now since Jones is privy to who actually manages that feat.
And since Beckett currently possesses Jones' heart"—his gaze strayed to Elizabeth, who was attempting to blend into the wall—"due to the talents of your ex-fiancé, I wouldn't hesitate to say that at least one of them is looking for me."

Will's eyebrows raised. "Obviously Beckett would have command of Jones at this point. It isn't that much of a stretch that knowledge of your survival would have passed between them. I can't understand why he would withhold that information from Jones since both of them want you dead. What I am confused about is how that figures into your plan to leave this swamp."

He bent to pick the can up. "We certainly are not going to swim back to Tortuga. We need a ship. And unless my memory was damaged from being dead, both Beckett and Jones have ships. One or both of them are using a ship to search for me. And correct me if I am wrong, but wouldn't the sign of fire attract their attention?" His gaze sought her again. "It certainly worked for you."

Her lips set in a hard line. "What is in the can, Jack?"

He turned from her and addressed Will once again, jiggling the can for emphasis. "This contains mer-oil, a highly flammable substance, and if one were to simply throw a small amount around the cabin, it would be burnt to the ground in no less than an hour."

A door opening and closing had the crew peering down one of the hallways, where Tia Dalma stood, surrounded by smoky shadow.

"You mean to burn my home down?"

He turned and tilted his head at her. "The sea is your home, Tia, not this shack. And yes, I am going to burn it down. If you are really inclined to be an obstacle, I have no qualms about sprinkling a little of this on you as well. It might at least slow you down in your ultimate quest."

She stood there, engaging in a silent debate with herself, then nodded at him and moved to stand next to Will.

He rounded to face the rest of the crew. "My search party will see the smoke, and since it is coming from this general direction, they will surely assume that I am involved. All we need to do is wait for them to arrive, then we take their ship."

"And if they both come?"

"If they both come, then you can take the other ship, William. The only question in that scenario is the location of her. Do you want her to reside on your ship or mine?"

He doubted this ire towards her that Will harbored would last for very long...

"It isn't even a question, Captain Sparrow. I have no doubt that she would be more comfortable on your ship."

With that, Will allowed a small grin to cross his face. "All of you, if you do not wish to be a pile of ash, I suggest you find somewhere else to take up residence. Soon this cabin will no longer exist."

"Jack, perhaps we should have a real discussion about this, in case the rest of the crew have other thoughts about their plan of action—", Gibbs started, casting his gaze towards him.

"Gibbs, I respect you, I really do. But as I am the only Captain here, I hold authority. I will not hesitate to carry out the proper punishments for those that question my authority. Is that clear?"
Gibbs swallowed nervously, his hands fidgeting in his lap. He communicated silently with the crew, and realizing that leadership had been decided, they exited the cabin. Only Elizabeth remained. "Jones is not going to bring the Flying Dutchman, is he?"

He glanced at her. "Why wouldn't he?"

She stepped up to him. "Do not assume me to be stupid Jack. I realize that Beckett would force Jones to use one of his ships, while he keeps the Dutchman safe in harbor. He only just acquired the ship, he will not risk giving it up now. You are only allowing Will to captain the second ship because of the absence of the Dutchman."

He narrowed his eyes, trying to hide the surprise in them. "I did not assume you to be stupid. I do know that you are still under a cloud of guilt, useless to anyone, not that I would want you under my command anyways. Leave. William and I can take care of this."

She jutted her chin out. "You sure you don't want to just leave me in here while it burns?"

He squared his shoulders and stepped up so that he was looking her in the eye. "If I kill you, Elizabeth, I am going to watch you die. I want to watch as the life leaves your eyes. I want to watch your limp body hang from the main mast of a ship as your blood covers the deck. I will not forfeit seeing you suffer by locking you inside a burning building. As I said, I want you to leave. That is a command."

She recoiled at his words. After a few moments, she responded. "Aye, Captain." Then she was gone.

He turned to Will. "Look around the cabin and gather up anything that you deem valuable enough to take with us, and when that is finished, I will spread the oil." The former blacksmith nodded and began inspecting items, calling out what he found over his shoulder as he went.

"Invisible ink, burn salve, a couple of daggers submerged in strange liquid, some kind of black powder, a spell book, and a gold ring. That seems to be all of it unless you want a jar of eyeballs with questionable origins."

He made a face. "Put it all in that crate by the door, and head outside." Will complied with the request, casting one last glance around the cabin.

Once Will was gone, he began sloshing the oil onto the wood, choosing spots at each corner of the cabin, and several in the middle. When each point of origin was covered, he took the torch off of the wall, stepped over to the door, and then threw the torch to land in the middle puddle of oil, watching as it caught fire immediately, spreading out in both directions rapidly.

He quickly stepped out of the door, closing it, and hurried down the steps to join the others.

They all watched as the cabin was engulfed in flames as though they were alive, licking at the edges of the windows, and reaching up to light the sky.


"Now we wait. They will notice the smoke right away, but it will take them a day at the most to arrive. There are some caves up the coast a bit that we can take shelter in if necessary. There are also some fruit trees and a freshwater lagoon somewhere around here. I would imagine Tia can help any of you to locate those."

With that, he took off through the jungle, rounding the shoreline opposite from the burning cabin, and disappeared around the corner. The rest of the crew dispersed, looking for a place to sleep until
Maps, nautical instruments, and writing utensils were strewn across the desk, while a lone lantern swung from a hook, casting a dim glowing light around the cabin.

He stood in front of the desk, glaring down at the wood as though it had offended him.

Suddenly Officer Theodore Groves burst into the cabin, panting.

"Lord Beckett, sir, there is a large amount of smoke on the horizon. Someone lit a fairly large fire."

He turned to him slowly, a small smirk adorning his lips.

"Sir?"

"Good work, Groves. I believe we have found our unfortunate band of misfits, their illustrious undead Captain no doubts among them. Sail for the smoke immediately."

Groves nodded. "Yes sir, right away sir."
Chapter Notes

Here it is! Chapter 18! I am very sorry for the long wait. I had a lot going on in my personal life that always seemed to rob me of my motivation. But know that I will never abandon this story. I know everyone says that, but I really mean it. I hope you enjoy this chapter, and as always, please drop me a review, because responses and discussion of my work are what truly fuels my motivation.

The night was dark as the hours crawled past them, the sun hidden beneath the line of trees. The fire of the cabin had long turned into spotty patches of burning ember, casting a dim glow around the rest of the swamp. She would stare at them too long and then see them clouding her vision as she gazed elsewhere.

Some moments, she wished she had never met Jack. She wondered if her life might have been better if she had kept her wits when James proposed to her. The need for Jack to intervene would not have come to pass. He would have never dove into the water to drag her water-logged form to the surface, and he would have never lit a fire within her when he tore her corset off with his rough hands. To this day, she swore that he was not looking at just the medallion around her neck when he had gazed down at her with his chocolate colored eyes.

He had seen something in her, just as she had seen something in him. She knew that there were far more layers to him than what was shown on the surface. Burning anger and rage, sadness and grief, confusion and frustration, and in the deepest recesses of his soul, a layer of tenderness. All of that beneath a mask of whimsical aloofness. To others, he may have seemed like a cowardly fool, caring only about what was best for him. But to her own eyes, she saw an intelligence unlike no other; it was complex and sharp as a blade. There was a darkness in him, swirling and writhing through his veins, and yet she knew that for only a small few, his retribution would be swift were harm ever to come to them.

But what did her eyes tell him when he gazed into them? Did she look like a girl with her head too high in the clouds? Did she look like a pathetic fantasizer?

Dreams of living a life filled with adventure and danger, mirth and mischief, had long since flitted through her mind. She remembered running along the beach just after they had arrived in Port Royal, imagining that she had seen once again the black sails of the great ship she glimpsed on the voyage over. Had someone told her that she would condemn a man she loved to death on the main deck of that ship some years later, she might have fainted from laughing.

Or did she simply look like someone whom he could seduce into his bed before moving onto the common strumpets?

God, how she feared that. Longing for his touch every day and night, especially now that she would almost certainly never experience it. Then, when she finally felt his rough fingers trailing across her skin, dancing across places that set her ablaze, accelerating into a union that would rob her of her sanity, he would tell her that he had gotten all he wanted from her, that he had never had a hope of loving her, and that she was a fool for harboring the hope. She felt it was akin to finally eating the finest honey only to be told that it was poisoned. She realized that she was obsessed with discovering
what he felt for her, whether it was love, hate, or anything in-between.

But she would have to put that obsession aside for now. They might have escaped the locker with relative ease, but she knew that the darkness and shadow that she found there now resided in both of them, and would continue to possess them. It was the most painful thing she would ever experience, but there was no denying the great rift between her and Jack. He was too far away from being relieved of his rage towards her, and she was too tired to try and wage war with him with forgiveness being the end goal.

She needed to leave. There was nothing for her here right now. She could slip away in all of the commotions once Beckett arrived. Jack would be occupied with taking the ships and wouldn't notice her. Not that he would care if he did, he was going to force her to leave once they arrived at Tortuga anyways.

Gibbs stood up a few feet away and came to sit next to her. "One would think that you were trying to calculate how long it took for the fire to go out by how hard you are staring at it", he quipped. She offered a small smile.

He sighed and watched her for a moment. "What are you planning, Elizabeth?"

She started. "How do you know that I am planning anything?"

He plucked at a few rocks on the shore before replying. "I can see the sorrow in your eyes from here. That wouldn't be there unless you had come to a decision about something."

"Oh, you don't suppose that I look sorrowful because I have done something unforgivable to the man that I-" she bit her tongue, then laughed bitterly. "I'm leaving, Mister Gibbs."

He recoiled slightly at that and turned to look at the cabin shell. "I should have guessed that. You do know that you need to inform the Captain of your departure, right? Don't want to go giving him any more reason to be displeased with you. I can tell you that sneakin' off in the night while you are meant to be helping the crew take Beckett's ship is on the list of things that might earn you a night's stay on the ship mast."

Flinching, she weighed that idea. Would it not just end up in another fight? He hadn't physically harmed her yet, but she was sure that he had a tipping point somewhere.

"Do you know where he is?"

"Wandered off that way somewhere," he said, pointing down the river bank.

She nodded, and rose from the ground, making sure that her sword was safely in its scabbard. Gibbs eyed it with a little trepidation. "You don't expect to be locking swords with him, do you? I hate to say it Miss Elizabeth, but that would be a losing battle for you."

"No, I don't expect to engage in a sword fight with Captain Sparrow, but in case he attempts to harm me, I at least have a way of defending myself."

He nodded once, a sort of jerky nod that said something else besides agreement.

"Do you think he hates me?" she asked with a bit of trepidation.

He thought for a moment before responding. "No, I don't think he hates you. I just think that he is too angry to identify what he feels for you right now as anything else. You condemned him to death Miss Elizabeth, and while you did also save him, you can't expect him to forgive you so lightly. I
also do not believe that he will ever attempt to physically harm you."

She scoffed. "I'm not so sure. Just before we burnt the cabin to the ground, he told me that he would see me hang from the mast of the ship before he would allow me to simply die in the burning cabin."

Now it was Gibbs' turn to flinch. "All I am saying is to not be too hasty to assume anything about him right at this moment. Now go on, go find him before you lose your nerve."

"Lose my nerve? I would have lost my nerve a hundred times over by now when it concerns Jack if I was ever going to."

He smiled a bit. "Yes, I suppose that is true."

She turned away and gathered her coat and hat, putting them on. "Wish me luck, Mr. Gibbs."

He inclined her head in her direction, and she set off down the river.

The sand was cold and wet beneath her boots, and every step triggered another animal to screech, the sound echoing through the night. She wrapped her arms around herself to keep from shivering. The wind was colder than she would have expected.

She must have trudged through the sand for over an hour before she came upon a rock face perched next to a clear pool of water. Leaning against the flat rock was the Captain. The moonlight gave his tan skin a blue tinge, and his eyes were sparkling with the water's reflection. He looked quite regal standing there with his black hair framing his face, and his tricorn hat perched on the top of his head.

Stopping just short of his field of vision, she considered turning back and risking his wrath. Watching him in that moment, though, he almost looked serene. Pursing her lips, she started forward again, reminding herself that she had her sword within close range.

One particularly loud footfall on a pile of twigs alerted him to her presence. He raised his head slightly and narrowed his eyes at her before they glanced down at her hand, which was hovering at her hip.

"What, did you come all the way up here with the intention to engage me in a fight?"

She lowered her hand. "No, I just don't know what your reaction is going to be in a moment."

"You believe that my most probable reaction is going to be inflicting physical harm upon your person? Interesting. Continue."

He switched his gaze back to the pool of water as I searched for the right words to say.

"I want to leave, Jack."

'You are going to leave, the moment that we arrive in Tortuga."

She shook her head, annoyance pressing her lips together. "No, I'm leaving tonight. I just thought it prudent to give you notice first."

She saw something flash in his eyes. Surprise? Disappointment? She wasn't sure.
"Why?" he asked quietly.

"Why? Jack, if you were to tell me right now that you wanted me against that rock, my clothes would be floating in the pool in a heartbeat. But I am never going to get any sort of admission of desire for my person from you, because of my crimes. I understand that. I just cannot flounder around you and the crew with the thing I want most dangling in front of me just out of reach."

He pushed himself off of the rock and turned to stare at it, a flash of heat in his eyes.

No...

"I appreciate you informing me. However, I am going to reject your request. You will not be leaving tonight, you will leave when I allow you to leave."

"Excuse me? You cannot expect to exert that kind of control over me-"

"Actually, Elizabeth, I think you will find that I can because I am your Captain, a fact that you continuously seem all too willing to forget."

She stepped up to him until she was looking directly at his face. "I don't care. I am heading for Tortuga on my own with or without your permission."

He stayed quiet for a moment before tilting his head back slightly. "I did want you, before. The first time when you attempted to swipe the Letters of Marque from me, then the second time when you so tantalizingly reminded me that you thought I was a good man. I had half a mind to seduce you into my cabin that very night, Will be damned."

She felt her skin flush as his eyes crept down the length of her body. "What else did Lucifer say to you when you were confronted with him? If I remember correctly, the first time he was masquerading as Scarlett."

Her palms began to sweat. "She-He talked about how you were incapable of loving anyone, and that all you are interested in is alcohol and sex."

His eyes turned hard, a strange contrast to his hand softly brushing against her face. "And do you believe that?"

She turned her face away from him, unable to gaze into the fiery depths of his dark brown eyes. "I don't know what to believe when it comes to you. One minute you detest me, and the next you become so damn confusing..."

He made a noise that sounded like he shared her frustration. "What else did he say?"

"He---he suggested that if you were to decide to act upon any physical desires that you may have, you would grow tired of me because of my...inexperience." His hand faltered on her cheek and dropped to his side.

"And do you believe that?"

"I---yes, partly. You have ages worth of experience in that area, Jack, I have none. I am a---I wouldn't know how to satisfy you..."

Her eyes burned slightly at that admittance, the presence of looming tears making themselves known.

"And? What else?" he whispered, turning her face back so she was staring into his eyes again,
holding her chin in his hand so that she didn't look away.

"Jack, please, don't make me repeat anything else."

"You will do as your Captain commands, Miss Swann."

She set her jaw in a hard line. "He talked about—what a woman experiences when she is with you." Her heartbeat began to accelerate rapidly, because as she said the words, flashes of her pressed up against the rock behind Jack, with her legs wrapped around his waist invaded her mind. She was almost positive that he had imagined the exact same thing moments ago.

"What—exactly, did he say?"

She swallowed heavily, trying to ignore the prickling in her skin.

"He said that I would never experience the way that you wrap your arms around a woman as you take her, nor would your eyes ever burn into my soul and that I would never hear the words you whisper when you make me—a woman—finish."

Several tears were making their way down her cheeks as they flushed from embarrassment. She closed her eyes, wishing to be swallowed up by the ground.

"Look at me", he said softly. She allowed her eyes to open again and blinked away the still lingering cloud of tears.

"I was like that like you described. I did only care about sex and alcohol, and my ship of course. Then you happened, and I actually felt something other than unsatisfied lust for once in my life. I allowed myself to believe that you might eventually return the...whatever it is I felt for you. Then, you killed me."

She flinched heavily. "I am sorry—"

"Stop. I'm not finished. I am a very complicated person, Elizabeth, as I am sure you have figured out by now. I have a very long and bloody history, I have killed a lot of people, and I have been nearly killed myself numerous times. And my mind—my mind is like the ocean, vast and dangerous, even to myself. I don't—I don't always mean what I say or say what I am actually thinking. The only thing I could focus on since you clasped that manacle around my wrist was that you had ripped my freedom away, and that enraged me."

"Jack—"

"Be quiet. I did hate you, I think for at least a little while. I said a lot of terrible things to you and thought a lot of terrible things before I saw you again. Do you want to know one of the visions that I had?"

"She-she told me about it. She appeared to you as me, just before I tried to—"

He shut his eyes as though it pained him to think about it.

"I think that was the only thing that kept me from ending your life on the spot in a fit of rage when you appeared in that corridor with Lucifer. When I watched you drag the knife across your wrists, I felt...not what a person enveloped by hate should feel."

She wasn't sure whether to step closer to him or step back.
"Lucifer tried his hardest to convince me to do nothing but hate you, but I resisted, teetering somewhere in between wanting to throttle you, and...He showed me memories of my own, trying to compare the choices I have made in the past to the choice he thought I should make concerning you. The only thing that he convinced me of was that I didn't need him to convince me of anything."

"I push people, everyone, away, Elizabeth. I prefer to be alone, save for occasional physical company. I let you get too close, and you struck with such a piercing blow that I turned into a shade of myself while I was in the Locker. I was consumed by dark thoughts. Sometimes I still am."

Then he was quiet for a long moment.

"I don't hate you at this particular moment, or detest you. But I cannot say what I feel for you beyond that because I don't know. It might still be hate, and I may be simply having a moment of calm before I do kill you. I can say that I have been known to reverse my feelings on a whim if my hand is forced, so I will warn you now to exercise caution around me."

She stared down at the ground. "Why are you telling me all of this? Why now? The last couple of days you could do nothing but describe how you wanted to kill me or tell me how little you care for me."

His eyes softened for a split second before the hard glint returned. "I told you, I'm complicated."

"Why did you want to know about Scarlett?"

He considered her question for a moment. "You seemed to fear something, beyond my retribution. Something deeper. Now I know what it was."

Her eyes widened.

"You feared that I would never treat you any differently than a whore, and a badly performing one at that."

She inhaled sharply, her skin flushing again. "Why wouldn't you, Jack? I have no idea how to pleasure you, I would do it all wrong, I wouldn't know how to act, or how to be seductive or any of that. I am sure you would grow incredibly bored with me. And the pain of---I..."

His eyes once again narrowed, and he stepped a little closer. "Elizabeth, never suggest again that I would be dissatisfied with any amount of physical contact I may ever have with you. I am not shallow, contrary to popular opinion. In fact, I would revel in the opportunity to---wait, there was one specific thing that Scarlett said, wasn't there?"

Elizabeth nodded hesitantly, hoping that he had simply missed her omission. "She said that a virgin could never satisfy you. I wondered if she meant that as a double-edged sword. That perhaps you wouldn't treat my first experience with care. Everyone has always talked about men only taking a woman for her first time with their own pleasure in mind, and never hers. I don't think I could handle that being true for you as well."

His face went carefully blank. "You're suggesting that I would ignore your comfort for my own selfish pleasure?"

She shook her head. "No, no Jack, it's just that the fear of that happening was planted in my head, and it has been difficult to rid myself of it, along with everything else I fear..."

He turned away from her to face the pool.
"I will not promise you that everything I have said here up until this point will remain true, or that I will not go back to hating you, but I can promise you that if our relationship ever progresses to that point, anything that *Lucifer* said will not apply."

The breath that she had been holding released in a whoosh.

"Why did you go to such lengths to get to the Locker?"

His question caught her off guard. "Such lengths? Wh---oh..."

"When you told me that you *killed* yourself to come and rescue me, I felt like all of my insides had turned to ice. That was the first moment that I truly questioned the permanence of anything I was feeling for you at that moment."

She pondered her answer, recognizing the weight that he considered it to carry. "Because, *Jack*, if there was any hope at all of you returning to this world, I had to take whatever chance I had, regardless of whether you hated me or not."

"I see. Do you still want to leave tonight? I will not stop you."

Again, he caught her off guard.

"No, I think I will remain on the ship until we arrive in Tortuga."

She saw his head nod, and then he turned to face her again.

"Once we arrive there, I am going to leave the rest of you behind. I function better alone, as I told you. I have a...particular goal in mind that I need to see through."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"Because you are the only one smart enough to realize how stupid it would be to either try and stop me or follow me."

She jerked her head in the direction of the others. "Beckett should be arriving soon. The sun is starting to rise."

He followed her gaze. "Yes, it is. And no, Beckett will not be arriving soon. He is too smart to come here himself. No doubt he sent his best officers to collect us."

He started off, and she followed quietly, emotionally exhausted from everything that had just transpired.
He felt tired, as though he hadn't slept in hundreds of years, and the exhaustion was just starting to sap the strength from him. Some may think that each chapter of a person's life comes with a clean slate. That could not be farther from the truth, because not only is there never a clean slate, each part of his life had just made him darker, colder. Genuine happiness or contentment seemed so far away that he had forgotten what it felt like.

He had wandered off from the rest of the crew as soon as the fire had subdued, hoping to be left alone. The crystal clear pool in front of him held a certain kind of significance for him. It was here that he had his first experience with a treacherous woman. He had been younger then, only twenty-six. It had been a necessary detour to stop off at the river on one of his trips to Shipwreck Cove. He hadn't known that she dwelled there.

She had been a charming seductive witch, quite capable of luring almost any man into her web. Only, she had trouble with him, because he shared the same manipulative talents that she did. She had brought him here, to this pool, with a mind to make him her bed partner for the night, and subsequently, her slave. He played along with her manipulation at first. He swam in the pool with her, drank her wine, and let her enjoy his body.

After, she had wandered off into the jungle in search of something she claimed was of 'dire importance'. No doubt she expected that he was too devoted by that time to be suspicious. He took that opportunity to search her hut for some kind of leverage.

He found it.

A small token; it was a bronze necklace with the words 'Et Ad Mare' carved into the back of the charm. Had his mother not taught him Latin, that would have been the end of it. But she did, and he had control over the witch. But she wasn't really a witch at all.

Ever since hearing the tale of the beautiful sea goddess and the mortal man, he suspected that the Brethren Court had imprisoned her in a human body. What he didn't expect was finding her.

It was of particular good fortune that he already belonged to the esteemed group of pirates that were responsible for locking her away, and if the need should ever arise, releasing her. When he presented her with the necklace, followed by telling her that he knew exactly who she was, she demanded to know why his knowledge mattered to her.
and white shirt, staring at her with a smug expression on his face. His eyes were the color of the finest cocoa bean, and his hair, with the plentiful braids and dreads, framed his handsome face perfectly. She could see that he had previously been examining an object that was currently laying in his hand.

"What is that?"

He ignored her question for the time being.

"You were so sure, so confident that you had complete control of me. Do you treat all men that way?"

Several expressions flitted across her face. He identified one as the feeling of a rug being pulled out from under you.

"Clearly, I miscalculated," she said quietly. "Men are fragile creatures, vulnerable to even the slightest taste of what they desire."

"And women are sensuous creatures, vulnerable to a musician playing the right strings, so to speak."

The corner of her mouth turned up with a slight smirk. "Ah, so you think you know my art of seduction as well, then."

"I don't think, I know. I also know that you know what this is in my hand, so it stands to question why you even bothered asking."

"Simple pirates cannot read Latin."

"Your first mistake was to think of me only as a simple pirate. My mother taught me Latin when I was five. I can, in fact, read the sweet little message on this sweet little gift. Did he give it to you when he proclaimed his love for you, or when you appointed him as the reaper of the sea?"

She scoffed bitterly. "I do not remember, as that was lifetimes ago. Now I am stuck in this useless body until the Brethren deem it a necessary task to release me."

He let the necklace drop from his hand to the desk. "Oh, I am sure you do remember. You share the one flaw that all humans share. Love is forever, even for a goddess, and memories of love never disappear."

Darkness passed over her face. "I prefer to pretend as though I have forgotten."

They eyed each other for a moment, as though waiting for the other to attack.

"What is your name, pirate?"

A deep rich laugh bubbled up from his chest. "It is funny that you forgot to ask me for that small detail. Really, it would have saved both of us a lot of trouble."

Curiosity danced in her eyes, mixed with a small amount of apprehension.

"Your name, please."

His eyes glittered dangerously. "Captain Jack Sparrow, Pirate Lord of the Caribbean, at your service."
She recoiled as if bitten. "Pirate Lord? You---you're part of the Brethren Court?"

He reached up and fingered the charm hanging down in front of his red bandana. "Quite a long story about how I got the title, actually. I can only tell you that it involved poison."

"So you are among those with the ability to free me?"

He inclined his head at her slightly. "Now that you understand exactly how much I own you, I want something from you. A token of acknowledgment, as it were."

She eyed the hallway behind him. "What is it that you want?"

He placed both hands on the desk and pushed himself out of the chair. Sauntering around the edge of the desk, he stepped towards her until he was close enough to kiss her if he wanted to.

"I am having some difficulty obtaining something that was taken from me. I need something that will...ease that difficulty."

Realization lit up in her eyes. "Ah, yes, your precious ship. The Wicked Wench, was it not? Oh, no, that was before it was burnt to a crisp and sunk beneath the waves. Now, it is known as the Black Pearl, captained by the fearsome Hector Barbossa. Davy Jones raised it from the sea for you, did he not?"

It was his turn for his face to darken. "At a steep price, yes. I was allowed thirteen years to captain my ship. At the end of those thirteen years, I must submit myself to his crew."

She nodded, with a hint of pity. "I believe I have just the thing for you, pirate lord. Give me a moment."

He watched her disappear into the hallway, listening to the various items being sorted through. When she reappeared, she had a small object in her hands.

"A compass? You are giving me a compass. I hate to say I am disappointed, but I already have a compass."

She shook her head, a small laugh dancing across the smoky air of the room. "Oh, Captain Sparrow, this is no ordinary compass. You see, it does not point in any direction in accordance with Earth's magnetic field. This compass only points to that which your heart desires most. So, for you, unless you unknowingly desire something greater than your ship, it will point you in the right direction."

He took the object from her, examining it. It was black, with ivory inlay.

"I believe it is safe to say that it will serve you well in other matters besides your ship. Use it well, Captain", she said cryptically.

Gathering his clothing until he was once again in his full Captain regalia, he turned to her before he exited the room.

"I expect that we will meet each other again at some point. Until then."

She nodded, smiling as though she was the victorious one.

The compass had indeed served him in other matters, but serving him well couldn't be a more inaccurate statement. The only thing that it had brought him recently was frustration.
And he did indeed see her again when he had a need to find something that only she could point him to. A way out of his miserable fate on the Flying Dutchman. Of course, that wretched woman took it as an opportunity to taunt him about Elizabeth and make a pass at stupid Will in the process. He had half hoped that he would fall for her seduction. Perhaps he could have just left him there. But instead, he pitched a fit about the key.

He rolled his eyes at the memory, just in time to hear small footsteps coming in his direction. He pretended to not notice her approaching him. Then, her foot landed on a particularly crunchy pile of twigs, and she became aware that he was aware. He narrowed his eyes, glancing down at where her hand was poised over the hilt of her sword.

Inwardly he sighed. The whelp may have taught her plenty about how to handle a sword, but he knew that he could easily best her were she to engage him.

"What, did you come all the way up here with the intention to engage me in a fight?"

She lowered her hand. "No, I just don't know what your reaction is going to be in a moment."

His reaction? What was she going to do, tell him that she actually loved Will, or that her true calling was at the side of Commodore Norrington?

"You believe that my most probable reaction is going to be inflicting physical harm upon your person? Interesting. Continue."

He stopped looking at her and focused on the pool instead. The only other thing that he could think of for her to proclaim is that she actually wanted to kill him again.

"I want to leave, Jack," she said, with an edge to her voice.

"You are going to leave, the moment that we arrive in Tortuga."

That was not even on his list of things that she was going to possibly say. He watched her shake her head, annoyance washing over her face.

"No, I am leaving tonight. I just thought it prudent to give you notice first."

Shock struck him, and then surprisingly disappointment. Though whether it was because she was taking control away from him, or because she was leaving, he wasn't sure.

"Why?"

She made a noise that sounded like frustration.

"Why? Jack, if you were to tell me right now that you wanted me against that rock, my clothes would be floating in the pool in a heartbeat. But I am never going to get any sort of admission of desire for my person from you, because of my crimes. I understand that. I just cannot flounder around you and the crew with the thing I want most dangling in front of me just out of reach."

His eyebrows rose incredibly high, and he turned around against his will to stare at the rock face, imagining that exact scene. He barely fought off the arousal. Closing his eyes briefly, he faced her again.

"I appreciate you informing me. However, I am going to reject your request. You will not be leaving tonight, you will leave when I allow you to leave."
Indignation was the next emotion that she exhibited, and he reveled in it. Her eyes brightened, and her hair seemed to get...puffy.

"Excuse me? You cannot expect to exert that kind of control over me-

Annoyance shot through him. "Actually, Elizabeth, I think you will find that I can, because I am your Captain, a fact that you continuously seem all too willing to forget."

He watched her step up to him until he was in the exact same position with her as he had been with Calypso ten years ago. "I don't care. I am heading for Tortuga on my own with or without your permission."

Why wasn't he angry? Wasn't he supposed to get angry at her blatant disrespect? He had spent enough time wishing death and all manner of horrible things on her that he had accepted that his feelings towards her would never change. But at that moment, he felt...curious. There was something that had been niggling at him ever since the Locker.

He tilted his head back to look down his nose at her. "I did want you, before. The first time when you attempted to swipe the Letters of Marque from me, then the second time when you so tantalizingly reminded me that you thought I was a good man. I had half a mind to seduce you into my cabin that very night, Will be damned."

Her skin flushed pink as he slid his eyes over her neck, down her chest, across her flat stomach, lingering for a moment on the junction between her legs, and then making a quick journey down her long legs, before snapping back up to her eyes.

There was something else that was scaring her besides the constant threat of his retribution. He needed to figure out what.

"What else did Lucifer say to you when you were confronted with him? If I remember correctly, the first time he was masquerading as Scarlett."

She clenched and unclenched her hands several times. His question made her nervous.

"She---He talked about how you were incapable of loving anyone, and that all you are interested in is alcohol and sex."

That incensed him. He intensely disliked being simplified. She watched him suspiciously as he raised his hand to softly caress her face. "And do you believe that?", he asked, lowering his voice to just above a whisper.

She turned her face away from him and knitted her eyebrows together. "I don't know what to believe when it comes to you. One minute you detest me, and the next you become so damn confusing..."

He made a noise in his throat at that admittance. As if he didn't know it... "What else did he say?"

"He---he suggested that if you were to decide to act upon any physical desires that you may have, you would grow tired of me because of my...inexperience."

Of all the things...

"And do you believe that?", he asked sharply.

A pained look came over her face. "I---yes, partly. You have ages worth of experience in that area Jack, I have none. I am a---I wouldn't know how to satisfy you..."
He watched, surprised, as tears sprang to her eyes. *This had been brewing in her head for a while...*

"And? What else?" he whispered, gripping her face and turning it back to him so that he was looking into her eyes.

"Jack, please, *don't* make me repeat anything else."

For a moment, he considered acquiescing to her request and then reminded himself that she didn't quite deserve compassion yet.

"You will do as your *Captain* commands, Miss Swann." He inwardly smirked as she set her jaw in a hard line. She was very compelling when she was defensive.

"He talked about---how you---what a woman experiences when she is with you."

Her chest began to rise and fall more rapidly, and she glanced almost imperceptibly at the rock to the right of them. A pang of satisfaction made its way into his chest. She had imagined the same scenario that he had.

"What---*exactly*, did he say?"

She swallowed, and he started to feel a little bit apprehensive about what the rest of the conversation was going to entail.

"He said that I would never experience the way that you wrap your arms around a woman as you take her, nor would your eyes ever burn into my soul and that I would never hear the words you whisper when you make m---a *woman* finish."

The breath caught in his throat. He hadn't expected that *Lucifer* had gone into quite that much detail. Sweat started to prickle at his skin, and he found it difficult to think clearly. The tears that had been building up since her admittance were now running down her cheek. She closed her eyes tightly as her body seemed to shrink away from his.

He squeezed the fingers that were still hovering around the junction of her neck and chin gently.

"Look at me," he commanded softly. Her eyes slowly opened, and she blinked rapidly. He thought about his next words carefully. It was one of those rare moments where he felt something other than murderous rage towards her, but it was still an emotion that he couldn't identify.

"I was like that, like you described. I did only care about sex and alcohol, and my ship of course. Then you happened, and I actually felt something other than unsatisfied lust for once in my life. I allowed myself to believe that you might eventually return the...whatever it is I felt for you. Then, you killed me."

More pain invaded her features, and she flinched away from him. "*I am* sorry." 

"Stop. I'm not finished. I am a very complicated person, Elizabeth, as I am sure you have figured out by now. I have a very long and bloody history, I have killed a lot of people, and I have been nearly killed myself numerous times. And my mind---my mind is like the ocean, vast and dangerous, even to myself. I don't---I don't always mean what I say, or say what I am actually thinking. The only thing I could focus on since you clasped that manacle around my wrist was that you had ripped my freedom away, and that enraged me."

"*Jack-*"
Damn her. He hated her. He was supposed to hate her. He had felt hate for her. He had wanted nothing more than to wrap his hands around her neck the entire time that he had sat in the Locker. He had told Lucifer that he had wanted to hang her from the mast of a ship more times than he had fingers, and he had treated her like a diseased invalid when she had brought him back to the living.

So why in God's name was he feeling like he had been the one that killed her? Was it the pain in her eyes, or the lingering fear that he was going to do nothing to alleviate her worry? Why was she even worried about that? Did she really think so little of him that she expected him to treat her like a common whore?

He wasn't sure what unnerved him more, the fact that he felt something for her again besides hatred, or that there was still a lingering shadow of rage, smoldering, waiting for the next moment that it could consume him.

"Be quiet. I did hate you, I think for at least a little while. I said a lot of terrible things to you and thought a lot of terrible things before I saw you again. Do you want to know one of the visions that I had?"

She thought for a moment before realization washed over her face.

"She---she told me about it. She appeared to you as me, just before I tried to---"

The memory of her 'death', even if it wasn't real, was one that still shook him. He shut his eyes without thinking, hoping to shield himself from her.

"I think that was the only thing that kept me from ending your life on the spot in a fit of rage when you appeared in that corridor with Lucifer. When I watched you drag the knife across your wrists, I felt...not what a person enveloped by hate should feel."

He opened his eyes to watch her tense slightly.

"Lucifer tried his hardest to convince me to do nothing but hate you, but I resisted, teetering somewhere in between wanting to throttle you, and---He showed me memories of my own, trying to compare the choices I have made in the past to the choice he thought I should make concerning you. The only thing that he convinced me of was that I didn't need him to convince me of anything."

He paused for a moment to let her absorb what he was saying.

"I push people, everyone, away, Elizabeth. I prefer to be alone, save for occasional physical company. I let you get too close, and you struck with such a piercing blow that I turned into a shade of myself while I was in the Locker. I was consumed by dark thoughts. Sometimes I still am."

His next pause was for himself to absorb what he was saying. He didn't want to admit that he didn't hate her because the emotions that he was feeling were entirely circumstantial and could change tomorrow, or an hour from now.

"I don't hate you, or detest you. But I cannot say what I feel for you beyond that because I don't know. It might still be hate, and I may be simply having a moment of calm before I do kill you. I can say that I have been known to reverse my feelings on a whim if my hand is forced, so I will warn you now to exercise caution around me."

That was at least the truth.

He stepped back slightly to watch her stare at the ground. "Why are you telling me all of this? Why now? The last couple of days you could do nothing but describe how you wanted to kill me or tell
me how little you care for me."

It was his turn to flinch, and he knew that she noticed. "I told you, I'm complicated."

She seemed to accept that answer for now but still watched him warily. "Why did you want to know about Scarlett?"

He didn't like when people lied about him. He especially didn't like when people lied about him when it concerned sensitive matters. He could be called a lot of things. Murderer, criminal, thief, liar...

But one thing he would not be associated with was a lack of compassion or carelessness.

"You seemed to fear something, beyond my retribution. Something deeper. Now I know what it was."

Her eyes widened, and nervousness swirled in them.

"You feared that I would never treat you any differently than a whore, and a badly performing one at that."

He said the words with disgust and watched her inhale breath sharply as her skin grew flushed. "Why wouldn't you, Jack? I have no idea how to pleasure you, I would do it all wrong, I wouldn't know how to act, or how to be seductive or any of that. I am sure you would grow incredibly bored with me. And the pain of—-I..."

He narrowed his eyes, indignation flooding him, and stepped closer to her again. "Elizabeth, never suggest again that I would be dissatisfied with any amount of physical contact I may ever have with you. I am not shallow, contrary to popular opinion. In fact, I would revel in the opportunity to—wait, there was one specific thing that Scarlett said, wasn't there?"

There had to be. She kept trying to say something, and then she would stop, as though she could not quite get the words out.

"She said that a virgin could never satisfy you. I wondered if she meant that as a double-edged sword. That perhaps you wouldn't treat my first experience with care. Everyone has always talked about men only taking a woman for her first time with their own pleasure in mind, and never hers. I don't think I could handle that being true for you as well."

Ah. He might actually hang Lucifer from the mast of a ship instead. He arranged his face until it was devoid of emotion. "You're suggesting that I would ignore your comfort for my own selfish pleasure?"

She shook her head furiously. "No, no, Jack, it's just that the fear of that happening was planted in my head, and it has been difficult to rid myself of it, along with everything else I fear..."

He turned away from her to face the pool. What else did she fear? Obviously, she thought that he might smother her with a pillow everytime she tried to go to sleep, what was there other things?

"I will not promise you that everything I have said here up until this point will remain true, or that I will not go back to hating you, but I can promise you that if our relationship ever progresses to that point, anything that Lucifer said will not apply."

He heard her breath escape her all at one time. There was something else that had been niggling at him, ever since she had told him about it.
"Why did you go to such lengths to get to the Locker?"

"Such lengths? Wh-oh..."

"When you told me that you killed yourself to come and rescue me, I felt like all of my insides had turned to ice. That was the first moment that I truly questioned the permanence of anything I was feeling for you at that moment."

If that wasn't saying too much, he didn't know what was...

"Because Jack, if there was any hope at all of you returning to this world, I had to take whatever chance I had, regardless of whether you hated me or not."

He found it curious that she still came to rescue him, even though she had to end her life to do it, knowing that he might kill her all over again.

"I see. Do you still want to leave tonight? I will not stop you."

"No, I think I will remain on the ship until we arrive in Tortuga."

A nonsensical feeling of relief flooded him. He nodded and turned to face her again.

"Once we arrive there, I am going to leave the rest of you behind. I function better alone, as I told you. I have a...particular goal in mind that I need to see through."

She looked confused, as though she had been let in on a secret that she hadn't asked for.

"Why are you telling me this?"

"Because you are the only one smart enough to realize how stupid it would be to either try and stop me or follow me."

It was the truth. Gibbs would lecture him about the value of the crew, William would whine about how he needed Jack to formulate a plan for his father, and the rest of them would blindly follow those two. She at least had the sense to let him go.

She jerked her head in the direction of the others. "Beckett should be arriving soon. The sun is starting to rise."

He realized that he forgot to tell anyone that he didn't expect Beckett to come himself.

"Yes, it is. And no, Beckett will not be arriving soon. He is too smart to come here himself. No doubt he sent his best officers to collect us though."

And those officers would be in for an experience indeed. She followed him as he headed back in the direction of the burnt hut, and didn't say another word.
Chapter Notes

Chapter 20 is here! I think this is my longest chapter so far! I introduced a new character here. I hope you like her! I had a lot of fun writing this chapter, and I hope you have a lot of fun reading it!

Through The Devil's Eyes - Chapter 20

"Why...why do you want Elizabeth Swann so much, Lucifer?"

He sat in place, very still, and pondered her question.

Hell was a strange place. Humans liked to depict it as dramatic images of fire and brimstone. They wove stories about which misdeeds would send you to an eternal damnation of pain and torture. Murder a man in cold blood, it's to hell with you. Betray a close comrade, it's to hell with you. Condemn an innocent man to a life of exile, it's to hell with you. He had always found the hierarchy of crime to be fascinating. The moral and code system of humans was both intricate and completely foolish. The average human mind surveyed a situation and placed it in a black or white basket. To most, murder was just murder. All of them failed to see exactly how many shades of gray there were. A man could murder someone to avenge another or to avenge himself, or perhaps the other person just deserved death. A person could steal something out of necessity, or out of personal pleasure, or perhaps the item in question belonged to them in the first place. He chose to ignore their definition of who deserved his punishment, and who did not.

In fact, there was no such crime that ever sent anyone to Hell. Sometimes, terrible people were just gone when they died. He found the complete lack of existence would be much worse anyways as punishment. No, Hell, his domain, was reserved for those special terrible people that he found interesting. He supposed it might be a grand statement to say that he fancied himself to be a puppeteer dangling people by strings to make them dance, but that is exactly what he did. He wanted humans that fascinated him. He was a selfish being, and his desire was for humans to accept that they were all inherently selfish.

If one were to look at the ridiculous idea of gift giving on one's birthday, they might think that the person would be giving a gift because the recipient would feel happy. What the gift-giver fails to understand is that they would not give gifts if it did not make themselves happy.

So, he searched for the special breed of humans that did, in fact, commit terrible deeds, the ones that murdered just because they wanted to. The truly evil. He wanted to see what made them self-aware of their selfishness so that he could perhaps strive to imbue that attitude on the average human.

Why, then, did he want Elizabeth Swann? That was a complicated question. She was in fact very selfish. She abandoned a rich lifestyle for piracy, left her father behind for a life of adventure, left her fiance for a pirate, and did all of these things because she wanted to. However, as much as he attempted to convince Jack Sparrow that she was evil incarnate, this was only a front to convince him to kill her. She was not evil, and that was what was so fascinating about her.
Yes, he spent a good length of time dragging Jack through memories (partly to satiate his own curiosity about Jack's past), masquerading as bar slags, and preening about how Elizabeth wasn't worthy of Jack, but in reality, he did not care about Jack Sparrow's feelings towards her or hers for him. He had been aware that it was going to take a massive amount of convincing to force Jack to remove her from existence, because like Elizabeth, Jack also only did what he wanted to do, and what he wanted was for Jack to kill her because he desired it.

In the end, he had been unsuccessful. Jack proved to be far more intelligent and stubborn than even he predicted. He often thought lately that if a situation ever arose where he would be removed from his position, Jack might substitute. Now, all he could do was watch from afar and hope that one of them just might drive the other to murder all by themselves, preferably with Jack doing the killing.

He looked up slowly from where he was previously gazing, and finally met her eyes, his obsidian orbs staring at her opal ones.

"I want to study her."

She folded her arms across her chest and arched an eyebrow at him.

"You have studied the likes of Elizabeth Bathory, the Blood Countess. You asked her questions about why she liked to murder all of those servant girls. You sat in this room with her for days. You studied the Werewolf of Bedburg, Peter Stumpp. You wanted to know why he felt like he was given orders from you to slaughter all of those people. If I remember correctly, you tortured him for that. But Elizabeth Swann has neither murdered servant girls for pleasure or used your name to justify slaughter, yet you are obsessed with her!"

Her voice was rising in volume with each exclamation she made, and his smirk grew more pronounced when she spluttered out both of those names.

"Bathory was a very interesting creature. I believe she actually fancied herself to be a vampire of sorts, though to my knowledge the last vampire died in 1476. And Stumpp, well, I just...dislike being the inspiration for people like him."

He nearly chuckled when he saw her cheeks gain a red stain on them. Her silver hair was sticking to her face, and her eyes were blazing with frustration.

"I swear to God you infernal creature if you don't give me a straight answer-"

"You'll what? Send me to Hell?" He rose from his chair, his black robes writhing around him. "Also, haven't I asked you to refrain from mentioning him in my presence?"

She slapped her hand down on the table between them. "I don't care what you ask me to refrain from. Swann is completely outside of your realm of interest, so I want to know why."

He flashed her an amused look. "Jealous of her, are you?"

"Of course she is not jealous of you, Lucifer," a new voice interjected. They both snapped their heads around to look at the newcomer.

"He wants to study Elizabeth Swann, and I cannot fathom-"

"Ah, Sin, have you not sussed out the reason already? You are growing slow in your old age."
Clearly, Lucifer is interested in her because she is the first person since Jack Sparrow with a dark soul who is aware of it. Though, I think that Jack himself would be a far more worthy subject for him to study…there is also the fact that she managed to kill Jack. A very impressive feat, and with naught but a kiss at that."

The tall, thin woman stepped towards the table and procured a book from underneath her robes, her black hair glinting with the orange light coming from the torches on the wall.

He watched the book with keen interest. "Jack is very interesting, but I do not entertain the possibility of him allowing me to just stroll up and kill him, and I do not see anyone else being able to do it at this point. I will admit, I was not pleased with the fact that Davy Jones got his hands on Jack, but the existence of their deal, unfortunately, placed him in his clutches."

Fate glanced up from thumbing through the book. "I remember the day that Jack died. I don't think 'I was not pleased' quite covers the rage that emanated from you that day. We all felt it."

Sin made a noise of frustration that earned a glance from him. "What, do you need attention? Just go observe all of the humans that are literally carrying out your essence. People are sinning all over the place. Why, just a few moments ago in Singapore, there was this strange gathering of people dressed like-"

"I don't think we really need to talk about that", Fate interjected.

He sent a blistering glare in Sin's direction, amusement dancing in his eyes. She sent the look right back. A particularly loud turn of a page drew his attention back to the book. It was bound in black leather, and it was quite small, no bigger than the expanse of his own hand.

"It is not often that you bring something back from the human realm. Care to tell me what it is, or did you just bring it here to torture me?" he asked, trying to catch any of the writing on the page before Fate turned it again.

"Well, to compensate for my involvement in helping Elizabeth in her quest to rescue Jack, which I am sure you are still displeased with, I have brought you a gift."

"You are correct, though it was unavoidable. She was going to get to the Locker one way or another. What is it, the book?"

She trailed a pale finger along the page and smirked up at him.

"This is the place where the object of your selfish desires poured her soul out. This is where she wrote about the first time she saw Jack, her kidnapping, her ill-fated wedding, her banter with Jack aboard his now sunken ship, and his murder."

His excitement rose with each word she said. "This...this is Elizabeth's journal?"

"The only one in existence, all for you to drive yourself mad with. I am sure this will occupy us for several days."

"Us?"

Fate tinkled out a musical laugh. "Do you really think that you are going to be able to refrain from driving us mad while reading that thing? I am sure that we will hear each observation seven times over, in varying degrees of tone."

He glowered at her, before snatching the book from her grasp. Flipping to the front of the book, he
could make out an inscription on the inside cover. The ink was faded in some places.

'This journal belongs to Elizabeth Anne Swann.'

"Where did you get it?"

"I swiped it from Calypso's little shack before they burnt it to the ground. I am assuming this is one of the few material possessions that she carried around", she answered, a self-satisfied tinge to her voice.

The entries in the journal went all the way back to December of 1738, aging her at 14 when she wrote the first one.

"Since you two believe that I have no self-control, do you want to have a seat so that we can read this together?"

Both Sin and Fate glared at him with a look that would have turned a human man into a puddle but did nothing to him. They conjured chairs and pulled them up to sit at the table.

He flipped to the first entry, dated December 17th, and began to read.

---

My Father insists on putting me on display at these sleep-inducing tea parties and enjoys calling me the 'finest daughter of the British Crown'. The ladies all simper and sip their tea, while shooting me side looks of secret disdain. They are unfortunately privy to the fact that I enjoy taking walks out onto the rocky shores of the beach, reading every book I could get my hands on about pirates, and trying out some of the words I come across at every opportunity. I was no lady to them. I should probably care that I was not popular amongst them, but I just cannot give up my love of the word 'bugger' that easily. Ah well, it is time for me to close my eyes now, and picture myself as Captain of my own ship until I sleep. What do you suppose I would call my ship?

---

A pirate at heart, then. Clearly, she had a rebellious nature from a young age, and he inwardly chuckled at the image of the powdered-up women at the party sizing up a 14-year-old girl, and her returning a steely glare back to each one of them.

"Your lovely baritone voice lends itself very well to her, don't you think?" Sin quipped, enjoying the slight tightening of his mouth, a sure sign of his irritation.

"Do you want to read it instead?" he asked her with a pointed look.

She declined with a wave of her head. "Oh, no, go right on ahead."

The next entry was written with slightly sloppier handwriting, as though it was jotted down in a hurry.

---

January 7th, 1739

I witnessed something...something forbidden today...I'm not sure what to make of it. I had woken up thirsty during the night and went down to the kitchens to get some water. On the way back to my rooms, I noticed some kind of commotion in the drawing room. It looked like the shadows of people...Of course, my curiosity got the better of me. I should have just returned to my room, but I
decided to take a peek at what was going on. I had opened the door just enough to not be noticed, and just enough to see only a portion of the room. What I could see shocked me. There were a man's bare buttocks, and it was twitching back and forth. For a moment it had seemed like he was the only one there, but then I glimpsed the dark hair of a woman -one of the maids- She was kneeling in front of him, but I could not see the rest of her. Eventually, my hand slipped against the door, making a loud squeaking noise against the wood, and the two people stopped any movement. I scrambled away and ran up the stairs to my rooms.

I thought about telling my father about it, but I was sure that he would be displeased that I was sneaking out of my room at night, nevermind learning that I trespassed on what was clearly a private moment...Oh no! Here he comes right now! I must stop writing. Until next time...

He was finding it rather difficult to hold back what would most likely become hysterical laughter. He was not known to do more than chuckle. The other two had no such reservations. Musical laughter floated around the room.

He rolled his eyes at them. "I didn't realize that a child's first sexual encounter was such an occasion for humor."

"Oh, stop pretending. You found it funny too. And you know, it is quite ironic that she was mystified by that encounter when you consider who she hopes to keep her company in the future," Sin mused.

"What is that supposed to mean?" Fate questioned in an arched voice.

Sin looked round at her in confusion. "Don't tell me that you, even as a non-human entity, don't recognize the sexual prowess of Jack Sparrow."

Fate didn't satisfy her with an answer, instead motioning for him to turn the page to the next entry. Sin rolled her eyes in consternation.

The rest of the next several pages were about the mundane happenings of a governor's daughter. More tea parties, dresses, and disdain for the parties and dresses. Then, he happened upon an entry a year later, in 1740.

February 22nd, 1740

I was coming in from horseback lessons today and happened to overhear something that was not meant for my ears, at least not yet anyway. My father was talking to Captain Norrington about my future...more specifically my marital future. He talked about how he wanted a noble good man for me so that my future would remain secure. I would bear a few children to carry on the family name.

I didn't understand why the Captain needed to hear any of this. What did he have to do with me? And why was my father already talking about this? I was only 16!

Besides, I didn't particularly fancy being married off to a suitor, nor did I fancy having any children with whoever it was. Did my father not want me to be happy? Perhaps I could find safety and security as a married noblewoman, but certainly not happiness. Why couldn't he see that?

I shall mention my feelings to him when I have the next opportunity. Until next time.

Her rebellion against propriety was coming closer to its full scope. She clearly had unpopular ideas
about her planned out life, and the only thing she seemed to want was freedom from it, eventually at the expense of her lifestyle, her father, and two fiances.

"She probably wonders often whether the day that Jack Sparrow sailed into port was just a coincidence, or fate stepping in," Sin thought aloud, leveling a pointed look at Fate herself. She held her hands up in surrender.

"I admit, I may have set a string of events in motion to possibly get Jack to learn of the Interceptor in Port Royal. It was still his choice to go there and attempt to take it. However, I honestly did not engineer the two of them meeting. It was just coincidence that Norrington proposed to her at that exact moment, and it was certainly coincidence that she just happened to fall into the water next to where Jack was arguing with two officers."

"Yes, well, thank goodness Jack could swim. We might not be having this conversation had Elizabeth died. She would never have been able to turn Jack's ship into his temporary tomb for your amusement, Lucifer," Sin mused.

He once again rolled his eyes. "Can we please get on with it? At this rate, we will never approach the event in question."

He flipped to the corresponding date.

---

**June 17th, 1741**

*I am laying in my bed as I write this. My handmaiden gave me a right laugh today, internally of course. Suggesting that I was terrified by 'that pirate'. Perhaps to some, it might have looked like terror, but to anyone who knew any difference, they would've been able to notice that it was excitement. I had met my first real pirate!*

*I had read about Captain Jack Sparrow before. He had always fascinated me, but the drawn pictures in the books got him all wrong. They depicted him as a stout bulky man with short black hair and a grizzly beard. This description was absolutely incorrect.*

*His face was seared into my vision. Perfectly tanned skin stretched over fine cheekbones, bottomless dark brown orbs that looked like they could possess a hundred different kinds of mischief, a neatly groomed black mustache with twin braids at his chin, a red bandana wrapped around his forehead, and a wild mess of long tangled black hair.*

*As he had gazed down at me, I completely forgot that my dress must have been nearly transparent, until he noticed the necklace around my neck, and extended his hand to pick it up.*

*I could only compare his voice to velvet. It was an exquisite timbre, vibrating through my chest and sending strange pangs of heat lower.*

*Of course, this exchange between the two of us only lasted for a few moments before my father had to rush in and completely ruin it, before rudely condemning my rescuer to death, a point which I had immediately opposed.*

*The next few seconds after that, my opposition would be challenged when said pirate used me as an escape mechanism complete with his shackles around my neck. I pretended for everyone watching that I was not enjoying any of what was happening. Indeed, I even called the pirate captain himself 'despicable'.*

*But the feel of his body against mine was such a foreign but delicious sensation that I only wished we*
had been alone.

My heart hurts for what transpired next. To my knowledge, Sparrow and Will had a bit of a scuffle inside the smithy, where the pirate was captured and brought to the gallows.

He is to be hanged!

I tried my hardest to convince my father to reverse the order, but he would have none of it, claiming that all pirates deserved their sentences.

Until next time...

He was not sure if he should be surprised about the fact that she had encountered the legend that was Jack before she had met him. What really compelled him was that she was drawn to Jack, especially since the visage of him in the stories did not sound physically appealing. She was drawn to his aura, to the fact that he represented the freedom from her proper lifestyle that she so craved. But what made her decide to actively chase freedom? What differentiated her attitude about it from someone who just thought of it as a passing fancy? That answer still eluded him.

"She certainly has a way of talking about Jack, doesn't she?"

He let out a low drawn out growl. "Really, both of you might actually be secretly in love with him. Are you sure that you don't want Elizabeth dead as well so you can take a crack at him?"

"We can appreciate a man's physical appearance without wanting to be romantically involved," Sin said scathingly.

"I don't even think you can deny that Jack Sparrow is quite a fine specimen of a human, Lucifer," Fate added, a teasing note in her voice.

He shifted his red orbs away from their gaze, and flipped to the next page, holding back a blistering retort.

June 19th, 1741

I am trapped here. I don't know how to get out of this situation...Ghost pirates, a cursed medallion, that wretched Barbossa, this ship, and this horrible dress that smells of mothballs. How did I get here? He said something about needing my blood...I was too busy focusing on the fact that he mentioned killing me to hear the rest of the story.

They seemed to change their mind about my value as soon as I told them my last name...Could that have any significance?

I've got to go!

Hector Barbossa had been on his list of wanted humans for quite some time before Jack killed him. The man had ordered a raid on a village where his estranged wife and child were living, and he knew it. He knew they were there. He organized a mutiny against Jack just for some blasted treasure that ended up being cursed anyways. He always murdered anyone on the ships he attacked, even if they were not soldiers.

"You're thinking about when you found out that Hector was now yours to play with, aren't you. If
you were enraged the day Jack died, you were practically orgasmic the day Barbossa died," Fate said, smirking. "Where is he, anyway? Did you leave him in the torture room again, or is he lounging atop his own excrement in his cell?"

He tilted his head to the side. "I actually don't remember where I left him last. I have been too preoccupied with Jack and Elizabeth to really care. If either of you would like to fill in with him for me, I wouldn't complain."

They both scoffed. "You know we aren't the torturing type. That is all yours to deal with."

"Suit yourselves."

The next entry detailed Elizabeth's thoughts on her wedding, or rather, her uncertainty about the wedding, among other things.

---

_Saturday, 19th September, 1742_

_It has been exactly a year and three months since I was deposited back in Port Royal after the whole kerfuffle with Isla de Muerta, Jack, and Will. The couple of days after I returned had been a blur of hidden fear. Jack was to be hanged for sure, this time, and I was to go to watch. I hadn't been sure how I was going to bear seeing a friend killed, especially one who had rescued me several times._

_Will's miraculous escape plan actually worked, and Jack had been able to make his way back to his ship, after a fashion. I haven't heard much about Jack since then, besides the aggravated whispers from my father about Commodore Norrington's failed chase._

_It makes my head hurt to write about this, and indeed, the reason I haven't written in so long is that it has been difficult to articulate my thoughts even in my own head._

_I had been more relieved about Jack's escape than I had been about finally revealing my feelings to Will. Does that not say something about me?_  

_Jack said something odd to me right before he fell over the battlements. "It would never have worked between us darling." I have been wondering what he meant by that. Had it just been a flippant remark, or was there deeper thought behind it?_  

_I often think back to the adventure that the three of us went on, and many believe me to be traumatized by it, but in fact, I crave more. When I have a moment to think alone, I wonder if perhaps I could have persuaded Jack to take me with to his ship._

_But how can I have all of these thoughts in my head? I love Will. I have since we were children! Haven't I?_  

_I sincerely hope that this is just nonsense that my mind is imposing on me. Will and I are to be married in less than a week and I am questioning..doubting what I feel for him, all because of some pirate._  

_Yes, I am almost positive that these are just the reactions I am having from reminiscing about such an exhilarating time, but still, the pangs of guilt that I have about thinking about another man in such a way will not go away._  

_Until next time...when I shall be a married woman._
Oh yes, Jack certainly got to her. Even back then, he had burrowed under her skin.

"Sometimes I do wonder why all humans can't just admit that they want what they want, and claim it. The world might be much more simple", Fate mused.

Sin gave her a long icy stare. "You do realize that the reason I exist is that humans believe that some things are actually bad, even if they want them, right? However, in this case, I feel like Elizabeth could have been much happier had she run off to go find Jack before she was arrested."

Fate returned the cold look with an annoyed one. "At least I sent the hurricane and made sure that Beckett got the letter that explained how two...or three, rather...subjects were fraternizing with pirates. I could have let them get married at the proper time."

A loud throat clearing and an arched eyebrow turned their attention back to the journal.

"My question is, how was Turner completely oblivious to the fact that his fiance was fantasizing about another man?" he questioned aloud.

"Well, it apparently needed to go as far as her becoming a murderer for him to finally realize that she was different from the little girl that he met," Sin answered.

He shot her a puzzled look. "You think he would have forgiven her for kissing him if that had been all she had done?"

She narrowed her eyes and tilted her head slightly. "...Perhaps."

He contemplated her answer, his pale finger trailing lightly on his chin. "Even if he did, I doubt that it would have changed her feelings. If what you say is correct, and she wrote about her experience on the Black Pearl with Jack, then I am fairly certain that statement is about to be proven. She was smitten with him."

Both of them eyed him like predators. "With all of your talk about both of us being in love with him, I could turn it back on you and accuse you of the same thing. After all, we are not the ones that dragged Jack through forty-five memories."

Instead of getting offended, he simply returned their look with an impish glare. Turning the page, he found that he was partially correct. The next two entries detailed the aftermath of her wedding, and her short stay in Tortuga, just before she joined Jack's crew aboard the Pearl.

"Ah, I misspoke. We are not quite at the sexually charged banter quite yet, so you can wipe that overexcited grin off of both of your faces. It's very unbecoming."

September 30th, 1742

I sit here dressed in boy's clothes, hiding away from all of the men as they sleep in their hammocks. We have just arrived in Tortuga. It was not hard to gain passage on the Edinburgh Trader. All it took was a promise of hard work and a quiet mouth.

How did I end up on this ship? Well, as Beckett said (the awful heathen of a man that he is), "fate intervened". I am not sure if I believe in fate, but something did not want me to get married. A terrible hurricane washed in, and as if it couldn't get any worse, Will and I were arrested for aiding in the escape of Jack! I was sentenced to hang, and Will was asked to do some kind of task for Beckett involving Jack and his compass.
Not that I didn't have faith in Will, but I decided to do something about the whole messy situation myself. I tricked the guard into letting me out to go to the bathroom and knocked him out with his own pistol, which I subsequently stole.

Eventually, I made my way to Beckett's office and stole the Letters of Marque from their chest on his desk. Then I waited for him to arrive.

I learned something that I had incorrectly assumed before. Jack's compass does not only point to Isla de Muerta. So where does it point? Regardless, Beckett claimed that there was 'more than one chest of value', and he wanted it. Perhaps Jack's compass points to treasure in general?

I reminded Beckett that he robbed me of my wedding night, with the aid of the pistol digging into his chin. He signed and sealed the Letters, and then accused me of wanting them for Jack. Certainly not!

I immediately left and headed to the mansion to procure some clothing that was decidedly not for a lady. Soon enough, I was nearly unrecognizable. There was a ship making port down at the docks, and I waited until most of the crew were lodged in the handful of inns on the island, then I hid away in the cellar of the ship.

Of course, the captain eventually caught me the next day. I quickly explained that I was only a boy interested in some work aboard a ship. He conceded and allowed me to stay, as long as I kept busy. And I did. I scrubbed the deck and railings, mended the sails, and kept night watch when necessary.

Which turned out to be quite fortunate, because I managed to convince the captain of the ship that there were good business prospects in Tortuga, with a little bit of help from my wedding dress and some gunpowder. He began sailing there straight away.

Now I only have to wait until I have a moment to slip away into town.

Until next time…

Clever girl. He did wonder how she made her way to Tortuga. It was also quite ironic that her wedding dress was used to help her escape into a path that would almost certainly prevent any such wedding from ever having a chance of happening again.

October 1st, 1742

I found a place to sleep overnight, after giving the barkeeper a few shiny gold coins in one of the few out-of-the-way bars in town. There was no sign of Jack that I could see on my way here, but the Black Pearl is docked in the harbor. He's here somewhere.'

Several hours later…

I didn't find Jack, but I did find another person that has been missing for quite some time.

I tried to feel bad about James ending up lying with the pigs, but I just couldn't bring myself to do it. It was rather funny in a sad way. He keeps glaring at me. Though, I can't tell if that is because I hit him over the head with a bottle, or because he didn't end up marrying me.

I couldn't just let him keep fighting while piss-drunk! And I am certainly not going to let Will's sword fighting training go to waste. Naturally, I jumped into immediate danger and it was exhilarating. I wonder if Jack had been in the Wicked Wench somewhere, watching me jumping around slashing
and parrying. He certainly wasn't here now.

I will just have to track him down myself, instead of hoping he will turn up somewhere.

Until that happens…

Ah, the ill-fated Commodore Norrington. He had been a man that was too proud for his own good, and that pride ended up with him covered in pig manure with his former fiance kneeling over him looking better off than he did. Really, he should have been able to realize that attempting to follow Captain Jack Sparrow anywhere is bad luck.

Well, there is nothing for it now. He was back in the Navy, under the command of Beckett.

"I am quite glad that Elizabeth never ended up with him. They would have made such a boring pair. Though, I certainly prefer the rougher James over the primped and perfumed James," Sin mused. "He is much more interesting."

"It is difficult to be interesting when your life ambition consists of hunting pirates, being promoted, and proposing to a girl that is most certainly not interested in you," he responded. "Do be quiet, we are just getting to the good part, at least for you."

October 2nd, 1742

I slept in the inn again for another night, and once night fell today, I went in search of Jack. The most obvious place to look was his ship, so that is where I went.

I certainly found him, looking exactly the same way as I had seen him last, and he believed me to be a young man proclaiming my love for him until I specified that it was William Turner that I was looking for.

As soon as he realized it was me, he immediately suggested to Gibbs to hide the rum. Of course, he would associate me with the burning of his precious rum. He ignores the fact that if I hadn't burned it, we would most likely be dead.

He then proceeded to tell me that my attire did not 'flatter me', and that I should be wearing a dress or nothing. I should have been outraged by his suggestive comment, but it really just made me feel a bit tingly.

No dress in his cabin indeed.

He claimed that he was not involved, but I learned that Will had gone aboard the Flying Dutchman to obtain the key to the chest that housed the heart of Davy Jones. Could this be the chest that Beckett was referring to?

He also claimed that were I to desire to find the chest, it would lead me to reunite with Will. It seemed reasonable enough. I was still mystified by how Jack expected to find the chest at all.

I had watched curiously as he procured his compass from his belt. I listened, fascinated, as he explained to me that his compass pointed to the thing that the user wants most. Of course! Beckett's greatest desire was to control the sea, and he was going to do that by controlling Jones with his heart!

But, something was still bothering me. Why couldn't Jack just use the compass to get to the chest?
Ah, well, I shall ask him at some point. He has given me one of the small crew cabins to sleep in for the time being. Hopefully, I survive this trip…

Until next time…

"Jack got that compass from Calypso, did he not?" Sin questioned.

Lucifer and Fate nodded at the same time. "He remains one of the very few men that have been able to resist her charms."

The next two entries were written as a continuation of the same day, though they were clearly two separate occurrences.

October 5th, 1742

The audacity! I asked Jack for the Letters of Marque back that he confiscated from me, and he had the nerve to suggest that I persuade him! It most likely didn't help that my preceding comment was that Will taught me how to handle a sword.

Damned double meanings.

We do talk to each other with a strangely practiced ease. Our banter bounces off the other relentlessly. Just as one of us is finishing a retort, the other has an equally snippy comment to make, and half of them are sexual innuendoes.

I should probably feel guilty for interacting with Jack in this manner, and I do a little bit, but I am finally on a ship on the open sea. Not just any ship, the Black Pearl. With Jack. I cannot find the room to feel guilty right now.

Also, I thought Jack's compass was fascinating before. Now, I want to hurl the damned thing overboard. It continues to tell me that Jack is what I desire most, and that is simply not true. The thing must be more broken than even Jack thought.

James' comments don't help, either. I am sure he did wish I looked at him the way I looked at Jack if I had any specific way of looking at Jack at all, which I don't. I do have to say that he is far more interesting without his primped up uniform on.

Several days later…

A proposal of marriage? I honestly thought I had heard wrong when that came out of Jack's mouth. Earlier today, he had sauntered over to tell me that I looked 'troubled'. I said that I thought I would be married by now, which is certainly the truth.

He actually said to me that he could perform a marriage at that very second, on the deck. It became quite clear to me that he was referring more to the wedding night portion, rather than the wedding ceremony. Of course, he would be, he is a womanizing pirate.

And I loathe admitting that I considered his proposal. Though it certainly would not happen on the bloody deck in broad daylight. But I love Will, and I think about him every day. I do hope he is okay with Jones and all...I can't wait to tell him about my journey to Tortuga to find Jack!

Jack also said something rather interesting to me. He said I would 'come over to his side' eventually. One word: curiosity.
That could sum up all of my feelings that I have felt while I have been aboard the Pearl. I was curious about him, about this new role that I was filling, and about the newfound freedom I had. Though Jack seemed to think that that curiosity would lead to me sleeping with him.

But what if he is suggesting something deeper? What if he wants me by his side?

No, that is wasteful thinking. I love Will, and I intend to marry Will if it is the last thing I do, hurricane or not.

And he almost kissed me!

I would be lying if I said that I didn't hope (at least partly) for him to finish it, as guilty as I feel about that. But he stopped right before his lips touched mine. I don't know why. I claimed that I was proud of him, but I really just felt a bit disappointed.

Oh, Gibbs just spotted land.

Until next time…

"The duality here is interesting. You can clearly see the mental battle that she is having. She writes about how she loves William, but then immediately turns around and comments on how Jack makes her feel, almost in the same sentence," he mused.

"Women are fickle creatures," Fate responded.

He closed the journal with a slap. "Best save the best entry for later. I want to have more insight into her at present before I read her past thoughts about Jack's murder."

The other two nodded, and turned to leave, grumbling about having to wait. He rolled his eyes at their backs.

Until we meet again, Elizabeth. Until we meet again.
Here is Chapter 21! Sorry for the long wait. I have been starting up the job search since I graduated at the beginning of the month, and before that, I was completely swamped with college work.

I hope you enjoy this chapter!

Sand lifted from the ground forming small funnels as wind snaked across the beach, sending soft whistling noises through the air. Palm trees swayed away from the shore, as though they were cowering in fear. Smoke still rose from the hut, intertwining with itself in a braid reaching up to the blue Caribbean sky.

He emerged from the jungle first, and the rising sun illuminated his bronze face. He stopped at the edge of the palm tree forest and laid the side of his hand flat against his forehead to block out the bright light.

"They're here," she said, a hard edge to her voice.

He lowered his eyes to look to his right and gave her a curt nod.

"I am right once in awhile," and then he turned for a moment to gaze at her face, smirking when her cheeks became stained with the smallest hint of a blush.

"So, what is the plan? Are you going to orchestrate some kind of grand hijacking?"

Now he turned to fully face her, his long black hair framing his face. She recoiled as though she was remembering the last time she asked him to disclose his plans to her.

"No, I already told you, I work best alone. At least on matters like this."

She glanced over his shoulder at the ship that was growing larger with every passing second.

"I may have been sarcastic about suggesting that you involve the entire crew, but surely you don't mean to take the entire ship by yourself?"

He tilted his head in mild annoyance. "I can't tell if you lack faith in me, or if you are concerned for my well-being."

"There are probably more than twenty crew on that."

"No, most of them are currently rowing towards shore. Did Will never tell you how we managed to commandeer the Dauntless?" he asked, cutting her off. She wanted to shout at him.

"Bits and pieces. Never the whole story. Mostly he focused on how you managed to use your overinflated reputation to bluff your way through," she said tightly.
He raised an eyebrow at that and tilted his head in a challenge for her to elaborate.

"I think he believed that if I was told too much, I would reminisce about it," she added with a clipped voice, ignoring him.

"Will always did want to box you up into a neat little package. I fear that he was and is incapable of seeing you as anything other than 'Miss Swann'. Probably why he can barely look at you now."

Her mouth dropped open slightly. "Excuse me? I beg to differ. Will would have certainly been supportive of whatever it is that I had wanted to do."

"Sure, as long as it meant sipping tea in corsets and giving him children. Did you know that he nearly tried to run me through when I revealed that his father was actually a pirate?"

The skin of her fist turned a splotchy red and white color as she clenched it against her vest.

He sighed. "Your fantasy of William being a pirate hopefully died the moment that you returned home after the Isla de Muerta business. That boy is no more a pirate than I am a chambermaid. Had I never fished you out of the harbor, I can guarantee that Will would have tried to turn you into a broodmare."

"How dare you! I would have never allowed him to-"

"Oh Christ, Elizabeth. I said he would try. I didn't say anything about him succeeding. Actually, I figure that you might have just left him before he ever managed to convince you to go to bed with him. And while we are on that topic, I highly doubt that you would have ever been satisfied with his-"

Her hand struck out, impacting his face with a harsh exactness. His head snapped slightly to the left, and he clenched his teeth together in irritation causing the muscles of his jaw to contort.

The slap burned, and his cheek tingled for quite a while afterward, but the fury in her eyes was worth it. He loathed to admit it, but she was beautiful when she was angry, much like the sea during a storm.

"Funny that you don't deny it. Then again, you killed me because you felt something for me. I would hate to see what you would do to a man that you were bored with," he snapped, refusing to rub his smarting skin.

"I betray men that I am bored with, for men that certainly don't deserve the attention. And for your information, I would have been quite satisfied with anything Will offered me."

"Right, because a man that actually makes you wait for anything other than light kisses until your wedding night is going to give you the performance of a lifetime. I would give him maybe a minute and a half, and that's being generous," he shot back, bracing himself for another slap.

It didn't come. Instead, she stepped a little closer to him, a predatory look on her face.

"And you? You're getting on in years, you probably haven't had any of that kind of company for a while, and you spend all your time fantasizing about me. I might give you five minutes. And that's being generous."

A very slow and dangerous smile stretched across his face. "Unfortunately for you, Lizzie, it is highly unlikely that you are ever going to get the opportunity to test that theory. And I am not the only one with fantasies. If I might recall, it was you that described me taking you against the rock
"You hardly seemed disinterested in that description," she argued, but the anger had left her voice, replaced by resignation. He gazed at her for a moment, a strange emotion attempting to strangle his chest. Regret? He couldn't identify it.

"*Anyways*, we snuck up the back of it from the water, and I held Lieutenant Gillette at gunpoint. Threatened him with death or something I think, hard to remember. Needless to say, the entire crew practically fell overboard trying to get onto the longboat. A fruitless task that was, seeing as how the Interceptor nearly obliterated them," Jack explained.

She opened her mouth to argue, but he cut her off again.

"Royal Navy soldiers are cowards when confronted with actual confrontation."

"And were *you* the exception?"

His eyes widened a fraction in surprise. "How did you know-"

"I inferred from the way Beckett talked about you that you had a past history. It only makes sense that you worked for him."

"No, I was not the exception, because I was never a Royal Navy soldier. Sure, I wore the uniform and did what Beckett told me, at least most of the time, but I was always a pirate."

He looked back around and surveyed the scene quickly, before turning back to face her with a gleam in his eyes.

"Don't worry, I never said that you won't get any excitement from this whole ordeal. While I could take that ship should it harbor the entire crew on board, I won't have to."

She inclined her head in the direction of the beach.

"Yes, they are lowering long boats now. Groves will stay on board with his best officers, and send the rest to collect us. You're right, they are cowards. So, what am I to do on shore?"

He turned to face the spot where the longboats were heading and gestured with his hand as he explained the plan.

"You are going to go over there and tell Gibbs and Will that you are to ambush them the second their feet hit the sand. They won't expect any of you to have the energy for fighting."

"You mean for us to kill them?"

He closed his eyes and imagined her face going stark white the moment she experienced her first kill in battle.

"No, obviously not. Though if the situation escalates to that, I would certainly expect you to act accordingly. You didn't have a problem with murdering me. Do a few soldiers really matter to you?"

Immediate anger was painted across her face. However, she said nothing in response to his barb.

"So a hostage situation then. I suppose they could have some use alive. What about you? Are you going to keep the men on board the ship as hostages?" she said, her face flushed from the mounting irritation.
"What I do with my part in this is my business, not yours. And I will tell you now to waste no time being concerned with anyone but yourself should things get ugly. A person's only true weakness in battle is trying to protect someone else."

She looked like she wanted to argue something further but wisely decided against it. After looking back at the ship for a quick check of the situation, he began removing his effects.

His pistol nearly plummeted to the ground when he shoved it into her hands, along with his sword, hat, and coat.

"What are you-"

"You don't suppose I am going to swim all the way over to the ship while being weighed down by all of this, do you? Go ahead and use my pistol and sword if you like. Just don't ruin them."

He was clad now in just his belts and breeches, white shirt, waist scarf, and bandana. His boots were sitting next to her feet. Something shiny caught the light of the sun in his right hand, and she stared at it for a moment before she realized that he clutched a small dagger. She raised a dark brow.

"You are going to take command of the entire ship with that?"

Before she realized what was happening, he had quickly circled around behind her, and locked both of her arms behind her back with his own, causing all of his effects to tumble to the ground. Her feet slid in the hot sand, and she fell back against him to keep herself upright. She barely contained her gasp when he pressed the blade of the dagger against the soft skin of her neck.

When he was sure that she wasn't going to struggle, he released her wrists, and slid his hand down to grip her hip just hard enough to make her listen, and let his lips brush against her neck as he spoke.

"Here is your first lesson as a fledgling pirate, darling. There is almost nothing that won't do as a weapon should the need arise. The only real issue is whether you have the skill to wield it. As you can see, I do. I suggest that you learn to stop questioning my competence if you expect to be on remotely good terms with me for the foreseeable future."

The curve of her body against his made him forget himself for a moment, and then he got caught by surprise when her fingers curled around his wrist to pry the dagger away from her throat. She turned to face him slowly. Her cheeks were stained red, and her eyes had darkened. Her pulse was jumping in her neck, and he had the sudden urge to wrap his mouth around the sun-kissed skin.

A frozen moment passed where they just gazed at one another, and then Elizabeth backed away quickly and gathered up all of his effects.

"I expect that you are going to give us some kind of signal when you have the ship secured?" she questioned, avoiding eye contact.

"No. I planned on sailing off into the distance without you," he snarked. He earned a frustrated snort in response. *That* was only a half-joke. It had, in fact, crossed his mind.

She finally looked up at him but was only rewarded with his retreating back as he stalked towards the water.

The water was cool as he stepped into it, the sand filling in the spaces between his toes.

The longboats were heading in the direction of Gibbs and the rest of the crew, and neither they nor
the soldiers had appeared to spot him or Elizabeth. From the distance that he was standing, it looked like they had left Groves and three or four crew members on board. The ship shared the same kind of structure as the Dauntless, which meant that Groves would be housed in the main cabin in the front of the ship.

Elizabeth was stalking through the sand behind him in the direction of the rest of the crew when he quickly glanced back to look at her. Good. Her involvement in his affairs was not something that he was fully prepared to factor in yet. Especially after the conversation that they had just had. There was nothing quite like feeling both uncontrollable hate and the urge to protect her at the same time, and he was not sure which side of that dynamic would win.

_HMS Voyager_ could be made out on the side of the ship as it sat in the water. It was a handsome ship, with pristine white sails and a fresh wood staining. But just like all of the other ships in the Royal Navy, it lacked character. Even his own ship, The Wicked Wench, had lacked something special that made it stand out from the rest of the fleet. That was, of course, until Davy Jones summoned it from the depths. It had returned to him, and it had retained the charred visage that it went down with. He had rechristened it as The Black Pearl, and it had become the terror of the Caribbean.

Now it was gone because of the very deal that he had made to get it back. The world was cruel, but he could not say that the world was not occasionally _just_.

What was not _just_ was Elizabeth's complete ignorance his own skills. He expected that her doubt of the stories that were told about him contributed to it. Even so, most of the stories had truth hidden within them, and most of the time, the truth was far more harrowing than the myth.

Sitting alone on a deserted island for any length of time in the Caribbean with the knowledge that you may never leave could make a man go insane. _Pirates_ are provided a pistol with which to end their miserable suffering. That temptation makes a man feel comfortable with the insanity. When Elizabeth had scoffed at him after learning that his weeks and weeks of being stranded on the rum runner's island was in reality only three days, he had half a mind to leave her there if they ever escaped.

Of course, that plan was killed as soon as _her_ plan came to fruition. She could have burned the entire bloody island down to make a signal fire, as long as she had left his rum alone, and her rescuers would have named him King of England before they allowed her to be left behind.

His face had been screwed up into a grimace at that memory, and it became even more so when he remembered what he was going to have to do to pull this whole thing off.

His experience with infiltration was limited, but any fool knew that silence and patience were the keys. Unfortunately, all of the trinkets that were tied into his hair needed to go. He clutched the dagger, rose it to his head, and methodically began to cut everything out besides the strand of beads that hung over his bandana. Once it was all removed, he placed it all into a little pouch that hung from one of his belts.

Smoothing a hand through his hair to make sure he didn't miss anything, he quickly scanned the ship with a small spyglass that he had tied to one of his belts. All of the crew members were standing on the right side of the ship, so it would be best to go up the left side.

Steeling himself for the task ahead of him, he dove into the water and swam.

_She stomped through the sand towards the crew, still a little frazzled from the events from earlier by_
the pool of water, and she could still feel the sharp edge of Jack's dagger against her throat.

Jack’s sword was now hanging from her hip, and his pistol was shoved into her belt. She wore his hat on top of her head, even though it was a bit too large for her, and she clutched his coat in her right hand.

Occasionally, she would glance back at the swimming figure that she could barely make out, attempting to picture him threatening Groves to give up the ship. After the demonstration earlier, she had an easier time of it.

Everything since bringing Jack back from the Locker felt incredibly bizarre no matter how many ways she tried to analyze it. Jack's mood seemed to swing back and forth far quicker than she could catch on. She could not get a handle on what was going on inside his mind, and she certainly did not gain any concrete answers from anything he said.

At the moment, she felt like she was stuck in a strange sort of calm before the real animosity between them made itself known. Jack had been angry with her the last couple of days but had given her no indication that she was a definite enemy to him. His behavior suggested that he was incredibly conflicted. Lucifer, from what she understood, had dredged up quite a bit of his past, so between that, what she had done to him, and his apparent feelings towards her before that, it must be a maelstrom within his thoughts.

She had taken their smooth banter and ease of company for granted during her days on the Pearl while they were heading to Isla Cruces, and she desperately wanted it back now. Perhaps something would change once they acquired this ship.

All she could do now was avoid provoking him to re-evaluate the apparent tolerance for her, even if it had the potential to undo itself without her interference. Everything was going to be hanging in a very delicate balance and in the world of pirates, a balance rarely lasted.

Gibbs looked around at her when she approached. The silent question of Jack's whereabouts hung between them. As an answer, she inclined her head in the direction of the ship. He closed his eyes for a moment in resignation.

"Of course the daft bugger means to take it alone," he said, shaking his head.

"You don't think he can do it?" she asked.

He watched the ship for a moment more. "Oh no, I have no doubt that he can do it. Did he give you any orders?"

She had been watching the longboats approaching while she listened to Gibbs. They did not look like they were unprepared to fight. They had their hands hovering in the vicinity of their swords and they were glaring at the lot of them.

"Yes, he told me to organize an ambush, but I don't think they are going to be susceptible."

"I wouldn't say that. Perhaps we can reach a happy medium between ambushing and intimidating. Take a page out of Jack's book. Give them a warning shot," Will chimed in.

A shot into the sky would not do much besides confuse them, but she had a better idea that might rattle them a bit.

She drew Jack's pistol from her belt and checked it to make sure it was ready to fire. The soldiers stared at her as their boats touched the shore. She could not tell if they were confused because it was
her with a pistol, or because one of them was preparing to fire at them.

"Miss Swann, please place the gun on the ground. We mean to cause no conflict."

Gibbs smirked at them, and she raised a sculpted eyebrow. Two soldiers in the front jerked back a bit when she took aim and fired at one of their hats.

The soldier's eyes bugged out of his head when it flew clean off of his head, landing in the water behind them.

"We mean no conflict either, but there will be one if you do not follow my instructions," she barked, lowering the gun and sliding it back into her belt. "What is your name, officer?"

"Lieutenant Sheffield," he said, after collecting himself. He motioned for them to climb out of the longboats onto the shore. She watched their movement carefully.

"Well, Lieutenant Sheffield, you have two choices. You and your crew can either become residents of this lovely coastline," she said, motioning behind her. "Or, you can cooperate and assist us in the voyage back to Tortuga."

He scoffed immediately at the mention of that. "Tortuga? Why on earth would you want to go to Tortuga?"

"All of us have business to attend to in Tortuga, but that is none of your concern."

One of the other men chimed in. "Miss Swann, I don't know what authority you think you have over us, but this is not a situation in which any of you have the upper hand. We are here to take you back to Port Royal, and back to Lord Beckett."

"If Beckett wanted us so bad, he could have come and collected us himself. As far as my authority, I have the blessings from our Captain to engage you in whichever way I see fit," she shot back.

When she mentioned Jack, all of them looked around as though they were under the impression that he had been there the whole time.

"And where is your illustrious Captain, Miss Swann? Last I heard, you had just rescued him from Davy Jone's Locker. Surely he is not fit to give anyone any orders," Sheffield sneered.

She looked past him to the ship and smiled slowly.

"Perhaps you missed something that I said. I believe I stated that you have an option to accompany us on the voyage to Tortuga. You didn't think we were going to make that journey in a longboat, did you?"

Sheffield stared at her a moment, confusion washing over his face. With hesitation, he looked around at the ship behind them and then whipped his head back around to continue staring at her with a much different expression.

"Do you mean to tell me that Sparrow is taking our ship?" he snapped, turning his body to the side to jab a finger at the vessel in question.

"I would wager a guess that he is threatening your captain with bodily harm right at this very moment," Gibbs boasted.

"I am sorry to tell you that Sparrow is wasting his time. He will never succeed by himself."
"So the story about how Jack and I single-handedly commandeered the Dauntless and the Interceptor doesn't get told to low-ranking officers such as yourself? Pity," Will countered.

She glanced at him in appreciation. When he didn't return the look, she shifted her gaze back to the offending man.

"As you can see, we have no reason to expect our Captain to fail. Your crew, on the other hand…"

Sheffield's face turned a unique shade of red before he suddenly drew his sword.

She responded by drawing Jack's sword a moment later, the rest of them following suit on both sides.

"Just remember that I did offer you a way of out this, Lieutenant."

"It will be you begging for us to spare your lives, Miss Swann."

He lunged forward when the rest of the officers did, slashing his blade through the air. A look of shock covered his face when she easily blocked it. Clouds of sand were kicked up as he stepped back from her to quickly reevaluate his approach.

"I will have you know that I learned from the two best swordsmen that I have ever seen. You are not going to win this fight."

"Cockiness has caused many of the best swordsmen to lose, Miss Swann. Don't forget that," the lieutenant replied.

She didn't respond. Instead, she struck, stepping forward before he realized what was happening. When he barely managed to block her blow, she slid her blade off his and went for his shoulder. She glowered at him when he jerked out of the sword's path.

"So, after Tortuga, what is your plan?" he questioned.

She eyed him suspiciously. She knew that he was trying to distract her, and she took the bait on purpose, interested in any information that he might reveal.

"Why?" she snapped, brandishing her sword.

A smug look crossed his face. "Well, the people of Port Royal certainly won't welcome you back if you attempt to return on your own. You are branded as a pirate now, Miss Swann, regardless of who your father is."

"I am well aware. Lord Beckett saw to that when he arrested Will and me for helping Jack escape the hangman's noose, despite the fact that Jack never deserved to be there in the first place."

The man shook his head disdainfully. "Your idea of who deserves what needs some reworking, as does your idea of the proper path for a woman such as yourself."

She tightened her face. "The only path for me at the moment is putting this sword through your alcohol-inflated stomach."

She lunged forward again, expecting his block, and withdrew for only a second before slashing at his arm, catching him just above the wrist.

He stumbled back, clutching his wounded limb, and swore at her.

"My my, what would your father say about you now, gallivanting with pirates."
"My father has nothing to do with this."

"Oh, your father has *everything* to do with this."

A twinge of fear invaded her body. He straightened up and seemed to catch on to the shift in her mood.

"Perhaps you might want us to take you back to Port Royal after all."

"*What are you talking about?*" she hissed.

When he didn't respond, she angrily slashed her blade at him catching him clean across his chest. Blood quickly bloomed through his shirt, and the commotion around her became an imperceptible blur of noise and color. He stumbled back, this time losing his footing. Another cloud of sand burst up from the ground when he fell onto his back, his face screwed up in a pained grimace.

She stepped forward and knelt next to him. She placed Jack's sword under the man's chin against his neck.

"You are going to tell me what has happened to my father or so help me, I will *bury* you in this sand," she growled.

He coughed, and weakly pawed at the wound on his chest. She pressed the blade of the sword harder into his skin.

"Let's just say that his usefulness to Lord Beckett has run its course. If you are wanting to see him again, I would suggest Port Royal as your next stop, but it might be too late by then."

She sucked in an angry breath, withdrew the sword, and smashed the man in the face with her fist as hard as she could. He was immediately knocked out cold.

She stood, and saw that the rest of the officers were either indisposed or deceased. Will studied her for a moment, before turning his gaze to Lieutenant Sheffield. He raised one eyebrow in a silent question. She considered her response for a moment before she decided that no one needed to know what was going on. It was her private business.

"Nothing. Just a conflict of interest."

Will nodded, but seemed dissatisfied. Gibbs was studying her as well, but it was more of a calculative stare instead of Will's judgment.

They secured the living and sent the dead to be claimed by the sea. Then, they all sat and waited. After ten minutes or so went past, Gibbs finally broke the tense silence.

"Did Jack tell you how he was going to sig-"*

He was cut off by the distinct sound of cannon fire in the distance.

"Ah. Well, we will need to make the trip in two rounds. Elizabeth, Tia, Pintel, Ragetti, and I will go in the first longboat. Will, you will come with me when I return. We will ferry the prisoners and Jack can decide what to do with them when we get to the ship."

He looked at her for approval, and she nodded.

"Let's go."
His arms were just starting to ache when he latched onto a rope hanging from the side of the ship. Taking a moment to flounder in the water, he looked up and studied the tall vessel. There was a line of small handholds that led up to the railing. He should be able to map out a way to get into the captain’s cabin without being seen by the rest of the crew.

Before starting to climb, he looked back at the coastline. The longboats had just arrived, and he could barely make out the Navy officers and his crew. No one looked to be fighting yet.

Choosing to ignore them for the moment, he began to climb. Water cascaded off of his hair adding even more weight to his already soaked shirt and vest.

Halfway up, he heard a gunshot off in the distance. He shifted to the right, keeping a tight grip on the handhold with his right hand, and produced the spyglass again.

The officers were climbing out of the longboats, and Elizabeth had his pistol pointed at the one in the front. She must have given them a warning shot. Perhaps these officers were better informed about their fighting skills than he thought.

Shaking his head, he finished the climb to the top of the ship, and then stopped for a moment to rest. He positioned himself so that he could just see over the edge of the ship through the gaps in the railing. There were five crew members bustling around towards the front of the ship, and he could smell smoke coming from the captain's cabin. Groves must already be in there.

The cabin had two entrances. There were the main double doors in the front and a smaller door around the right side. Going through the front would be doable, but that approach had more of a chance of alerting Groves. He tried to listen for movement inside the cabin, but the only sounds coming from anything was the creaking of the ship and the chatter of the crew members.

He shimmied to the right a bit, and then very quietly hoisted himself up and over the railing. Keeping a side-eye on the men on deck, he took calculated steps towards the back entrance of the cabin and then flattened himself against the wall. There was a small window next to the door, which provided a perfect opportunity to get a visual on what was going on inside.

Groves was knelt over a chest, rummaging for something. The memory of commandeering the Interceptor still brought a smirk to his face, if only for the dumbfounded look on Groves’ face, along with the immensely displeased look on Norrington's.

Pushing himself off of the cabin wall, he placed his hand on the doorknob and turned it without making a sound. The old familiar smell of tobacco wafted into his face, and there was also a pungent smell of alcohol lingering in the air. He carefully slipped through the small gap he had made for himself, keeping an eye on the captain.

The door would most likely creak if he closed it, so he left it alone. To the right was a handsome desk covered in various papers and a few candles. A deep red rug adorned the floor, and bookcases lined the walls, but they were mostly empty. A small bed was tucked into the left corner, and a nightstand with a lantern sat next to it.

He waited until the captain closed the trunk, using the noise it made to cross the room quickly without being noticed. He gripped the man by the back of the jacket and hauled him up, immediately ending any chance of struggle with his dagger pressing into the slightly exposed skin of his neck.

"Long time no see. In fact, last time we saw each other, you were watching me sail away into the distance with the Interceptor, Theodore."
The Navy captain stood very still, well aware that any wrong move could cost him his life.

"Captain Sparrow, I presume."

"Aye. I expect that me turning up here is a bit of a surprise. Since none of you have any knowledge of the Locker and how it works, I'm going to wager a guess that you thought I would be close to dead upon rescue."

"No, we did not expect you to be...functioning. But here you are, threatening me."

He searched the man's uniform for any weapons and threw the small pistol in the left pocket behind him.

"I presume that Jones told Beckett about my untimely demise?"

Groves shifted his weight a bit, making him to reassert the presence of the dagger.

"Yes, he gave us some...inside information. Let's just say that Lord Beckett has command of the sea now, due to a little gift from our mutual friend James Norrington."

He raised an eyebrow and spun the man around to face him, placing the knife just above his jugular vein.

"Aye, the heart of Davy Jones for his new title and authority. It was a smart move, really."

"I also heard a rumor that Elizabeth Swann was responsible for your demise."

The dagger was pressed a little harder into the man's throat.

"Oh, I'm sure that Jones couldn't wait to communicate that little detail."

Despite flinching from the pain of the shallow cut appearing on his skin, the Navy captain kept taunting him.

"That one, yes, but there were some details that were lost in translation, I think. Lord Beckett saw to that."

A moment passed while he reviewed all of the ways that he had imagined murdering Cutler Beckett, and it made him feel marginally better.

"What kind of details?" he snapped.

Groves shook his head. "Sorry Captain, but I am not authorized to tell you any more information on the matter."

He debated questioning the man further but then realized that Gibbs and the rest of his crew were probably getting rather restless. It was time to move this commandeering along.

"Fine, keep your information to yourself for now. I'll figure it out eventually. For now, you are going to come with me outside and you are going to announce that you are giving up your captaincy of this ship to me. You will see to it that your crew accepts my position, and you are going to do all of this without complaint. Is that clear?"

The two men stood in silence for a moment, before Groves responded.

"And if I don't comply? What then?"
He closed his eyes briefly, weighing his options.

"Most of the time, I try to avoid killing people, so I would like to continue that tradition here. However, if you make this difficult for me, I will bring you outside as a corpse, and when your crew sees that I dispatched you with relative ease, fear will force them to submit to me. It's your choice, Captain."

"Fine, I will grudgingly hand the ship over to you, Captain Sparrow, on one condition."

He tilted his head, wondering why the man thought it prudent to attempt negotiations when he had just heard threats to his life.

"And what's that?"

"When we reach Tortuga since I presume that is where we are going, I want to count on you to ensure that we blend in well enough to avoid immediate...reactions."

He very nearly laughed at that.

"You want me to make the lot of you look like pirates."

Groves nodded. "I can't imagine that any pirate would take kindly to the Royal Navy suddenly turning up on their doorstep."

He lowered the knife and shoved it into his belts, and then turned to pick up the pistol that he had thrown earlier.

"No, they wouldn't. I agree to those terms if only to make the entire arrival less annoying for me."

"Always the selfish pirate, Captain Sparrow."

He had to at least appreciate the man for his sense of humor.

"Well, why don't we start with you now. Lose that god awful uniform, or at least the jacket, and throw the wig overboard. In fact, just burn it."

Once the Navy captain was clad in just his white shirt and pants, his straw-brown hair hanging just past his shoulders, Jack nodded, satisfied.

"Good enough. Let's go," he said, making sure to remind *Theodore* that he still had possession of the pistol, and would not hesitate to use it.

He let the other man lead the way to the double doors, and when they swung open, they both stepped through.
Yay, here is chapter 22!

Hope everyone enjoys!

Drop me a review if you like it! I always love to discuss things with my fellow readers!

He led the previous captain of the *Voyager* out of the cabin and up the stairs above the double doors, immediately bringing his hand up to shield his eyes from the now burning sun. He kept the dagger in his hand just in case.

Groves glanced back at him for a moment, as though hoping that he had maybe changed his mind. He just glared back, giving him a silent *absolutely not* as an answer, twitching his head in the direction of the crew.

"Captain? What's going on?" one of the sailors asked.

Groves stayed silent for a moment, earning a jab in the side from his elbow.

Clearing his throat, he started to speak.

"Captain Sparrow has persuaded me to give up the captaincy of the *Voyager* to him. You will follow any orders he may give from here forward without protest, and you will address him as Captain. Is that clear to all of you?"

It was very much not clear to any of them, and they made their displeasure known.

"You're giving up the ship to a *pirate*?"

"Lord Beckett will not take kindly to this!"

"What did he threaten you with?"

He rolled his eyes and looked skyward for a moment, annoyed with the general ignorance of Navy soldiers.

"Will you *please* stop their whining?" he snapped.

"*What would you have me do?* Tell them that you are going to bring them on their merry way back to Port Royal and have tea with Beckett when we arrive?" Groves said in an aggravated whisper.

He stepped forward until he was standing next to him. "No, I expect you to act like a captain and command your crew. Clearly, they do not hold you in very high respect."

"That might have something to do with the fact that I just handed over the ship to a notorious pirate!"

"And a wise choice it was, *Teddy,*" he said, snickering.
The man bristled at the nickname and then watched him stride over to take his place at the railing overlooking the deck, wrapping his hands around the handsome wood.

"Gents, as your previous captain so aptly explained to you, I have taken over leadership of the Voyager. Once we assemble the rest of the crew, we will immediately begin to make sail for Tortuga. I have agreed to turn the lot of you into something resembling a pirate so that the actual pirates do not run you through on site. Upon arrival, you will either stay on the ship, or you will remain on the island."

"Beckett will find out about this and."

A deadly glare from him silenced the crew member immediately. He removed his hands from the railing and stepped down the stairs onto the deck, making his way over to the offending man until he was eye to eye with him.

"What is your name, lad?"

The man in question was a bit less confident now that he was staring him down.

"An-Anthony, sir."

"Anthony. Well, I can tell you that if it comes to my attention that Cutler has learned about any of the events involving this ship, or any of you, I will leave you to personally explain to him why exactly the rest of the crew perished."

Anthony was unable to suppress a small shiver at the threat.

"Aye, Captain."

He nodded in satisfaction. "That goes for all of you as well. None of you will breathe a word of any of this."

The rest of them jerked their heads up and down in an attempt at nodding, fear seeping into their eyes.

"We need to signal the rest of my crew to start making their way over to us. One of you, I don't care which, go fire one of the cannons. That should be good enough."

The crew member that was outraged at a pirate being the new captain scrambled over to one of the cannons and prepared it to fire. They all covered their ears when the loud blast rang through the air.

After the last of the smoke had dissipated into the sky, he turned to look at Theodore.

"I am going to have a proper look around the captain's cabin. You stay out here and make sure that they don't try an ill-advised mutiny."

"I highly doubt that they are going to be trying anything besides not soiling themselves, Captain. You gave them a right scare. Do you threaten everyone with death?"

He gave Groves a grim look. "No, not as a general rule. In situations where one outcome is needed above everything else, I prefer to be absolutely sure that no one foils any of my plans."

Or when a certain woman decided to chain him to the mast of his own ship…

He stalked back to the double doors and turned one more time.
"When my crew arrives, tend to any injured, and give the rest of them something to do and a place to sleep."

Just as he was about to enter the cabin, Theodore half-shouted a question at him.

"And what am I to do with Miss Swann?"

He stopped and closed his eyes in annoyance before seriously considering his answer.

He didn't want her in his cabin because that could spawn more problems than he could handle thinking about right now. He certainly didn't want her in with the crew, because he didn't trust any of the Navy men with her amongst them. As far as her place on the ship, he saw no reason for her to be given special treatment, and he was going to avoid her like the plague as much as possible.

"Give her the first mate's cabin, and inform her that she is only allowed to enter my cabin upon my request or explicit permission. Otherwise, treat her as a regular crew member," he answered without turning around.

She climbed up the ladder on the side of the ship, Jack's boots clutched tightly in her hands, Tia Dalma right behind her. Pintel and Ragetti climbed up as soon as the two of them cleared the deck.

She looked around the ship and spotted Lieutenant Groves.

"Theodore! Well, at least he left you in one piece. I can't say the same for several of your fellow officers, though. Sheffield has suffered a rather nasty cut on his chest. We brought all of the injured men on this trip. Mr. Gibbs is going to return to get the rest of them. I trust you have medical supplies somewhere?"

He studied her for a moment, and it was a moment too long because she crossed her arms over her chest and narrowed her eyes at him. He noticed that she had dark circles under her eyes and her skin looked to be a shade too pale for how much time she had likely spent in the sun.

"Is something interesting on my person?"

Her voice snatched him out of his observation, and he sheepishly shook his head no.

"No, Miss Swann. I apologize, but I am not used to seeing you in men's clothing. Yes, we have supplies below deck." He called two of the crew members over. "Lustrume, Johnson, escort any injured men below and give them proper treatment."

Two men, one of average build and one that was rather on the short side, lumbered over to Groves.

"Aye, sir. Pardon me sir, but are you sure that putting Sparrow in charge of the ship was a good idea?" Johnson asked, eyes twitching to his companion with every other word.

She rounded on the shorter man and answered before Theodore could even open his mouth.

"Captain Sparrow has more skill captaining a ship than any of you could even dream of having. Do
not question his leadership in front of me again. Savvy?"

The word slipped through her mouth before she could stop it, and a small blush tinged her cheeks. That was Jack's word.

Johnson too had a look at her, but it was in admiration rather than confusion. With Jack's sword hanging off of her hip, his pistol shoved into her belt, his hat on her head, and his jacket adorning her shoulders, she made quite an attractive sight.

"Aye, I was not meanin' to question anything."

He scuttled off with the taller Lustrume to gather all of the injured.

Her attention was drawn back to Theodore when he cleared his throat.

"The Captain told me to give a couple of messages to you. First, unless I misunderstood him, he has given you the position of the first mate. You will have the authority to carry out any orders aboard the ship in his stead should he give you permission to do so. You will also be lodged in the first mate's quarters. It is directly below the captain's quarters."

Her face changed from nervous anticipation to confusion.

"And the other messages?"

Theodore fidgeted his hands.

"He said that you are not to enter his cabin unless explicitly requested, or permitted. He didn't say why. He also said that he expects you to act like a regular crew member, in that you are not going to be given special treatment while aboard the ship."

She stood there processing all of the new information. Jack had made her his first mate. That was very unexpected. It was even more unexpected that he had shown any kind of concern for her wellbeing. She knew that he had not given her her own cabin accidentally.

Her shoulders slumped slightly when she realized that he meant to avoid contact with her otherwise. Fine, she could deal with that. It would give her some time to think about her next courses of action regarding the danger that her father was in if Sheffield was to be believed.

"Thank you, Theodore. I am going to rest in my cabin for a little while. Please, unless Jack gives you other orders, take command of the ship in my stead," her voice betraying a little of the exhaustion that was just starting to creep into her.

He nodded, and she retreated below deck. Her cabin really was directly below Jack's. She could hear him striding around above her.

Suddenly she realized that she was still wearing his clothes and effects when she set his boots down on the wood floor, lifted his sword up and over her head, and removed his pistol from her belt. She set them all on the small table across from the bed. He could wait a little while before he got them back, or he could come down and get them himself.

Taking Jack's hat off, she laid down. Her skin tingled and ached as she stretched herself out. As soon as she relaxed, the thoughts started, and all of the events of the last few months seemed to crash into her all at once.

Vivid images of chaining Jack to the mast, his face that held a hundred different emotions smiling
ruefully down at her, his look of disgust when they first reunited in the Locker, his anger when she almost told the crew about Lucifer, and his strangely open countenance when he made her tell him about Scarlett.

All of the guilt, confusion, desire, anger, self-hatred that she had felt convalesced into a churning enemy of horrible proportions.

Fate’s face, Lucifer’s face, Will’s face, blurs of dreams, and snippets of her own imagined futures haunted her mind like a burning fire, swift and changing with each breath she took.

She couldn’t count how many times she had imagined Jack with his rough hands painting a trail of fire on her skin, only to shove his knife roughly through it, hatred in his eyes. The very thought of him feeling nothing but contempt for her made her chest clench in on itself. She hated that she so desperately wanted him to look at her with admiration and longing again.

She *hated* that he had the audacity to treat her differently every time he spoke to her. She couldn’t handle being thrown around Jack’s treacherous mind like that, but she was quickly finding that she had no choice.

He was just going to sit up there and avoid her. All of these thoughts were going to be caged within her because she couldn't go up there and talk to him about *any* of them.

And Will. She had resigned herself to the fact that none of the futures she had imagined held them being together again, but she only wished that he didn't look at her with such revulsion. Perhaps time would ease his attitude.

After laying there mentally running through the cobwebs of her mind, time stopped having meaning.

The room felt much too hot, and her skin felt flushed. Several tears of frustration had leaked from her eyes, and she hadn’t even bothered to wipe them from her cheeks.

Was she awake or asleep? Did it matter? Sweat formed on her skin, and the bedsheets began to feel damp. Her muscles ached, and a headache had formed behind her eyes.

Spikes of panic ate away at her until she was a quivering mass of unhinged emotion. She thrashed her head from side to side in a feeble attempt to banish all thought from her head, but it only made the storm increase.

Her father, he was in danger, but she hadn't told Jack. She hadn't told anyone what Sheffield had told her.

Should she tell Jack? *What was Jack doing?*

She clamped a hand over her mouth when her stomach churned, and immediately sat up in bed, swinging her legs to let them hang over the edge. Breathing heavily, she kept her eyes tightly shut and waited for the fuzzy spots to leave her vision. When the nausea passed, she slowly took a few shaky breaths, placing both hands on the mattress to steady herself.

Sweat still slicked her skin, and the room looked blurry. It was the tears still steadily leaking from her eyes, she realized. Her body felt heavy, as though she had stood out in the blistering sunlight for too long.

Raising her eyes to the hat that had been knocked onto the floor, she pushed herself off of the bed to collect it.
In her post-panic haze, she decided that now was as good of a time as any to return Jack's things to him.

Fighting the spin of the room as she stumbled over to the table, she gathered his effects, and then took small steps over to the door, opening it quietly, only to find Gibbs standing on the other side, his hand poised in a knocking position.

He took one look at her, and immediately changed his stance from slightly annoyed to extremely concerned. Her eyes were red-rimmed, and her skin was pale.

"Miss Elizabeth, I wasn't meaning to upset you. It is just that I was knockin' and no one was answering."

After staring down the hallway for a moment, she half-turned to look at Gibbs.

"Knocking? You were...knocking?"

Gibbs nodded, looking terribly out of his depth. He spotted the things bundled up in her arms.

"I can take those to the Captain if you would be wantin', Elizabeth. It's late, he might be preparin' to sleep."

Squinting, she noticed that it had grown dark outside.

"What? Take these to Jack? No! I mean, no. I can do it myself."

She started down the hall, leaving Gibbs to hope that her strange mood didn't cause any problems with Jack.

The crew stared after her as she stopped in front of the double doors, shoulders twitching slightly. They held their breath in anticipation when she lifted her hand to knock.

A moment passed, then another, and another. Then finally, the Captain opened the left door just a bit and stuck his head through. Upon seeing her, his face screwed up in annoyance. After what seemed like an eternity to her, he jerked his head and then glared behind her at all of the onlookers. They immediately busied themselves with something.

He opened the door wider to allow her to step through, and she did so on wobbly legs, the things in her arms threatening to fall to the floor.

"I-I...thought that you might want these things back."

She said it all very quickly, her voice strained. Jack still stood by the door that he had just closed, eyeing the back of her head with trepidation.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked quietly.

"Me? I'm fine. I just said that I thought you might want these things back," she enunciated, as though it was taking her a great deal of effort to speak.

He stepped cautiously around her and took his effects from his her as though they might send some kind of pain through him.

"Go sit on the bed," he sent over his shoulder as he strode to drop everything on the desk.

Turning around to stare at her, he crossed the room to where she sat and unceremoniously pressed
his hand to her forehead.

"You have a fever," he stated plainly.

He was not prepared for what she did next. Gripping his wrist, she threw his hand off of her skin.

"Don't touch me!"

Confusion clouded his face as he took several steps back. Her skin had turned an ashen color, and tears were streaming steadily down her face.

"What do you want?"

She lifted her eyes to stare into his, and he was slightly taken aback by the maniacal hysteria that he saw there.

"What do I want? I want you to stop treating me like a disease. I want you to regard me as a human being again. I want...I don't know what I want. Jack, but I know that whatever this is, whatever we are doing, I don't want it. I just want it to stop."

"I gave you your own cabin, Elizabeth. Would you have preferred me to leave you with the crew?"

A strangled cry blistered his ears at it left her lips, and for a split second, he wanted to rush over to her and gather her into his arms, but that urge was squashed when she launched herself off of the bed and charged towards him.

Before she managed to do any harm to him, he caught both of her arms easily, and then let her go when she sank to the floor, holding her head in her hands.

He felt like he was teetering on a precipice of reason. "Lucifer had told him to kill this woman, yet all he could think to do at the moment was carry her out of his cabin and back to her bed so that she could get through this spell of whatever it was. She was clearly not herself.

"Maybe I would have preferred that," she mumbled to the floor. "Every time you do something that even approaches concern for me, you turn around and squish any hope that it gives me. Every damn time. I just, I don't know how long I can do that for."

Stepping away from her, he clenched his teeth together in frustration.

"Perhaps you should have thought about that before you betrayed me. Go back to your cabin and keep your thoughts to yourself. Next time you burden me with your presence, make sure you're not a hysterical mess."

She looked up at him with watery eyes, and the depth of anguish in them nearly made him take back every hateful thing he had thought about her or said to her, but he stood resolute, his expression unchanging.

"Go," he said, jerking his head in the direction of the door. Before he did something foolish.

She stood slowly, as though there was a great weight upon her shoulders.

"You can't love me and hate me at the same time, Jack. Not forever. Choose, before you ruin both of us," she said, pointing a shaky finger in his face.

Turning from him, she made her way to the doors and slipped through them.
As soon as she was gone, he immediately covered the room in two strides and dropped himself onto the bed, running his hands over his face, his dreadlocks hanging past them.

He hadn't realized the toll that her pain was going to take on him. It wasn't supposed to do that. She killed him, for god's sake.

A knock on the door startled him slightly.

"Who is it?" he said into his hands.

"It's me, Cap'n."

Gibbs stepped through without even waiting for permission to enter.

"Is Miss Elizabeth alright?"

Jack gave him a pointed stare. "Why would I care about her wellbeing? She barged in here, nearly vomited on my floor, attempted to attack me, and then cried on my feet."

"I think she has a fever, Cap'n."

Placing his head back in his hands, he nodded. "She does. What of it?"

Gibbs sighed.

"Jack," he started, forgoing his title. "I have known you for a long time. I know when you truly hate someone. And I am willing to stake my life right now on the fact that you do not hate her."

His hands turned into fists against his bandana.

"I don't have any idea right now about what I am feeling, Josh. I'm drowning in some kind of void...split between wanting to march into her cabin and strangle her, and wanting to march into her cabin and climb in bed with her to soothe the fever."

Gibbs allowed a small smile to grace the right corner of his mouth before his face turned serious again.

"Well, to maintain whatever sanity either of you have left, I suggest that you choose your feelings for her soon."

Jack emitted a long sigh.

"She said the same thing. Can a person choose feelings?"

Gibbs didn't have an answer for that.

"You have been deprived of rum for quite some time. I am sure that there is some somewhere in this cabin. Drink some of it and go to sleep."

Jack arched an eyebrow at him. "Are you my captain now?"

"No, I am your friend, Jack."

They were both silent for a moment before Gibbs stood up and shuffled over to the door.

"Just remember Jack, regret comes after anger most of the time. Don't be doing anything that you
might regret regarding Elizabeth."

Jack laughed bitterly.

"Well, 'm afraid that that line has already been crossed. Make sure the rest of the crew are in their places since my first mate is... indisposed."

He said the last word delicately, as though he wasn't quite sure which way he meant it.

Gibbs complied with the order and was halfway out the door before he heard Jack call something after him.

"Send Tia down there to check on her. I can't have her dying on me," he said, trepidation laced in his words, as though he was taking a mighty risk admitting to it. Gibbs nodded and fully exited the cabin.

The bed depressed as Jack stood up to resume his search of the cabin. Where would a Navy officer keep his stash of alcohol?

There was another small cupboard in the left corner of the room that was half hidden by shadow. He walked over to it and opened the right door, revealing nothing. A twinge of disappointment made his shoulders slump, and then relief flooded him when he opened the left door.

A small bottle of tequila sat in the far corner of the small space. Though it wasn't quite what he was craving, it would get the job done well enough.

He snatched it out and immediately uncorked it. The liquid sloshed around from the sudden movement and then started being subtracted from the bottle as Jack swallowed it. It burned his throat and made the hairs on his arms stand up, but it also smoothed the sharp edges in his mind.

He returned to the bed and set the bottle down on the small nightstand. He finally laid down on the mattress and stretched his aching limbs.

Sleep came almost immediately, but his sleep was not peaceful.

She stumbled back down the stairs, the pain in her head increasing. She didn't remember making it into her cabin, nor did she remember laying back down on the bed.

At some point, both of those things must have happened, because she woke briefly with a figure holding a small cup to her lips, and something cool slid down her throat.

"Drink, child."

She complied and then drifted back to sleep.

She watched her as she slept, looking for signs of the fever getting worse.

So, this was how her giving part of her soul to save Jack was going to manifest. Her mind was going to collapse in on itself with guilt and grief, and there was naught a thing that she could do to stop it, besides earning forgiveness.

Which, of course, that damned hell-devil had tried so hard to steer Jack away from.

Jack Sparrow loved this woman, and soon he would understand the true reason for why he also
hated her.
She only hoped he understood it in time.

He was back in the Locker, walking aimlessly down a dark hallway. His throat was as dry as sand, and his eyes were scratchy.

This damned place was never going to let him go.

"No, it's not."

He spun around and came face to face with the exact last thing he wanted to see.

"Nice to see you again, Jack."

"You."

"Me. It is comforting to see that your eloquence hasn't left you yet."

"What the devil are you doing here?" he demanded, leaning against the wall.

Lucifer had to chuckle at the choice of words.

"In your dream? I thought I would take a nice leisurely stroll out of Hell for a moment and remind you of the task that you are ignoring quite admirably, " he drawled, leaning down until he was eye level with him.

"Task?"

"Elizabeth is still alive."

He clenched his fists tightly, barely resisting shouting at the infernal demon.

"I know that she is still alive. I told you that you have no influence on whatever it is that I decide to do to her."

"And I suppose that checking her health is the first step in your preparation for murder?"

Against his bottomless pit of better judgment, he struck his fist out and caught Lucifer across the face.

And then immediately regretted it. He did not show it, however, and continued to glare at the robed figure.

"I am going to tell you plainly why I came here. Elizabeth traded part of her soul to send herself to this place to collect you, and you are now seeing the consequences of that trade. She will continue to show symptoms, though not quite as severe and sudden as you saw tonight, and she will remain weakened until that part of her soul is revitalized."

"And why does any of that matter to me?"

His question was ignored.

"Put her out of her misery before she gets herself killed in battle."
He woke in a pool of sweat. It was still dark outside, so he gathered that he had only slept a few hours. Sitting up, he picked up the bottle of tequila and downed a few swigs.

Rubbing his temples, he realized that he was not going to be able to sleep again, so he got up and crossed the room to the desk. Just as he was about to sit down on the chair, another knock came from outside the door.

Damn it all to hell.

"What?" he snapped, saying it as more of a statement than a question.

Will stepped in, glaring at him. He returned the glare with an impressive intensity.

"I just woke up from a very annoying dream, and I only got about two hours of sleep. Whatever you are here to bother me with, make it fast."

The former blacksmith dropped his hand from the door handle, leaving the door open.

"Go to Elizabeth, Jack. She is having a nightmare, and she won't get a night's rest until someone soothes her."

He stared at Will as though he had just announced that he planned to marry Davy Jones. Sighing forcefully, he placed both hands on the desk to resist hitting something.

"Excuse me? Am I still dreaming or have you lost your mind?"

Will rolled his eyes. "Tia sent me up here to get you. She said something about...well, I don't even know what she said. All I know is that Elizabeth needs you."

He narrowed his gaze at him. "Since when do you care about Elizabeth? Last I remember, you-"

He was cut off by a scream from below him.

This woman was going to be the death of him.

"Fine."

He stepped around the desk, rubbing the lingering sleep from his face, and shouldered past Will as he exited.
Her wrists were pinned down against something hard.

The screams being ripped from her throat did nothing to halt the dark figure that was hovering over her. Terror had enclosed her heart within its venomous fist eternities ago, and it was rushing through her veins in endless waves of sharp sensation.

Screams turned into choked pleas of mercy, and her struggling turned into short bursts of weak defiance. Two red eyes held her own in an unbroken gaze, while a deep baritone voice chanted indistinguishable words and phrases at her. Her

Then, a piercing pain shot through her, and her voice gave out when the cry of agony was torn from her. It felt like her very insides were being sliced open.

Finally, the faceless figure broke their gaze and leaned down next to her ear. When his voice rumbled out to make the hairs on her neck stand up, the familiarity of it struck through the fog of pain, but no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't make any kind of connection.

"An eye for an eye."

One of the hands that were squeezing her wrist started to shake her shoulder, and the voice was suddenly shouting her name at her, louder and louder…

Her eyes snapped open, and then immediately snapped closed again from the assault of sensory information.

Something, or someone, was clutching at her shoulder, and she slowly reopened her eyes to determine whether she was once again in danger.

Shock washed over her as the fuzziness from her vision slowly disappeared. Instead of bright red eyes, there was a pair of chocolate brown eyes gazing down at her, the corners of them crinkled with annoyance, and if she looked hard enough, a small bit of concern. The moonlight coming through the small window highlighted his sharp features.

"...Jack?"

He leaned back from where he had been hovering over her.

"Don't get your hopes up. I didn't come down here by choice. Will wouldn't bugger off until I agreed to drag you out of whatever the hell that dream was," he said quietly. "Evidently you wouldn't respond to him or Tia."

She looked around the room, still wary that she was dreaming, and that Jack was only that faceless figure taunting her.
"There was...this thing...a man-like thing holding me down..."

He shook his head, rising from the bed. "I don't need to know details. You're awake and mentally sound, so I did my job."

Scooting up the bed so that her head was leaning against the small headboard, she drew her knees up to her chest and narrowed her eyes at him, her long blond hair laying flat against her shoulders.

"Would it kill you to show concern for me?"

Her mental dialogue of 'I killed myself for you' hung unspoken between them. He had been about to open the door when her question embedded itself into his head.

"Funny you should ask that. By my recollection, showing concern for you did get me killed," he muttered without turning around.

A harsh sigh escaped her behind him. "If you are referring to the fact that you returned to the ship, may I remind that you if you hadn't left, there would have been no reason to return."

Then he did turn around, an indignant expression plastered on his face.

"I already told you that-"

He paused, remembering that the Elizabeth in the Locker was nothing more than a figment of his tortured mind.

"No, I didn't tell you, but I told an apparition of you that the only reason I came back to the damned ship was that the farther away I got, the less I could fathom leaving you there."

The information settled into the silence between them, and she stared at him blankly, making a mental note to ask him about this apparition.

"You returned for...me?"

Jack rolled his eyes in exasperation. "What the bloody hell else would I have come back for?"

"I don't know, maybe your ship, or the rest of the crew, or just because you didn't want to be labeled as a coward."

"I didn't bloody care about being labeled as a coward, Elizabeth, not in that circumstance. I still don't. My choice was one of survival. Obviously, you wouldn't know this since you grew up with everything handed to you, but when you live the kind of life that I did, your mind shuts everything out, and survival becomes the priority."

He stopped and took a withering breath.

"But you, dammit. I couldn't shut you out. I couldn't row away and just watch you die."

But she wasn't really listening completely to what he was saying because she had just happened upon a stunning realization.

"You knew. You knew that you weren't going to leave that ship alive," she whispered.

His face dropped all signs of anger and arranged itself into a genuine expression of surprise.

"Of course I knew. I knew that returning was a death sentence. I was just not prepared for you to
serve it to me quite so spectacularly. Imagine that, the woman who I was about to sacrifice my life for turns around and does the job for me," he replied, his voice also dropped to a near whisper. This time it held no malice or contempt, just resignation.

She didn't reply, turning her face away from him. He stood there for a few moments, waiting. When she finally did say something, it was not the continuation of the brewing argument that he was expecting

"We have been through this a hundred times before, Jack. Do the specifics really matter at this point? You hate me, and I am never going to earn your forgiveness," she mumbled, a bitter tinge laced through her voice.

Inside, she was reeling from his confession.

He shook his head. "I told you that I didn't hate you when you came looking for me to tell me you were leaving."

"Try treating me differently Jack. Then I might actually believe you," she said, her eyes shifting to meet his once again.

He opened his mouth, but then realized that he didn't have a response to that. Instead, he reseated himself on her bed and examined something interesting on the wooden floor.

"This dream. You said something was restraining you?"

She gazed at him, trying to discern whether he was joking. It was hard to tell in the darkness of the room.

"Yes. I was laying on something. Something hard. And whatever that thing was, it was hovering over me, gripping my wrists hard enough to leave bruises."

He waited for her to continue, but she stayed silent.

"And?"

She started again, hesitantly, as though she was unsure about revealing anything more to him.

"I-I don't know. I remember a lot of pain, and I know that the thing said something to me, but I can't recall…" her voice trailed off, and then she spoke again with a sureness that caused him to twist around to look at her.

"It had bright red eyes, whatever the thing was. And its voice sounded so familiar...a deep baritone..."

_Bright red eyes…_

The horrible truth dawned on him very quickly.

_Lucifer._

She saw the shift in his eyes, as though her descriptions had stirred something in him.

"What?"

"Nothing, nevermind. Try and go back to sleep." He paused and appeared to have a silent argument with himself. She didn't appear satisfied with his obvious deflection when he glanced back to look at
"...I am probably going to regret offering this, but if you have any more nightmares, come up to my cabin. We can talk about them."

The bed sank down as he got up to leave, missing her mouth hanging open at his invitation. Moonlight bathed the door in a glowing blue color when he slipped through it and closed it.

She slid back down onto the bed and laid her head on the pillow. She had half a mind to go up to his cabin and demand that he explain why he thought it was acceptable to treat her like scum and then open a tiny window of hope that he still...all in the space of several minutes.

What had happened when she went up to his cabin to return his things? She remembered drifting to a half-sleep after finally managing to calm her thoughts, and then she had felt violently sick. After that, it was all a hazy blur.

Shaking her head, she focused on the other matter that had been gnawing at her ever since her fight with Lieutenant Sheffield.

Her father was in danger if he was to be believed. Had he found something out, something that he wasn't supposed to know...

Was Beckett trying to lure her back home? What on earth could Beckett want from her?

They were due to arrive in Tortuga in three days. She had to find a way to leave as soon as possible from the island to get back to Port Royal. There was only the slight problem of Jack being under the impression that she was staying with them. She should have told him about her father.

But she knew why she didn't. Ever since his rescue, she had been deathly afraid of adding more confirmation of his current feelings towards her. Certainly, presenting a situation that required him to show concern for her life meant that she was opening herself for rejection.

She could easily picture him telling her that not only was her father not his problem, he had no reason to get himself involved with her affairs at all, regardless of what they were.

There was nothing for it. She would have to leave, and she would have to do it in such a way that went unnoticed by Jack, regardless of what his reaction would be.

__________________________________________________________

The sun rose above the sea only an hour later, bathing the water in sparkling light. It was a calm day, the sound of seagulls and waves permeating the warm air.

He stood at the railing of the Voyager, his sun-bronzed hands gripping the cherry colored wood. His hat was perched on his head, and his kohl was freshly applied. Groves was currently at the helm of the ship, keeping them on course.

The ocean really was something to behold with awe and respect. In its finest moments, it could either blind a person with its beauty or destroy the beauty of man. Its depths held secrets that might never be discovered, and its surface offered itself as a canvas for exploration.

"We are three days out, Cap'n. I'm thinkin' that it's time we make the Navy boys shuck those awful wigs and uniforms in a...permanent manner. Make 'em get used to lookin' like normal men."

He turned to look at his former first mate, who was now standing at the railing with him. "What happened on the beach, Josh?"
Gibbs snorted. "They first wanted to try and convince us to come quietly back to Port Royal without a fight, but Elizabeth didn't think very highly of that plan. She informed them that they either had the choice of being marooned or going to Tortuga as hostages."

A very carefully controlled expression of amusement was on Gibb's face when the same level of amusement entered Jack's eyes at the mention of Elizabeth's behavior.

"I did hear a gunshot go off. I presume that was her?"

"Aye, she shot a man's hat clean off of his head. Eventually, she goaded the same man into drawing his sword."

"This man, it is the same one with the rather painful looking gash on his chest?"

Gibbs nodded. "That would be from Elizabeth. She also punched him in the face. There was some kind of exchange between them that seemed to rattle her something awful, but I never found out what it was about."

"I want to meet this nemesis of Elizabeth's myself. Go and get them all lined up."

Gibbs nodded and turned to shout orders to all of the Navy soldiers. They all scrambled to comply, several of them glancing at him with apprehension.

"Cap'n?" Gibbs called out, but his attention was drawn elsewhere for the moment.

"Cap'n."

"...If she needs you, I'm sure she will ask for you, Jack," Gibbs finally said quietly.

"I'm not sure if I want her to," he muttered, briefly sending a dark look at Gibbs. He pushed any thoughts of Elizabeth to the back of his mind for the moment and turned around.

Some of the men, including Anthony, bowed their heads as Jack made his way down the line to look into the eyes of each of them. Lustrume and Johnson were standing right in the middle, peering at Jack with something akin to admiration.

"First and foremost, I would like to remind all of you that failure to cooperate with us will result in more of you getting injured. From what I understand, my crew already did quite the number on you. Which one of you met the sharp end of my sword, held by Elizabeth Swann?"

He waited, scanning the line of men from the left to the right.

Finally one spoke up towards the left of the line. "That would be me, Captain Sparrow. I wasn't aware that she held your sword, but she did attack me after I offered her a peaceful resolution," Sheffield said, attempting to sound confident. He was holding himself at an awkward angle because of the wound on his chest.

"Peaceful?" he barked, laughing darkly. "Are you suggesting that Lord Beckett would throw us a magnificent dinner party upon our arrival to Port Royal?"

He was standing in front of Lieutenant Sheffield now, eyeing the man as though he was a particularly bothersome mosquito.

"I-well...that is to say…"

"No, I didn't think so. I can also see why Elizabeth got so angry with you. You are exactly the type
of man that irks women like her, with your beady little eyes that can only pay attention to everything below the eyes, and the view that she could be cajoled into submission by offerings of tea and fancy dresses."

Sheffield spluttered indignantly. "Well, my word, only a misfit pirate like you could be attracted to a woman who aligns herself on the wrong side of the law, nevermind the fact that she wears men's clothing, and has the aud-

"To treat you like the pile of waste that you are?"

Both Jack's and Sheffield's heads snapped to the left to see Elizabeth standing there. Her complexion was still pasty, and the dark circles remained under her eyes.

"No, idiot woman, the audacity to order men arou-

He never got the chance to finish his sentence before his fist connected with Sheffield's cheek, sending a sickening crunch through the ears of the rest of the men.

Lieutenant Sheffield's eyes rolled into the back of his head, and he crumpled to the ground in a mess of red and white cloth. His white wig sat askew on his head.

"Pintel!" he shouted over his shoulder.

"Cap'n?" the pirate in question responded, finishing up a series of knots before appearing at his side.

"Bring this one below deck again. No need for treatment. I think a good headache will teach him a lesson," he said, flexing his fingers.

"Aye, Cap'n," Pintel said, smiling gleefully at being addressed by him.

The rest of the men watched Sheffield get dragged off down the stairs, each of them individually shuddering.

"A side note before I discuss what I wanted to discuss. If any more of you have the unfortunate idea of disrespecting her, I will be... unhappy with you. Is that clear?" he said slowly and deliberately.

All of them nodded vigorously, alternating between staring at him and Elizabeth with fear.

"Good. Now, I was asked by your previous captain," he said, motioning a hand at Groves,"to make you all look like pirates, but before I do that, I want to give you a choice."

They stared at him, expressions of fear changing to expressions of cautious curiosity.

"Once upon a time, long before I sacked Nassau, rode sea turtles, or any of the other stories, I was a captain in the Royal Navy."

Gasps and whispers flew around at the new information. However, one man towards the right of the line didn't seem very shocked at the information. He stepped forward a bit.

"I didn't make the connection right away, but there is a painting of a young captain in Beckett's office that hangs above his desk. Black hair just past the shoulders, pulled back of course, and well, it's you, I think. I have only just glimpsed the painting meself, but I am positive that I am right."

He grimaced, not quite believing the young man.

"A...painting?"
"Beckett hates Jack more than pretty much anything else. You must be mistaken," Gibbs said, side-eyeing him cautiously.

"Normally I would agree with you, Gibbs," he said under his breath, "but this actually sounds like the perfect bit of irony, doesn't it?" He paused, refocusing his attention on the sailor. "And what is your name?"

"Voyle, sir. Eli Voyle."

"Well Mr. Voyle, I appreciate your memory and your observation skills. As I was saying, I was a captain in the Royal Navy under the command of Lord Beckett. My ship, the Wicked Wench, was mainly used for transporting cargo."

"I joined the Navy because, well, the short version of the story is that I wanted to escape my father. We don't have time for the long version, and I am not inclined to share it with you anyways."

He paused and waited for the men to process what he had said.

"In my short two years as Captain of the Wicked Wench, I learned that living a life under law does not necessarily mean living it under honor or order. My last shipment of cargo, unbeknownst to me, ended up being people. Beckett had sent me to Africa to pick up one hundred slaves to bring them back to him. I released them a quarter of the way through the voyage back. Beckett obviously discovered my act of treason and had me branded as a pirate. And here we are."

He heard a soft gasp to his left. Ignoring Elizabeth for the moment, he continued.

"Beckett thought that he was robbing my freedom by putting this brand on my arm," he said, holding up his wrist for everyone to see. "But I learned very quickly that he had given me freedom, instead of taking it away. I returned to the life of piracy that I had engaged in before enlisting."

"My point is, all of you are living your lives under the impression that you are free. You think that your future is bright, but everything that you have been told is a lie. Beckett doesn't care about any of you. You are nothing more than pawns to him, and that will never change. He only uses your desire to contribute to the world to progress his agenda."

The men were starting to nod, looking around at each other as though they were having a silent conversation.

"As the Pirate Lord of the Caribbean, I have the authority to excommunicate you from the Royal Navy in the eyes of the Brethren Court, in that you will be seen as free men and not as enemies. The only reason I am willing to do this is that I find great pleasure in displeasing Cutler Beckett, and I will only have one requirement. In the future, if I ever get my ship back, I will expect all of you to at least consider joining my crew."

He went silent, crossing his arms over his chest, and watched all of them as they quietly discussed their options amongst each other.

"You freed slaves?" came a soft voice next to him.

"You sound surprised," he replied.

Elizabeth had the grace to look ashamed. "I didn't mean that I didn't believe it of you, but I just never expected that to be the origin of your branding. I also don't think you are doing this only because you want to tick Beckett off."
He looked around at her curiously. "And why else might I be doing it?"

"I think you hate to see others in cages when they could easily be free. That's what you saw in me, isn't it?"

With that, she walked away. He watched her as she left, mildly annoyed, though he could not figure out why.

So much for avoiding her...

"Captain Sparrow?"

The sailor called Eli stepped forward.

"Mr. Voyle. Have you all reached some kind of decision?"

"Yes, we would like to accept your offer, and we would also like to remain part of your crew whether you have your ship or not. Certainly, you planned on taking this ship as your own, didn't you?"

"Aye, for the time being. She isn't as terrifying as the Pearl, but she will have to do. Well, since you are officially under my command, by choice now, I command all of you to get rid of those disgusting wigs, and please, no more Navy colors."

The men busied themselves with his orders.

"Groves!" he shouted up to the wheel, where the lieutenant was standing.

"Captain?" was shouted back.

"Gibbs here will take over for you. Go and lower the Navy flag and shove it somewhere below deck."

The flag fluttered in the wind as it was lowered, as though it was protesting, and then quieted when Groves detached it.

The Voyager was now a pirate ship.
The moonlight sent glittering streaks of white and silver across the water, mesmerizing her as she stood at the railing. Inhaling deeply, she savored the smell of the sea air as it filled her lungs. She didn't understand how some couldn't see the beauty of the ocean. All of the men that she had encountered until Jack had always said that the sea was simply a tool when she had known it was much more than that since she was a little girl.

A light breeze blew her straw blonde hair around her face, tickling her skin. Sighing, she resigned herself to not being able to properly appreciate being on a ship again until she could share it with Jack.

He had disappeared into his cabin after the Navy men decided to willingly accept him as their captain.

_Why_ did he care if Sheffield, or anyone, said something disrespectful to her? She distinctly remembered the anger in Jack's eyes at the man's words, but she did _not_ expect him to nearly break Sheffield's jaw. Was Jack the only one that was allowed to say distasteful things to her?

But even so, ever since their conversation in the jungle, he had been almost _civil_ to her. It was as though there was a war going on inside of his head, and the side that didn't hate her was currently winning. He had also told her that he was known to flip his feelings about something without a moment's notice…

It couldn't be that simple. She had a niggling feeling that even through all of his anger and malice that he had expressed towards her, he felt equal amounts of respect and affection for her regardless of how far he was burying it. It didn't matter what sin she had committed against him, because if she was right about the extent of his feeling before she did…_that_…

Being in love with someone _never_ lifts its taint from the heart. Sometimes, something else just overshadows it so completely that they rarely feel it again.

The _smallest_ whisper of suspicion that he had been in love with her had ingrained itself in her head, but she could only allow that to float towards truth in her mind just barely, because it was pulled back immediately with every cold glare he sent her way, or every harsh word that left his mouth. It wasn't just guilt that had been slowly suffocating her. Everytime she allowed herself to consider that he felt real feelings for her, doubt poured into her mind like a swarm of locusts.

She had worried that he had only wanted to bed her, or that he was just teasing her because he found her blatant admiration and affection for him to be funny. She had worried that she was seeing evidence of feelings where there were none. She had worried that she was pursuing a possibility that didn't exist, and would leave of a wake of problems in its path.

She had worried so goddamn much over that man that she would propel herself towards total exhaustion every time her brain would choose to feast on her anxieties again; they would replay
themselves in her head like a cycle of torment, each question and theory blending together as though she was attending a carnival designed to drive her to madness.

She drummed her fingers onto the hard wood of the railing in frustration. Perhaps...perhaps she could test the waters by going to talk to him tonight. She always had an endless list of questions to ask him, but lately, she feared that just breathing in his direction could potentially set him off.

Candlelight was burning from inside his cabin as she stared at the double doors dubiously. She guessed that he was inside, but then she realized that she hadn't been keeping track of his whereabouts.

Checking around her to make sure that no one was keeping track of her whereabouts, she headed towards the doors, then remembered that there was another door around back. Taking care to keep her footsteps quiet, she made her way there and stopped to peer through the small window.

Unless he was hiding in the shadows of the room, she could not see him. At first, she decided to wait for him to come back from wherever he was without even thinking about it, but then she wondered…

Did she dare go in without asking his permission first? There was not much else he could do to her at this point that he hadn't done already, she realized. She could handle it if he shouted at her, and regardless of how angry he might be, she could not even fathom that he would lay a hand on her. Not at this point. If he meant to harm her, he would have done it by now.

Without further deliberation, she twisted the door handle and slipped through the small opening that she made for herself. Quietly closing the door behind her, she looked around the room again. The bed to the left of her in the corner was made haphazardly as though Jack got up too often in the night to bother making it properly, and paper was strewn across the desk to her right. On the table right next to her was a small clay bowl filled with what looked like black powder. She realized that it was Jack's kohl after staring at it for a few seconds.

His hat hung from a small hook across the room, and his jacket hung just behind it. The candlelight bounced around the room frantically, matching the rhythm of her heartbeat.

Stepping over to the desk, she realized that the papers that covered it were actually maps. Sitting down on the small chair, she examined them more closely. All of them were clearly unfinished. The top one looked like it was going to be the Caribbean islands, and she could make out the outline of Africa on the one directly under it.

*Did Jack draw these?* From what she could see, they were beautifully sketched. At the left edge of the desk was a leather-bound book. An exquisite thrill went through her.

It was Jack's captain's log. She knew that many ship captains used their logs as both personal journals and a place to record the daily activities of sea travel.

For one moment of madness, she considered just flipping through it, but she knew that if anything were to provoke his wrath, it would be snooping. Nevermind that she was snooping just by being in here without him, but his journal was just too personal.

At the right edge was a small stack of books that looked like they had been recently read. *Gulliver's Travels, A Modest Proposal,* and *Robinson Crusoe* were the selections. As if there weren't enough reasons to be attracted to Jack, knowing that he was interested in literature made a small smile grace her lips. It occurred to her to ask him if she might borrow one of the books to read.
"Apparently you have decided to blatantly ignore my orders. Shouldn't surprise me, really."

Her head snapped up in shock, and fear crossed her face before she could suppress it. Jack was standing in the middle of the room with his arms crossed over his chest, glaring down his nose at her. She shoved the chair backward and made to scramble out of the room before he held a hand up.

"No, don't go."

She was stuck at a strange angle, freezing as she was rising from the chair. She looked from Jack to the door, and then back again.

"You...you want me to stay?"

Had she fallen asleep in his chair? Was this some kind of strange dream where he had just asked her to stay in his cabin?

He sighed dramatically, stepping over to his bed and dropping himself onto it.

"Yes, I want you to stay," he mumbled to the floor. "I sense that you have...questions to ask me."

"Questions?" she repeated dumbly, sitting back down.

He looked up, arching an eyebrow at her. "You have been glancing at me all day as though you wanted to march over and assault me with questions. It's strange that you waited until now to make your move, especially by sneaking into my cabin. No protection in here."

Normally those words would have sent a chill through her, but she was reasonably positive now that any harsh words he sent her way were just the lingering fragments of his anger towards her.

"You're not going to hurt me regardless of what I do." She spoke with more confidence than she felt.

He was silent for a very long moment, his gaze leveled at the far wall.

"No, I'm not," he said finally, the shadow of defeat winding its way into his voice. She swore she heard a *dammit* whispered under his breath. Relief flooded through her, lifting some of the weight off of her shoulders.

Regaining clarity at an impressive speed, he pinpointed his stare at the journal that he had just noticed.

"If you touched that, I swear..." he started to say. She immediately interrupted him.

"Jack, do you really expect me to invade your privacy like that?"

He glared at her as though he wanted very badly to argue that statement.

"You did let yourself in here without permission when I explicitly told you to avoid doing exactly that," he grumbled petulantly.

"I am your first mate," she countered. "And you didn't tell me. You told Groves to tell me."

He rolled his eyes. "While I am not going to regale you with a lecture on the first mate's boundaries and duties, know that *breaking into* the captain's cabin is not included."

She blushed, staring down at his maps.
"Did you draw these?"

Rising from the bed, he stepped over to grab the other chair behind the desk that had gone unnoticed by her until now. Pulling it up next to her, he sat down. She eyed him cautiously.

"Aye, I did. All of my maps were drowned with the Pearl," he griped, sending a pointed stare her way. "So, I decided to spend the time drawing new ones."

Ignoring his barb, she traced a finger around Port Royal, which was the only complete part of the map. "Could...could you teach me how to read them?"

He looked around at her incredulously. "You don't know how to read a map? During all of your tutoring sessions, they never taught you how to read a map..." he deadpanned.

"That wasn't really important for a lady to know. I was only taught history, mathematics, literature, Latin, and etiquette. I don't think they ever expected me to have a reason to read one, nevermind sail with pirates."

He made a noise in his throat that almost sounded like laughter.

"You are a pirate, Elizabeth. Or did you forget my final word to you before I was quite literally devoured?" he asked matter-of-factly. "Though, I suppose I had been devoured before I said that, just by a different kind of monster," he added quietly as an afterthought.

She blushed again. Even though all of the events that happened after it were still haunting her, that kiss had been incredible for the few seconds that she had allowed herself to enjoy it. The friction of his beard against her skin, the taste of his mouth as he curved it against her own, and the hard planes of his body fitting perfectly with her curves, it was all burned into her memory, blending with the plethora of fantasies that she had already accumulated.

"I wasn't the only one. I wouldn't exactly categorize you as an inactive participant in that... interaction."

She swore she saw a ghost of a smile on his lips when he looked around at her again.

"I am generally an active participant in any kind of interaction with the female creature, but I will note that rarely do I get to be a reactive participant. At least, not at first."

Deciding to stop that line of conversation before it got too far and raised her hopes too high, she pointed at the maps again.

"Fine, at some point, I will teach you how to read a map," he conceded. "I should probably also teach you how to captain a ship since you will be doing that eventually."

"I learned a little on the Edinburgh Trader. Though my time there was mostly spent trying to conceal the fact that I was a woman," she explained.

He mumbled something under his breath that she didn't quite hear.

"Sorry?"

"I said, it must have been fairly difficult to do that. I don't think I have ever seen a man with such..." His voice trailed off, as though he didn't quite want to finish the sentence.

"Such what?"
"Nothing. Nevermind."

She glared at him but chose to drop it. Rising from the chair, she took the liberty of crossing the room to sit down on his bed. It was certainly big enough for two people…

No, God, stop. That was not the direction that her mind needed to go in at this second.

"So, since you so astutely pointed out that I had some things to ask you, why don't we start with some of your recent decisions," she began, trying to forget the train of thought involving Jack and his bed.

"What about them?" he replied, watching her pick at his sheets.

"Why did you make me your first mate?"

He leaned back in his chair and propped his feet up on the chair that she had just vacated. His expression was carefully controlled, and it made him rather difficult to read.

"Why, would you rather not be?"

"I-well, no. I'm just confused. Surely Gibbs or Will have more experience on a ship than I do."

"Yes, they do…" His voice trailed off, but a hundred unspoken words were clearly audible to her.

He knew why, but he was hiding it from her for some reason.

"Jack, just a few days ago you were telling me that you...well, you said some rather nasty things to me. Now you give me the position of first mate. That doesn't seem like a natural progression."

"No? I hadn't noticed," he countered.

She narrowed her eyes, trying to see past the walls that he was throwing up.

"Well, since you are going to be uncooperative, I will try and answer for you. I think that you aren't nearly as angry with me as you pretend to be. Not anymore. I think that there is something in you that still...cares for me."

His eyes fluttered shut, as though he had just heard some extremely frustrating news.

"I...I don't know how I feel about you right now, Elizabeth. Let's just leave it at that, aye?"

"But that doesn't answer my question."

"Then forget that one and ask a new question."

She snapped her mouth shut just before she sent a nasty comment his way.

"Fine. Why did you hit Sheffield?"

Surprise flooded his face.

"What?" he asked, as though he was confused about why she was asking in the first place.

She repeated the question, saying it slowly as though she was talking to a child.

"Well, Elizabeth, when someone insults the captain's first mate, it is customary to punish that person."
"You nearly broke his jaw!" she half-shouted.

"Nearly? Pity. I was hoping I actually did."

"I think you hit him because he insulted me. I am almost positive that it didn't matter if I was your first mate or a corpse, you would have hit him anyway."

He raised his eyes to the ceiling, pushing his lips out as though he was deep in thought.

"You think rather highly of yourself don't you?"

"No," she shot back, her voice clipped.

A silence grew between them, and then she practically heard one of his walls come crashing down as he removed his feet from the chair and leaned forward, resting his chin on his hands.

"You're right, I suppose," he muttered. "Don't worry, the irony isn't lost on me. You killed me, and I clouted a guy because he called you an idiot."

She let the barest sign of victory onto her face.

"I admit, it was rather satisfying seeing him crumple like he did," she exclaimed. He got up and crossed to the other side of the room, pulling something out of the small cabinet.

Alcohol, she realized. The bottle was only a quarter full.

"Tequila," he said pointedly, brandishing the bottle at her. "Want some?"

"No thank you, I barely like rum. I'm not sure I need to delve any further."

He shrugged and took a swig straight from the bottle, grimacing at the burning sensation of the liquid sliding down his throat.

"I—the other things I wanted to ask you were more of a...personal nature, so I understand if you would rather me—" she started to say, stopping when he began shaking his head while swallowing more of the golden-colored drink.

"Go ahead lo—" he paused, his eyes widening a fraction. "Elizabeth. Ask away."

She watched him climb onto the bed to sit cross-legged diagonally from her, busying himself with rolling up his shirt sleeves. He was clearly trying to distract himself and her from his near-slip, but since that was the first time he had even come close to calling her something else besides Elizabeth in quite some time, there wasn't a hope of her forgetting it.

She did, however, pretend like she hadn't heard it.

While he was distracted, she took a second to study him. She had noticed that he had taken the beads and trinkets out of his hair, but everything else about him was exactly the same.

"What happened in the Locker?" she asked unceremoniously.

His eyes snapped up to stare at her incredulously, the kohl around them making him look sinister in the different angle of candlelight that he was now sitting in. He didn't say anything for a moment, then reached for the bottle of alcohol that he had deposited and took a deep swig.

Several emotions flitted across his face just long enough for her to read them. He seemed to settle on
caution.

"Why?"

Unprepared for the task of explaining herself, she stalled for a moment. She had expected outright rejection, instead of...whatever this was going to turn into.

"I don't know. Curiosity, guilt, worry, fear...pick one."

"If you really wanted to know, you could have just read the damn-"

"If you don't want to tell me, you don't have to," she insisted.

His face had darkened as though a storm cloud had passed over it, and she shivered from the look that he was giving her. He feels threatened, she realized.

"I don't mean to pry. I just...I don't know. I thought that maybe you wanted to talk about it."

"With you?"

She couldn't school her expression quickly enough. He saw the hurt that was surely written all over her face. He was right, of course. She didn't deserve to know anything about what had happened in the Locker. She had half sent him there for God's sake.

Just before she could verbalize her acceptance of his rejection, he said something that had her questioning whether she had dozed off again because the words that exited his mouth could only exist in her dream-world.

"Sorry...I told you to ask whatever you wanted. I should have realized that that would be on your list of subjects," he mumbled, looking anywhere but at her.

"Are you sure?"

"Aye, start before I change my mind."

She shifted around a bit on the bed to get more comfortable, then placed her hands awkwardly in her lap.

"I'm...I'm sorry, Jack. I-"

His eyebrows knitted together, and his face turned stony.

"You said you weren't sorry. We have already been through this-"

"But I am. I'm not sorry for what I did, because I did the right thing, but I am very sorry for doing it to you. I regretted it the second I did it, and it took all of my willpower to not climb back up the ship to set you free."

Climbing into that longboat had been the equivalent of excruciating torture. Just walking away from him had taken an unbelievable amount of effort, and then seeing the questioning stares of the crew, and the prickle of guilt when she had to lie to all of them.

He ran a hand over his bandana and down through his hair, where it finally rested on the back of his neck before he dropped it into his lap.

"If you could do it over again, would you make the same choice?" he asked, his voice soft.
The question struck her like a sword might, swift and unexpected. He was looking at her now with a new expression that she hadn't glimpsed yet. Her heart clenched at the glimmer of hope in his eyes. "I feel like I have created a fissure between us that is irreparable," she said, her voice wobbly with emotion. "No, I couldn't. Not again. Not after I have seen the consequences."

She watched and waited as he picked at his breeches, her eyes stinging from tears that she was suddenly holding back.

What was he thinking?

"That wasn't a question, by the way," he muttered.

"What do you m-"

"I was all prepared for you to interrogate me about the Locker, but then you veered wildly off topic," he interrupted.

"Oh."

"Oh," he mimicked.

They sat in silence again, losing themselves in the rhythmic rocking of the ship while Elizabeth gathered her thoughts.

"You had...hallucinations? Or visions? I am not sure what you call them," she said finally.

"Aye, and I am not sure what you call them either. The first one was of Will actually."

"You saw Will?" she gasped, pretending to be surprised.

He nodded, his face becoming aggravated.

"He tried to tell me that I didn't deserve you, or something like that. Thankfully he disappeared quickly."

She waited for him to continue. A hesitant look came over his face as though he had just realized something that was not the best thing to realize at that moment.

"The next one was..." he started, and then stopped.

"Was what?"

"Ah, well...it was you, actually."

"Me?"

"You...well, that is...oh, bugger it. You were in my cabin on the Pearl, and you were..."

He stopped again, as though the words were stuck in his throat. A swoosh of breath exited his mouth, and he continued.

"You were touching yourself on my bed without a care in the world. You were watching me while you did it, and I stood there and watched you come," he said, his voice husky.

Her heartbeat rapidly sped up, and she swallowed tightly. She had been unprepared to hear those
words arranged in that order coming from his mouth.

After a few agonizing seconds, she realized that she had forgotten to breathe, and had to close her eyes to tear herself away from his penetrating gaze.

"What...um...what did I do after that?" she asked in a low voice, her eyes opening halfway.

His head was tilted to the side, and the blush extended to her chest when she noticed that his eyes had darkened a shade.

"You told me that, contrary to what you just said a second ago, you wouldn't hesitate to kill me again. You also implied that I was a coward. Keep in mind that you weren't wearing clothes while you were telling me all of this."

She mentally applauded him for reminding her.

"Was...were these visions pulled from your own mind?"

"If you are asking if I ever thought about you being on my bed, allow me to remind you that I did propose to you."

"But that was a joke!"

The expression on his face told her that she was very wrong, and she re-evaluated her reaction to his proposal immediately and thoroughly.

"You were...serious?"

"Partly. I didn't expect you to even consider saying yes, and I am not sure what I would have done if you had said yes. Did you really think that I didn't fantasize about you?"

Of course, he was stuck on that detail.

"I thought you might, but I had doubts about any of your thoughts involving me."

He actually allowed a small smirk to quirk the corner of his mouth this time.

"I think the most entertaining part was watching you try to convince everyone on the ship that you didn't fantasize about me. Even ol' Norrington saw right through you."

Suddenly she found the bed sheets fascinating as she ducked her head to avoid Jack's gaze.

"I may have thought about venturing into your cabin once or twice," she said to her knees.

"And why, pray tell, didn't you?"

She looked at him like he was stupid. "Oh, I'm sure that cheating on the man I was currently attempting to rescue was the best moral decision I could have made."

An annoyed sigh escaped him.

"You came close quite a few times," he said as he started to count off on his fingers. She realized what he was doing half a second later. "I believe you wanted to kiss me at least three times during that voyage."

He paused, a spark of amusement dancing in his eyes. "The first time was when you tried to get the
letters back from me. You so tantalizingly reminded me that you knew how to use a sword. Then when you tried to convince me that I was a good man. Then just after that when you tried to convince yourself that I didn't want to drag you into my cabin right at that second, Will be damned."

"Why did you stop yourself that last time?"

"The black spot appeared on my hand, actually. Terrible timing, really. You looked rather disappointed."

One of her shoulders jerked up in a half-shrug. She refused to give him the satisfaction of an answer.

"What else did you see?" she asked.

He drained the last bit of alcohol from the bottle.

"Nothing," he said firmly. She guessed that he was avoiding the vision of her committing suicide, so she let it go.

She knew that Lucifer had arrived at some point after that, and had proceeded to parade Jack through memories in an attempt to convince him to kill her. Clearly that strategy didn't work quite the way that Lucifer had anticipated. She could tell that Jack was softening towards her, little by little, and she just hoped that it would last. She compared their relationship to a candle that was being assaulted by strong winds, yet the flame just kept hanging on somehow.

"I'm getting tired," she said, yawning.

He rose from the bed and tugged his shirt out of the sash that he wore around his waist.

"What are you doing?" she asked sharply.

"I don't know if you noticed, but it's rather warm in this cabin. In order to get any kind of sleep, the shirt has to come off."

She had certainly noticed how warm it was, having acutely felt the warmth when Jack described what he had seen her doing in the Locker.

"Oh," was all she managed to whisper with all of the moisture having left her mouth. Her skin prickled with goosebumps from the look he was giving her.

"I can sleep just fine with all of my clothes on," she muttered, avoiding eye contact with him when she heard the rustle of fabric. She had never seen him without a shirt, she realized. She had come close on their island when he showed her his bullet wounds, but not entirely.

The candles started to go out one by one, their absence leaving the cabin bathed in moonlight. Breathing a sigh of relief, she allowed herself to look at him again. She wanted to save any...exploration for when they were past all of this.

"Perhaps in your cabin. It's cooler down there," he said from across the room.

"My cabin? What are you implying?"

Then her brain caught up before he had a chance to answer.

"You want me to sleep in here? Did that tequila have something else in it?"

As he crossed the room again, the blue light illuminated his face. Now, instead of seeing just the
shadow of desire there, she also saw a hint of concern.

*How* was she going to sleep at all with *him* lying next to her? Thanking the darkness for his inability to see the blush that was once again covering her skin, she looked at the bed nervously.

"That dream you had. I don't think it was just a dream," he explained, shooing her to the right side of the bed so that he could lay down. She stayed sitting up as he settled in, propping himself up on his elbow to look at her.

"I think Lucifer is trying to play games with you."

"*What?*"

"Trust me, I don't know why either. I am hoping that if I can see you experiencing the nightmare again, I might get a better idea."

She shifted her gaze towards the pillow she was meant to lay on.

"What's on your mind?" Jack asked, evidently picking up on her anxiousness.

"Nothing," she lied.

"Elizabeth…"

Her legs were starting to ache from being stuck in the same position for so long. She heard Jack exhale softly.

"*Lizzie.*"

It was the quietest thing, yet it sounded crystal clear to her as though he had shouted it.

Shock flooded her face as she gasped. From what little she could see of his face now, it was obvious that he was trying to draw as little attention to what he had just said as possible.

Despite the hope that was poured into her with his utterance of his nickname for her, she didn't show any more reaction.

"I...don't know, Jack. Go to sleep, I am sure I will follow eventually."

He gazed at her for a long moment, and then nodded, laying down flat on his back.

In truth, a hundred different thoughts had flown through her mind when he told her that she was going to share his bed.

Deciding to attempt to sleep as well, she laid down, gazing up at the ceiling as the rocking of the ship shifted the moonlight around.

Her eyelids grew heavy, and she started to fade just as she heard light snoring coming from the pirate next to her.
"He's crumbling," Sin stated plainly, her silver hair hanging freely past her shoulders.

The human psyche was a complex thing. It could transform itself suddenly, with one ripple, one twist, one mistake. The human conscious thinks that it understands itself, thinks that it knows what reactions it will have, and what actions it will perform. But all it takes is that one shadow in the timeline, that one stain that blindsides it and turns everything that a person thought they knew into a terrifying joke. Their new reality becomes a poison that taints the very core of their thoughts.

And the subconscious sits and laughs like a merry fool at the tragedy of it all, reveling in the final release of all of its secrets. The deepest recesses of the mind see and know all, but refuse to depart with the knowledge, not because it doesn't want to, but because it doesn't care.

He was sure that had poor Elizabeth known just how much she was going to propel Jack towards a shade of what he once was, she might not have sent him to his death. Had she known how angry he would be with her, she would not have made claims that she wasn't sorry. And had she known exactly how much Jack Sparrow loved her, there was no doubt in Lucifer's mind that she would have flung herself into the Kraken's maw before she shackled Jack to the mast of his ship.

But she wasn't privy to any of that knowledge because her mind only let her see the surface of it all. Her mind only told her that Jack was too risky to bet on, romantically or morally, with the stakes she had behind her. Her mind told her that he harbored nothing for her besides marginal lust. And her mind convinced her that everything she feared Jack Sparrow to be was true.

Her mind was so very wrong.

And that moment, that one convoluted moment of misinformation and misdirection, had changed both of their lives.

"I am aware," he replied, his voice echoing off of the cold stone walls.

"And you are giving up?"

He had decided to retreat to the background, to observe, to re-evaluate his position, but now he saw a new window of opportunity.

The piece of Elizabeth's soul that she had traded would have allowed her to soldier through the guilt and mental exhaustion, but now the Locker had it, and she had no defense mechanism.

She may be putting on a brave face for Jack, but beneath the surface, a hundred fears had manifested themselves as pinpointed weapons, parasites that attached themselves to her thoughts, warping them inside of her mind until they were no longer recognizable.
"No."

Sin stared at the demon, the air feeling cold and void around her.

"What are you going to do?"

His head turned to look at her slowly, his face holding a grin that did not move his mouth at all. It was the kind of expression that chilled her very countenance.

"It isn't a question of what I am going to do, it is a question of what I am going to continue doing."

Jack was beyond his reach. He had accepted that nothing was going to shake the connection he had to Elizabeth. The man was just too damn stubborn. But because of Elizabeth's fragile state of mind, he saw a glimmer of possibility.

"You really are willing to go to any lengths to claim your prize, aren't you?"

He gazed into Sin's pale face.

"I claimed you, didn't I?"

Her hands, which were previously clenched at her side, loosened in immediate defeat.

"Leave at least some sanity left in her, will you?"

"I don't make promises."

She gave him one last withering stare and swept out of the room.

Elizabeth already feared Jack as a product of her paranoia and scrambled mind.

Now she needed to see him as an enemy. She needed to be convinced that Jack was dangerous, and she needed to convince Jack that she no longer cared for him. She needed to become cold inside, to everyone and everything.

She needed to hate Jack with every fiber of her being, so that he would, in turn, feel betrayed by her yet again, and this time, Lucifer was convinced that he would not turn a blind eye so easily.

The status quo had to shift.

His throat was scratchy when he woke from the haze that might have been called sleep. It hadn't been more than an hour, he concluded, when he peered out of the window. He rubbed his eyes as the fog cleared from his brain, and that's when he heard it.

A small faint whimpering was piercing the air, coming from the form next to him.

He lightly touched her shoulder and got no response. She was still asleep, which meant that she was dreaming.

Using extreme caution to avoid waking her, he gently turned her onto her back and then froze at the sight of her face.

Her skin was deathly pale, and a harsh trail of tears was shimmering on her cheeks. She was twitching her head back and forth, and her brows were pinched together. He realized that she was in pain, and then something crystallized into sharp relief. He hated seeing her in pain, and he suddenly
acutely hated every time that he had caused her pain.

The surface of the bed shifted when her wrists pushed into it, as though something was pushing on them. He noticed with a jolt that her hips were jerking, trying to get away from something. The whimpers were getting louder as her head thrashed from side to side more violently.

Terror struck him when she opened her mouth and screamed, a hoarse sound that very nearly made him make a fruitless attempt to wake her up. But he refrained, barely. His own hands were starting to shake from watching her, this, whatever this was.

Lucifer. Lucifer was torturing her, and all he could do was sit there and watch if he wanted to help her at all.

The helplessness he felt left him hollow, bereft of the anger that he once felt towards her.

Her wrists were trapped, a vice grip tightening and tightening, and there was a weight on top of her, hot and suffocating.

She couldn't breathe. Wheezing noises were being wrenched from her chest, and her brain swam from the lack of oxygen. Colors blurred and rushed together, and noises amplified and vanished before she could tell what they were.

Then she heard it. It cut through the dizzying precipice that she was nearing the edge of. That voice. Deep and baritone, it throbbed through her ears as it whispered something to her, into her neck, scorching her skin.

"I want to watch the light leave your eyes."

Those terrible words washed over her, connecting to something deep in her mind, but she couldn't find...couldn't understand why they were so familiar-

The tear of fabric singed the air, causing her eyes to widen. A streak of white flew through the haze, and with alarming clarity, for just one moment, she realized she was half-exposed to the shadow's gaze. Fighting to cover herself, she expunged the remaining strength she had. It would not relinquish its hold on her arms.

It shifted, leaving the skin of her neck cold, and halted right above the valley of her breasts, inflaming the skin there. She gazed down at it, watching in mute terror as it whispered another string of words to her.

"I want to watch as your limp body hangs, and your blood covers the deck."

Heat mixed with the glacial piercing chill that gripped her very being. Pain throbbed incessantly in her head as she searched valiantly for-

"Familiar, isn't it? This fear you are feeling..."

She couldn't speak. It felt like someone had poured sand into her throat. Then suddenly, it released her arms, and for one glorious second, she thought she was free.

The burn of cloth dragging down her skin made the thought perish and whispered no's chanted their way through her cracked lips. But it was no use.
Tears welled in her eyes as the shame crept into her. It could see everything now. Her too thin waist, her shaking legs, the gooseflesh that covered her entire body.

Red eyes stared up at her as its fingers sunk into her hips, its grip too strong for her to struggle.

The muscles of her stomach quivered when the mouth lowered again, speaking again, as though its goal was to make her turn herself inside out with the indiscernible thoughts chewing their way through her brain.

"It's sad that you went through all of that trouble for forgiveness that you will never have."

God, she knew that voice, rich and velvet-like, rumbling with its intensity, but her memory had abandoned her, and every search she did through the buzzing inside her head left her more and more helpless in the insanity.

She wrenched her head away from it, squeezing her eyes shut, causing excess tears to leak onto her cheeks. Lights danced behind her eyelids, strange wisps of white dotting her vision. A repugnant layer of sweat had settled onto her skin, the dirtiness she felt peaking in that moment.

Her terror was newly forged when the grip shifted from her hips to her thighs, and a shriek was torn from her throat when strength that she had never experienced wrenched them open. The contrast of the feather light touch of lips to the piercing pain of fingers digging into her flesh made her sob anew with the manic energy of it all, ripping through her from top to bottom like a whip strike.

She didn't know who she was anymore, didn't know the meaning of anything, didn't know...

"You killed me. You played-" it paused to kiss her thigh, making her feel violently and suddenly sick-"a ridiculous cheap trick on me."

Nausea poisoned her stomach, and the throbbing behind her eyes climbed to such an intensity that she had the sudden urge to claw them out to stop the pain.

The shadow figure's next words were punctuated with more kisses.

"You shackled me to the mast of my own ship."

Red eyes gazed up at her again, and then, through the tears that coated her vision, the figure started to change, started to form into something so familiar...

Dark brown eyes, lined with something...something...she couldn't remember what it was called...

Long dark hair...

She knew someone with hair like that...who...why...why couldn't she think...

She searched, looked as hard as she could, but everything was so out of focus, so blurry...

The figure's lips moved, the curve of them visible even through it all.

All feeling seemed to float away, her body growing numb to everything. Everything but that voice, as it spoke more words that she strained to hear.

"What kind of fantasy world are you living where I feel anything besides hatred for you?"

Her eyes squeezed shut involuntarily, and then several things happened very quickly. Nothing was touching her for a brief moment, and she dimly heard the rustle of more fabric, and then everything
was brought into sharp focus again when it climbed, slithered its way up her body, its mouth settling on her throat again.

The muscles in her body felt like jelly, and she did nothing when the figure gripped her hips again. Then, strength returned to her when it lifted her hips, and she became wild, struggling, thrashing with every ounce of vitality she had left.

She lost.

"You will get the punishment you deserve," it whispered against the corner of her lips, holding her body tightly. Something was scratching at her face, and something small and cold was tapping against the skin of her neck just below her chin.

Her body went taut and then contorted forcefully at the tearing pain that shot through her.

A low rumble emanated from the figure.

*Laughing…*

*God, it hurt.*

She sobbed, sobbed until she didn't think she was going to have any tears left, and then the figure lifted its head to stare at her.

The bottom of her entire world dropped out from under her.

Her vision cleared magnificently in that moment, and she desperately fiercely wished it hadn't.

No no no no…

*Jack.*

It was *Jack.*

Then everything went dark.

She woke in a pool of sweat, her limbs trembling.

"Lizzie."

Her eyes shot to the figure that had just spoken, and then a terrible fear slammed into her chest. Her breathing became irregular, giant wheezing gasps turning into short breaths. The world around her started to spin, and she turned as quickly as a lightning strike and flew off of the bed, hitting the hardwood of the cabin floor painfully.

She had to get away, had to get away from him.

"Stay...stay away from me," she croaked, holding her hand out in front of her.

He rose from the bed and walked slowly towards her, causing her to shuffle back on her knees. His hand reached out to her.

"It's me."

The blonde hair that was now dirty with sweat shook as her head jerked from side to side.
"No...no no no...you hurt me, you-"

He knelt down to where she was huddled and raised her face up to meet his.

"Lizzie, it's Jack."

She gripped his wrist with an almost painful tightness as she flung his hand away.

"NO!"

The force of her scream made him recoil.

"You hurt me. You caused me pain, you have caused me pain ever since...how could I ever believe that you might still care for me..."

There was no denial of the first accusation from Jack, but he would be damned before he let her think he didn't care for her, and that scared him.

"I'll admit, I was, still am, angry with you, but the things I said...I didn't mean them, Lizzie."

She looked up at him with bloodshot eyes, her skin raw from the spilled tears.

"Then why would you do that to me? How could you force me...you said...in the-in the jungle that you would care, and then you..."

A new kind of fear was starting to creep into him as her voice failed her.

He prepared himself for her to lash out again, and knelt, taking her face in his hands.

"What happened?" he whispered.

"I remembered, all of the terrible things you said to me, I remembered, you spoke them again, and then you..."

Her words failed her again as she sobbed noiselessly.

Suddenly she shoved him back with all of the strength she had, and stumbled for the door of the cabin, wrenching it open with her shoulders heaving, only to come face to face with Will.

He stared down at the trembling form that was now clinging to his shirt, and then looked at Jack, who was kneeling on the floor, defeated.

"She was having another nightmare, and then she woke up, and...she's terrified of me..." he muttered, answering Will's unspoken question.

Elizabeth turned around slowly, and in the new angle, he could see how drained, how exhausted she looked.

"I was such a fool. The way you have been treating me, pushing me away and then pulling me back in, the things you said to me. You told me that you wanted to-"

She quieted yet still gazed wildly at him when Jack rose from the floor, dark eyes stark and hollow.

"So that's what it is then. That's what his plan was."

His voice was no more than a whisper.
"Who's plan?" asked Will.

The pirate captain shook his head, more to himself than anyone else.

"Take her and go. Get her out of here. Away from me."

"Jack, what-"

His eyes flashed dangerously.

"Take her, and get out of my cabin."

The empty bottle of tequila shattered against the wall behind his desk, sending fragments of glass around the room, and Jack wished in that moment that it was he who shattered instead.

The fabric of his old reality felt like a million worlds away. It was a strange thing, that you don't realize how much you care about something until it was gone. And the gravity of what had just happened was only beginning to sink in. His mind was fighting to eject all of it, to erase the last half hour from existence.

But it wasn't going away. The ugly hate in her eyes, the fear that practically bled off of her skin, it was all directed at him, and there wasn't an ounce of his body that could process anything.

He should have seen this coming. He really should have.

Looking back, it was painfully obvious what Lucifer's plan was, but he hadn't even considered that he was going to try and turn her against him because somewhere in his subconscious, he had been convinced that that wasn't possible.

He had told her that he had no intention to physically harm her, so he knew that his new fear of him didn't originate within her, and he knew that she was strong enough to overcome any lesser persuasion from Lucifer.

What had he done to her in the dream?

He scoured his memory of both, looking for commonalities. Nothing significant stood out to him in either of them, but he remembered that she had brought up the conversation that they had in the jungle after she had woken up. She said that he told her he would care…and he had betrayed his word in the nightmare.

What was she referring to?

Then, he remembered one detail that had stood out to him.

Her hips had kept moving as though...as though…as though she was trying to escape something.

What-

The truth dawned on him before he was prepared for it, making him pitch forward to stumble to the ground on all fours. The contents of his stomach found their way onto the cabin floor, his chest heaving with the raw panic that clenched at it.

He had never had more of a confirmation that he still cared for her deeply than the absolute sickening feeling he experienced when he even thought about forcefully taking her. His heart seemed to eat itself every the terrible image paraded through his mind.
And now, for all intents and purposes, he had done it. She had seen him, she had seen *his* face above her, his body, his…

He slammed his fist into the wooden floor and then rolled over onto his back in exhaustion.

At some point, the world fell away, and just for a split second in the teetering precipice between consciousness and sleep, he wished it would *stay* gone.
The sun was just starting to breach the horizon, and the air was a cool crisp breeze. The *Voyager* was a day out from Tortuga.

Elizabeth sat on the stairs leading to the captain's cabin, numb to everything and everyone. When approached, just a glance from her steered anyone away. Will had tried to talk to her, but even he got the same response. The crew worked while alternating between watching for any sign of Jack and watching Elizabeth warily. They didn't know the entire detail of what had happened, but they knew enough, and the melancholy atmosphere of the ship could be felt by all.

Will wandered over to where Gibbs was talking to Voyles.

"Do you know anything about what happened to Jack in the Locker?" he questioned.

Gibbs sent Voyle to do some task or other, and turned to the young sailor, his face stony with annoyance.

"No, I don't, and I wouldn't tell you if I did. That is Jack's story to tell, and no one else's," he said, glancing up at Jack's cabin. "But it might be high time for him to be tellin' it, I think, at least to someone."

Will looked out to the sea. "Elizabeth...she...I am worried about her health. I just wanted some answers."

"And you think that the Locker has to do with Elizabeth's current disposition?"

"Jack did something to her, and I am sure that his actions were...influenced."

Gibbs rounded on him.

"I don't know what accusations are brewing in your head, Will. Jack did nothing to that girl last night-"

"But he said that she was terrified of him! Maybe it wasn't last night, but Jack has done *something* to her that resulted in this."

"Fine, then go ahead and march up to his cabin and accuse him of hurting her, right now. We'll see how you feel after that."

"I don't think that Jack would harm me."

"And why do you think that?"

"He was friends with my father."

Gibbs rubbed his temples, frustrated.
"I wouldn't say that friends is the right word. They might have been friends before your father half-participated in the mutiny that Barbossa organized. The only saving grace he had was that he turned against Barbossa at the last second. I wouldn't place any faith in your standing with Jack when it is based on Bootstrap."

The anger dropped from Will's face, replaced with resignation.

"Elizabeth isn't safe around Jack."

Gibbs inclined his head in her direction. "I don't think we have to worry about that, lad. She doesn't seem to be wantin' to go anywhere near him."

Will hesitated for a second. "I'm going to keep an eye on her," he said, turning to gaze at her.

"Well, you will be competing with the captain for that."

"What are you talking about?" he asked incredulously, rounding back on Gibbs.

"You might believe that he's responsible for whatever it is that happened to her, but I do not, and I know that he will be making damn sure that nothing else happens," Gibbs said. "Besides, since when are you concerned about Elizabeth anyways?" he added, looking at Will with suspicion.

The wind blew a few strands of hair across his face when he looked down at the deck.

"I was angry with her when I found out what she did to Jack. But something that Jack said finally sunk in. I think that I was angry because she didn't tell me her plan, not because she sent Jack to his death. As I have thought about it, I think I have come to understand her motivations for not telling me."

Gibbs didn't look entirely convinced. "I would wager that you also realized that the girl you thought you knew was an entirely different person."

Will glanced over at the lone figure sitting on the stairs. "I think I always knew that, but just buried the knowledge to suit my idea of her. I...I'm not sure how I feel about her other betrayal yet."

"And which betrayal is that?"

"That kiss that she shared with Jack was not just a trick. I'm sure of it. So she must have had some kind of...feelings for him before that point. I am not sure what Jack offers her than I cannot, but it must be something substantial."

"Ah," Gibbs said, looking distinctly uncomfortable. "Perhaps you best be talkin' to her about these concerns, when she gets around to talking to anyone. I would re-evaluate your position on Jack too before word somehow gets to him that you think he is guilty. I can promise that he will not be pleased."

"Innocent until proven guilty I suppose," Will responded.

"Aye. If you'll excuse me, I am going to go get some answers myself out of him."

Will watched him climb the left stairs to the captain's cabin, avoiding Elizabeth on the right, and then returned to his spot at the railing.

The sun was shining in his eyes when he cracked them open, causing him to immediately close them. Shifting, he discovered that his neck had a distinct kink in it, which led him to the realization that he
had slept on the floor.

Then the memories of last night flooded in, and all of his insides seemed to shrivel up into themselves.

"Dammit", he muttered, gingerly sitting up. He attempted to locate the knot in his neck, made more difficult by his dreadlocks getting tangled in his fingers.

He also noticed that his fingers had light bruises on them, and he dimly recalled hitting the floor right before he passed out.

"Dammit," he muttered again, flexing his sore hand. Sometimes the world just seemed to hate him.

A light knock refreshed his annoyance.

"If it is anyone that isn't Gibbs, bugger off."

"Good thing it is me, then," Gibbs said as he opened the door.

He sent a pointed look of annoyance his way, clearly saying that he would rather not have anyone bother him.

"We need to talk, Jack."

"No, we don't."

"There is no more alcohol in here for you to drown yourself in, and I would wager that you will not be hittin' anything for awhile, with the bruises you already have," Gibbs persisted, glancing down at his fist. "So, you need to talk."

He forced out a long sigh and scooted up so that his back leaned against the front of his desk. He stared at Gibbs when the older man didn't sit.

"If you want to talk to me, you will have to come down here. I don't feel like standing," he grumbled petulantly.

"Fine," Gibbs sighed, taking a seat across from him on the floor. "Will thinks that you hurt Elizabeth. Don't kill him."

He looked up sharply from where he was examining his waist scarf.

"He what?"

"Aye, he thinks that the Locker influenced you into hurting her."

"That's utter bollocks. Besides, since when did he care what I did to her anyways?"

Gibbs studied Jack, noticing that he looked like he hadn't slept properly for quite some time. The mischievous undertones were gone now, replaced by something grim and bleak.

"He appears to have had a change of heart. Jack, no one knows what happened to you there, so I wouldn't be surprised if the entire crew start speculatin' about you and Elizabeth-"

"I could care fuck all about what they think, Josh. Really, let them talk. I know that I didn't hurt a hair on her head, and that is all that matters to me."
Then he looked at Gibbs with a skeptical look. "Do you think I harmed her?"

"No. I told her that I didn't believe that you would harm her, back when…"

"Back when what?"

"When...when you were being unpleasant to her."

"She killed me," he snapped, though it was said with less venom than it normally was.

"Aye, she did," said Gibbs with resignation. "She talked to me before she went off to tell you that she was leaving in the jungle. Like I said, I told her even then that I did not believe that you would physically harm her."

"I thought about it, many times. But thinking and doing are two very different things. For example, I think I would rather slice my own hand off over actually hurting her."

"Do you forgive her, then?"

He looked mildly stunned at the question, as though he hadn't thought about it before.

"The answer I could give you right now could be different five minutes, three hours, or even a day from now. So I will just say I don't know."

"But you were angry with her?"

He leaned his head back against the desk.

"Immensely. Astronomically. Terribly. Might still be. Haven't been able to pinpoint the reason why though."

Gibbs raised both eyebrows in surprise. "You wished a horrifying death on Cutler Beckett for burning the Wicked Wench down, and yet you can't pinpoint why you are angry at Elizabeth for killing you?"

"No, I can't. Trust me, don't think I don't hate it. I do."

"What happened in the Locker, Jack?"

He gave a heaving sigh and started to pick at his fingernails.

"You are the second person to ask me that in twenty-four hours."

"Did you tell her anything, besides what she already knew?"

He glanced up for a second, looking mildly annoyed. "Some."

"Then tell me some too then."

"I had some visions, some nasty thoughts, and a visitor or two. What else do you need to know?"

"A visitor?" Gibbs inquired.

"Aye, a visitor," he said with a foul tone, recognizing that Gibbs wasn't going to let up. "Lucifer himself decided to pay me a visit. He apparently has been watching me, and was most displeased when Elizabeth chained me to the Pearl."
Gibbs' eyes bugged out of his head, and a shadow passed over his face. "Lucifer, as in the Lucifer? The fallen angel Lucifer? That one?"

"That's the one. Bright red eyes and black robes. He...he took me on a guided tour through my own memories. One of them was me getting this," Jack said, holding up his left wrist. "Why?" Gibbs asked, a little bit of wonder still in his voice.

"He believed that if I worked out the mess of my own mind, I could see my path regarding Elizabeth and her punishment clearer. The only thing I saw clearer was that I made every choice in my past for a reason, and there was never going to be anyone to tell me whether it was right or wrong. Only myself."

Gibbs sat back a little. "So, did the Locker have influence over what happened to Elizabeth?"

The same shadow that had passed over Gibb's face was now passing over his. "You...could say that."

"What do you mean?"

"What I mean is that Lucifer's motivation for having anything to do with me never really had anything to do with me. He wants Elizabeth."

"So-"

"He invaded her mind," he said, his voice dropping to a lower register. "Twice. The first time was the nightmare that Will pestered me to assist with, and then again when I made her sleep in my cabin."

"Jesus Christ," Gibbs breathed.

He twitched his eyebrows in agreement. "So then why did she become so afraid of you?"

His shoulders sagged, and his eyes shut. "He desperately wanted me to kill her. He told me to every five seconds. I am fairly certain that for some reason, if I do it, Lucifer gets his hands on her. Don't know the mechanisms of it."

Gibbs waited for him to continue, his face losing color rapidly.

"Once he realized that I wasn't going to follow through, he changed tactics. He wanted to turn her against me. Make her betray me again. I guess he thought that I would be tipped over the edge this time or some such thing."

"How could he possibly turn her against you? The girl killed herself for you for God's sake."

The room became deathly quiet. He looked at Gibbs with a grim half-smile that was gone as soon as it arrived, replaced by an expression that was rarely seen on his face. Revulsion. "He violated her, Josh."

Gibbs sucked in a breath in horror and then dared to ask him to clarify, realizing the answer halfway
"For all intents and purposes, I...I raped her. She saw me do it, in her dream, as I told her all of the nasty things I had said to her. I caused her pain, and because of the trade that she did to get me out of the Locker, she has no defense against the consequences of it. Lucifer got his wish. She sees me as an enemy now."

He leaned his head back against the desk a little more forcefully, tightening his jaw.

"You may do a lot of things Jack, but that would never be among them. Especially to her," Gibbs said adamantly.

"You don't think I know that? The problem is, now she doesn't. You know, even through all the anger I harbored for her, this just...I never wanted her to think that I might do that. I never wanted her to fear me because of that."

"I'm sorry," the older man said quietly after a few moments.

He shook his head bitterly. "Aye, so am I. The only thing I want now is to drag her up here and do everything in my power to convince her that that dream is absolute nonsense. Just a few days ago I was threatening to kill her. It's a funny sad stupid world, isn't it?"

Gibbs nodded, tracing the lines on the wooden floor.

"How do you know that she is missing part of her soul?"

He looked at him strangely. "That is the only thing that Davy Jones will take in exchange for a person. Life for a life, that sort of thing."

"What are you going to do then?" Gibbs asked.

"I really only have one choice, though my chances of success are slim to none, which I am sure Lucifer knows," he answered. "I have to somehow convince Jones to give it back to her."

A look of hopelessness transformed the older man's face.

"Jack, you know as well as I do that that is a daft idea."

Finally, he stood up and stalked across the room to the table next to the bed. Gibbs watched him snatch his compass off of the brown surface. It had dropped from Elizabeth's breeches after she had scrambled out of his bed.

"Elizabeth killed me because this damn thing pointed at me and not at Will. Then she," he paused for a second to collect himself, "she killed herself to bring me back. I think that I ought to try every single daft idea I have to do the same service for her."

He was almost shouting, and then he flung the compass at the ground. It skidded all the way to the door and bounced off, coming to a stop a few inches away.

"Is that why?" Gibbs asked quietly, standing.

He rubbed his forehead in frustration.

"I don't know. Maybe it was to save the crew, maybe it was to save herself, maybe it was because..."
"I remember the two of you on the way to Isla Cruces. She couldn't take her eyes off of you, and you couldn't stop trying to goad her into looking," Gibbs interjected.

"That was a more simple time."

The man shook his head. "I wouldn't say that. It was equally complicated, just for different reasons," Gibbs said, watching him stare at the compass on the ground distastefully.

"You're dismissed."

"...Aye Captain. Just...whatever you decide to do, be careful."

He gave a half-hearted nod, turning away as Gibbs exited the cabin.

She had abandoned her spot on the stairs a few minutes after Gibbs had gone into Jack's cabin. She sat in her small cabin now, looking to the world as though she was an empty shell. Her hair hung limp, and her eyes had lost their life. She supposed that to anyone looking, they might be right, but inside, she felt like two storms were crashing into each other.

The moment that she saw Jack's face above her was flashing through her mind every time she closed her eyes and then seeing his face when she woke up; all she could remember feeling was threatened. She was so sure that he was going to try to hurt her again, so sure that that was all he had ever been trying to do. Everything she thought she knew about him seemed so far away now, replaced by a terrible reality where nothing made sense anymore.

She questioned every word he had ever said to her, everything he had ever done in her presence, examined it and turned it over and over in her mind trying to find his true motivations.

He couldn't be trusted, not with her safety, especially not with how angry he had been towards her. Every awful thing he had said to her that she had brushed aside were coming back with a vengeance, reminding her that he was dangerous.

She had been too slack with him, had trusted him too much, had thought that he was softening towards her. No, he hadn't been. She was just blind to the truth.

And it made her so angry, so desperate to live in that fantasy world again where Jack forgave her and had never wanted to punish her by raping her. But it was never going to come back. Jack was an enemy now, and there was nothing that she could do to change that, not after what she saw, what she felt him do to her.

Burning salty tears were spilling over onto her skin. Angrily wiping them away, she covered her face with her hands and screamed into them. She damned Jack and damned herself for being so stupid.
The brig was made up of six cells, all empty except for the one that he currently sat in. Had this been a pirate ship, the floors would have been covered in a watery grime, and the smell might have resembled that very particular scent of musk that only comes off of a dead body. But this wasn't a pirate ship, this was a Navy ship, and that fact made him all the more displeased that he was sitting in the brig at all.

He had long since thrown his ridiculous wig off because of the sweat that had started to accumulate under it, and every few seconds or so, he would run his hands over the bruise forming on his face. The hit had been entirely unexpected, but he had learned two valuable pieces of information from it. He never desired to put himself in a position to provoke Jack Sparrow's fist again, because the man had a nasty right hook, and he also discovered the extent of the captain's weakness for Elizabeth Swann.

By the instant dark rage that had taken over his eyes from his petty insult, he would almost say that the captain loved her, at least as much as a filthy pirate could love a woman anyway. He most likely confused the desire to bed her as being love, because in his experience, pirates were creatures that only functioned on the most basic of instincts.

And Swann. How much she had changed. Gone was the prim and proper daughter of Weatherby Swann, replaced by a corrupted shade of her former self. In a perfect world, she would have married Commodore Norrington. The girl would have made a good wife for James. He used to think that it was William Turner that had driven a wedge into that engagement, but now he had a sneaking suspicion that she held a misguided affection for Sparrow.

An affection that was perhaps born even before she met the pirate. She was always pestering her father with stories about adventure and whining about attending afternoon tea. Weatherby put up with it, of course, passing it off as the fanciful ravings of a child. But anyone with a keen eye could detect that Elizabeth Swann was cut from a different cloth than the ladies of Port Royal.

Of course, women who believe themselves to be above the societal positions for which they are meant are just poorly educated. He would say that they could just masquerade as men, being unfit for the role of a woman in their state, but he would hate to disgrace his gender in such a distasteful fashion. It was best to try and persuade them to find a suitor, a good respectable man that could train them in the duties expected of a wife.

But Swann was ruined the second the damn pirate had fished her out of the harbor. All of her dreams and fantasies had been validated, realized upon meeting a real pirate. He had been there that day, and he had watched the blatant curiosity on her face just before she begged her father not to send Sparrow to the gallows. How she could not see that Sparrow cared very little for her, due to his trickery in using her to escape, he did not know.

Women were nothing but a tool to improve the world of men, and he was confident that Sparrow held Elizabeth in the same regard. A pretty young thing, infatuated with him, to hang on his arm.
while he sailed around the Caribbean.

At least, until she killed him. Now he was fairly certain that he wanted very little to do with her. Perhaps she could be steered in James' direction once more.

The door to the brig drug across the floor as it opened, snapping his attention to the figure that was slipping through.

When she stepped into the small amount of light in front of the cell next to him, he was taken aback by how gaunt and exhausted she looked. Her skin was a sickly pale yellow color, her lips were dry and cracked, and her eyes were dead to the world.

"Lieutenant Sheffield," her voice echoed around the room.

"Miss Swann," he replied, inclining his head in her direction, sounding like he wasn't sure of whether he should nervous or curious. "To what do I owe the pleasure? And no captain here to look over your shoulder this time?"

Her eyes narrowed. "I do not need protection. I want information from you."

"Information, hmm? No doubt about your dear father?"

She stepped closer until she practically had her nose pressed against the iron bars of his cell.

"Yes. Tell me what you know."

He got up to stand in front of her.

"Tell me first why it is that you were so against a true engagement to James Norrington."

He couldn't tell if she was offended or intrigued by his inquiry.

"Why?"

"Surely you realize that," he started, after giving her a sneer, "this life is no place for a lady. I'm sure James would be more than willing to reconsider if you would."

Her hands gripped the bars tighter.

"I never had a problem with James Norrington."

"No? Did your heart belong to another then? Young William perhaps? Or is it the dashing pirate captain that could have maybe once wanted to bed you, but now just wants to see you hanged?"

"Don't talk about him in my presence again."

"Did you finally realize that he isn't to be trusted?"

Her face darkened when she looked at him in mild surprise.

"My regard for Captain Sparrow is not only none of your business, it is also not the topic of discussion. Tell me about my father."

There was a flash, a flash of uncertainty in her eyes, but what it regarded, he did not know.

"I don't have much incentive to do that. You aren't a threat to me at the moment."
She slapped her fist against the iron, causing his smirk to grow wider.

"Fine."

The door slammed shut on her way out.

They were nearly to Tortuga, he estimated. They would spend a couple of nights there, and then he would slip away onto a merchant ship bound for Port Royal. The men and his crew would be too occupied with the women and drink to notice him leaving, at least right away. And she was too occupied with hating him to pay attention.

She may not even recognize him, but he doubted that. The merchant sailors, on the other hand, most likely didn't have any idea what he had looked like in the Navy, and resuming that visage should be a good enough of a disguise, at least for the time being. The idea of looking like that again was highly unattractive, but if he wished to even get close enough to look at Beckett's place of residence, the Swann Mansion he guessed, without being arrested, he certainly couldn't look like himself.

He had a pressing, urgent need to regain possession of the bloody heart of Jones. There was also the small matter of Norrington's theft to attend to. A firm talking to would most likely set him straight. And then there was Beckett.

When he was unaware of Elizabeth's predicament, his goal had been to wipe the man off of the face of the earth, but now, there was information that he needed from him first. He could kill him afterward.

The door to his cabin suddenly slammed open, upsetting the ink pot that he had just dipped his quill into, the black murky liquid oozing over the map that he had been working on. Elizabeth burst through like a bat out of hell, and it took every ounce of patience he had to restrain himself from shouting at her for the mess she had made, choosing instead to go back and forth rapidly from regarding her with extreme caution to extreme concern.

He opened his mouth to ask why she was in his cabin, when just a few hours ago, she had treated it like it was hell on earth, but she cut him off sharply, her tone reminding him that she would rather be anywhere else over standing there looking at him.

"I need the keys to the brig, Captain Sparrow."

"Back to formal titles then, Miss Swann?"

"Just give me the damn keys."

Upon closer inspection, he noticed that she was practically shaking with tension, whether it was fear of being in his presence or anger at him or someone else, or both, he couldn't tell.

"What precisely do you need them for?"

He might have laughed at the exaggerated expression of offense on her face if she hadn't suddenly drawn her sword.

"Allow me to remind you, Miss Swann, that despite the...progress we were making, I am still your captain, and drawing your weapon against me is a criminal offense, not that you would win a sword fight with me anyway."

"So was making me believe that I could trust you. Give me the keys."
He had to very quickly school his emotions before he let her see how torn apart he was that she believed him to be untrustworthy, especially for that reason. The thought of trying to defend himself to her sounded appealing for all of a second, before he accepted the endeavor as absolutely fruitless.

"Put the damn sword away," he snapped, digging around in the bottom drawer of the desk.

She didn't put the sword away. Instead she kept it brandished right up until she snatched the keys from his hand. Before he could even say anything else to her, she shot one more disgusted look at him.

"Go to hell."

He watched her dart out of his cabin too quickly for him to respond to her insult, and then unceremoniously flopped himself back into the chair at his desk, hating everything and everyone.

A realization had occurred to him in the time after Gibbs had left his cabin. He had been unable to sleep afterwards, tossing and turning in his bed before getting up to brood at his desk.

He wasn't angry at Elizabeth for what she did. He understood, understood that in her mind, it was the only course of action, both for herself, and for the crew. Hell, he had it coming, as much as he hated to admit that.

He was angry because it was her.

Sheffield's confidence waned when she returned with keys in her hand, and plummeted when she yanked the iron door open. He only had a split second chance to see the viscousness in her eyes before she drug him from the floor by the shoulder of his jacket, a dagger pressed to his throat.

"The incentive is your life, Officer Sheffield. Tell me about my father."

"Well played, Miss Swann," he said, struggling to speak. "Lord Beckett gave the order that Governor Swann had...fulfilled his usefulness."

"Who did he give the order to?"

"Mr. Mercer, I believe, I'm sure you remember him."

"Are you telling me that Beckett ordered my father's execution?"

Her voice was high and shrill, fear overtaking the anger that he had instilled in her. The dagger loosened enough to allow him to speak normally.

"Quite unfortunate really, Weatherby was a good chap."

"Was? Is he alrea-"

The syllable broke off, choking in her throat with a strangled noise.

"Perhaps, perhaps not."

A few moments went by before she spoke again.

"Why?"

"Let's just say that he overstepped his boundaries."
He spied tears in her eyes when she backed away from him, sheathing the dagger in her breeches.

"Good day, Lieutenant Sheffield," but he could tell that the last thing she wanted him to have was a good day.

It was only about twenty minutes before she returned with the keys.

"Are you going to tell me what you needed to go down to the brig for?"

He suspected that it was something to do with Sheffield, but what, he wasn't sure.

She was standing as far away from him as possible, without actually being outside of the cabin.

"It's none of your business."

"Then why are you still in here?"

She didn't answer right away, looking confused herself as to why she remained.

"I-I don't know. You haven't tried to throw me on your bed yet, so maybe you aren't as dangerous as I originally thought."

"That was never the plan-"

"Then you might have just slit my throat while I slept, or you could have made a show of it by hanging me from the mast like you threatened to do."

"I was angry-"

"How can I trust anything you ever said to me? Anything you will say?"

"...Do you want to?"

She stepped closer to him.

"Yes, yes, dammit, I want to...go back, before any of this happened, but I just can't. Every time I look at you, I just see you..."

Her voice choked up in her throat.

"Elizabeth," he tried, then shook his head. "Lizzie. I don't care how damn angry I was at you. You could burn the damn Pearl down, if I still had it, and I still wouldn't do that to you."

"But it was you, Jack! I know it was just a dream, but all of those horrible things you said to me, and...and you were smirking when you did it..."

Angry tears were staining her face now, and he once again cursed Lucifer for the rage that was polluting her mind.

"If you cared for me at all, ever, then you should have gone down with the Pearl from the first. You should have stopped trying to run from the fate that you brought upon yourself."

"Lizzie..."

Malice was shining in her eyes now.
"You deserved what I did to you. I should have sent you to the Locker sooner. It's like...it's like I was blind to everything you have ever done to me. I can't trust you."

It was a delusion, he knew that, but it was damned hard to not feel the sting.

"And then the way I still wanted you after we rescued you. It sickens me now. I never really saw the way you treated me, just passed it off. I thought I deserved it."

"You didn't," he sighed.

"Then why were you so angry with me?"

He scraped the chair back when he got up and stalked towards her, uncaring whether she was afraid of him or not.

"Because I let you in, dammit. I let you in, more than I have for anyone else, and you shit all over it. Because it was you, and put the damn dagger away."

She had snatched it out of her breeches as he had come closer to her, and ignored his command, continuing to hold it in front of her like a lifeline.

"What are you talking about?"

"I am not angry with you because you killed me. I was, then I finally accepted that I had that coming. I am angry because you did it."

There was a moment, a precious moment when something in her eyes softened, but then the cold malice returned, making him wonder if he was imagining things.

"Still enough of a reason to rape me for it," she sneered, making his shoulders drop in defeat.

"Fine. Fine, believe that if you want. Just get out. It's best if we stay away from each other for a while," he said, turning away from her to go find something to make himself look occupied.

"I hate you."

His hands stilled where he was tracing the books in the case next to the desk. The door slammed when she left, but even that didn't have as much of an impact on him as that disgusting phrase did.
Yay, chapter 28! Hope you all enjoy this one! Sorry for the delay, I have been a bit wrapped up in my Sparrabeth modern AU, but I promise, I didn't forget about this story :)

The pirate city was lit with dancing flames and laughter that carried through the darkness, strung along by smoky gusts of wind, as the Voyager came to a slow stop next to the dock. The ripples in the water fractured and bent with orange and yellow streaks of light, illuminating the depths of the bay like a teasing wink, over and over.

He had always liked this city. The chaos made a sort of calm wash over him, something he had never felt during his stay in the Royal Navy. There were no rules here, no orders, no structure, so he could make his own rules as he saw fit.

The gangway had just been lowered, and the Navy tars, disguised as pirates, poured off of the ship no doubt eager for their first taste of freedom. He still stood at the helm with his back leaning against it, contemplating...

Things like the current whereabouts of Elizabeth, even though he was not watching to see where she fled off to, nor was he concerned with whether she was coming back or not.

At least, that is what he tried to tell himself. Currently, his inner argument was leaning towards searching for her, but to what end he couldn't pin down. There was no trying to reason with her at the moment, not with Lucifer's poison in her mind. She would most likely flee from him the moment she became aware of his presence anyway.

It was a bit frightening the way he appeared to have no control over how he felt about her, and it was even more frightening that he felt what he did towards her at that moment. An alarming urge to comfort her, to let her in, to stop being angry with her. But, he had already started doing that, against his better judgment, he thought. When she had broken into his cabin, two weeks ago he might have...done things he would have regretted, but instead, he just snickered at her.

Then, when she accused him of...that, he would have normally told her to go back to Will, or find someone else more worthy of her time, or some other snide comment, but instead, he acted as neutrally as he possibly could, just telling her to leave, not for his own good, but for hers. There was no use for her to be around him if just his presence made her feel uncomfortable.

She was getting under his skin, breaking through the walls that he had put up to...he couldn't decide if it made him feel relieved or uneasy.

The way that Lucifer had treated her, the way that he had planted ideas about him in her head, how he would be careless with her were he to take her virginity, how he would dump her at some port or other after he got tired of her, still made his skin crawl, not quite voluntarily. The way that she looked at him like he was dangerous, made him...he wasn't sure what it made him.

"Cap'n?"
He turned to look at the man that he had taken over the captaincy from. As it turned out, Groves wasn't terrible company, warming to the ways aboard a pirate ship with astonishing speed, even embracing them. Perhaps the man had been considering turning pirate even before being forced.

"Aye?"

"How long d'you suppose we are going to be in Tortuga for?"

The question wasn't how long they would be in Tortuga, it was how long he would be in Tortuga.

"Well, Theodore, how well can you keep a secret?"

His face twisted in confusion. "Reasonably well, why?"

"You lot can stay here as long as you like, doesn't matter to me. I won't be around to care. I'm leaving, for Port Royal, as soon as I am able," he explained, pushing off of the helm to face him.

"For Port Royal? You have business there?"

"Aye...business, if you would like to call it that."

"Am I to be Captain again in your stead?"

"Probably, though I fear that you will be entertaining too many ladies to really worry about the ship at all."

He looked excited for a moment, as though he had wondered about that exact prospect already. The women of Tortuga certainly didn't discriminate on any grounds as far as who they entertained, and Groves was not the worst sort to come around. They might even enjoy corrupting a former member of the Royal Navy if he let it slip somehow.

"Perhaps, Captain Sparrow, perhaps."

"Besides trying to get everything in order, I have another favor to ask of you."

He needed someone to watch over her if he wasn't going to be there to do it.

"Aye?"

"Keep an eye on Elizabeth, will you? Can't have her doing anything...stupid."

"...Certainly, we can do that."

"Good. I don't know when I will be back, or if I will be back, but I'll send some kind of notice just before I leave."

"And what shall I tell the rest of them in your absence?"

That was something he had not considered.

"You're smart, I'm sure you'll think of something."

He headed down the gangway, breathing in the ashy scent of fire, the trinkets in his hair clinking together, reminding him that they would be gone soon, and searched through the crowds of drunks and prostitutes for the shock of blonde hair and the scowl that had adorned her face for the last
couple of days.

There had to be words between them, something before he left, so he had to find her. Whether it was shouting, just a 'hey' back and forth, or whatever happened, it needed to happen.

Unfortunately, he had already been spotted by the precise two people that he had been trying to avoid. Excellent.

"Come to pay me a visit, Jack?"

Giselle looked exactly as she had last time he was here, just before Elizabeth demanded to join his crew to look for Will. He stopped, deciding to give them his attention for as long as it took for them to go away.

"Of course he isn't here for you, he's here for me. Isn't that right?"

He dragged his tricorne hat over his face in annoyance at Scarlet's whiny voice.

"No, as surprising as it may be to the two of you, I am not here for either of you."

The torch that was attached to the building behind them caught the slight greasiness of Giselle's hair as she sidled up to him.

"Aww, are you sure? I could certainly-"

"If he is going to share a bed with anyone, it's me," Scarlett said, sticking her nose up in the air.

"What on earth could he possibly want with you? Your hair is too curly, your lips are puckish, and your chest is-"

"Don't you dare finish that sentence! My chest is more than adequate, Jack never minded-"

"...I don't care about either of your chests, for the love of Christ…"

But they didn't appear to hear him as they started to tug at each other's hair. Why on earth did he ever give either of these women a moment of his time? The only thing tolerable about them was their mouths when they weren't spouting things that made him want to strangle them.

Shaking his head, he backed away from them, managing to escape just as Scarlett shoved Giselle, squawking a few choice words about what her mouth could do better.

"Annoying, aren't they?"

Gibbs was standing just behind him, watching the two women fight.

"You have no idea."

"Looking for Elizabeth?"

"Aye, probably shouldn't, but here I am."

"I haven't seen her, but I did hear her mutter something to Will about a fever."

Her fever that she had had the night she had come storming into his cabin to yell at him, before the nightmare, had been occurring on and off since the nightmare.
"She might be going to the apothecary then, for medicine."

"That sounds possible. Best head in that direction then. I'm in dire need of a drink."

He watched the man amble off in the direction of the Faithful Bryde. The apothecary was at the eastern end of town, a small little hut where everything you bought came with the promise of easing whatever suffering ailed you but did not always deliver, sometimes making you even worse. It was a great metaphor for the pirate's life, certainly.

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She had to get away from him, as far away as this city would allow. Just his presence brought turbulence to her mind, an uncertainty of which direction she should follow. Her thoughts, the nightmare, everything he had said to her, told her over and over again that he was dangerous, not to be trusted, that he was going to hurt her the first chance he got, that he would ruin her, take her body by force.

She desperately wished to go back before these poisonous thoughts had entered her brain, wished, again and again, to see things differently, but she just couldn't. He was tainted to her now, something that she couldn't allow in her life.

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The wind blew her hair around her face as she stepped into the shop. From where he was standing, he could see her glance to her left, then her right, then behind her, thankfully not spotting him.

She was looking for him, he realized.

Another pang entered his heart. He hated that she was afraid, and he didn't like that he hated it.

If only he hadn't rowed away, if only he hadn't left her…

Or he could have told them all about his fate to begin with, or perhaps she could have had enough faith in him to do the right thing.

...but it wasn't like he had given her any reason to.

She came to rescue him. She bloody killed herself to rescue him, and he still wasn't sure how he felt about that.

Dammit, he was fucking supposed to hate her, but he just couldn't. Her pretty smile when he said something that was apparently funny, the way her eyes could see right through him, the way she gazed at him when they were alone in his cabin, like she was trying to undress him, or trying to coax him to take her on his bed, the way that she loved him even despite all of the awful things he had said to her.

Did she love him? Did he want her to love him?

It would be a damn sight better than what she felt for him at the moment.

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She could feel him around but had not been able to spot him.

Closing the door to the apothecary quietly, she inhaled the spicy smell of the shop, then swayed on the spot, reminding her of why she was even there.

A fever, an awful one that would recede then return even worse than before had been plaguing her since the nightmare, and she needed to get rid of it.
"What can I do for you, miss?"

A man, with a scruffy white beard and a thin green bandana wrapped around his head, gazed at her with watery eyes, beckoning her closer.

"Hello, I am looking for something…" she paused, putting her hand on her forehead for a moment to refocus herself. "something that can help with a fever."

"A fever? Yes…yes, you do look a bit peaky. I have just the thing."

He ambled out from behind the counter, making her flinch away from him as he looked through the shelves.

"Ah, here we go. A bit of willow and meadowsweet mixed together should do nicely. Just sprinkle them into a cup of grog, or rum if you like."

"…That's it?"

"That's it."

She dug around in her pocket and paid the man, heading to the Faithful Bryde to do as he asked, and prayed that he wouldn't be there.

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Sidestepping a brawl right as he entered the bar, he was reminded of why he tried to avoid the place.

The bartender, Tom, saw him straight away and waved him over.

"Captain Sparrow, how does the sea fare these days?" the man asked once he had taken a seat at the bar.

"Not as well as I would like…"

"Ahh, something troubling you?"

"Something? Quite a few somethings, really."

"I can see that you aren't lookin' to talk about them. No matter. Had a pretty lass looking for you earlier, by the way."

"…Looking for me? Did she by chance have blonde hair-"

"Blonde hair? No, black hair actually and-"

"Jack," a female voice interrupted, causing the pirate captain to turn slowly in his seat, hoping that someone else had just stolen her voice.

"…Annamaria, darling, didn't imagine that I would see you here."

"Right, just like I didn't imagine that I would find you staring at the bottom of a bottle of rum. Funny how things work, isn't it?"

"…Aye, funny. To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"You owe me."

He sighed, pinching his nose with two fingers.
"You haven't forgotten, then…"

"Ha! No, Jack, I haven't. But I am not here to slap you for it again, lucky for you. Could we talk, somewhere more private?"

With an eyebrow raised at her, he nodded once, allowing her to lead him to a table in the back corner out of earshot of the rest of the bar's occupants.

He sat down, eyeing her with trepidation, wondering what on earth it was that she wanted to talk about.

"So are you going to explain to me how you aren't still dead?"

Oh.

"Dead?"

"Word travels fast amongst pirates, you know that."

"...well, fucking Christ…"

"I even heard that it was a girl that killed you. Imagine that. Was it the way she kissed you, or the way-"

"Really?"

"What? All of the girls here have been trying to break your control for quite some time, in the bedroom, though, not on your ship."

He did have a long history with women in Tortuga, and he wasn't sure if he was proud of it or not. They liked to tell stories, and even though he didn't mind tales being spun about him, that part of his life was something that he would rather be kept quiet.

"She did kiss me actually, just kissed me, then she shackled me to the mast of the Pearl."

Anna's eyes widened.

"Who was it?"

"...Elizabeth."

"Swann? How on earth…"

Then she made a face as though several pieces of a puzzle had just fallen into place.

"She came looking for you awhile back, dressed as a boy."

"That she did."

"...and now you're in love with her," she said at the same time. "Maybe have been for a long time."

He spit out the rum that had just made its descent down his throat. Anna was leaning back in her chair, staring at him triumphantly.

"...what the fuck did you just say?"

"She killed you, betrayed you, and yet, here you are, looking for her."
"I am not in love with her, Anna. For fuck's sake, as you just pointed out, she killed me."

"But she is still alive, Jack."

"So?"

"When you came back to us after your adventure with the Turner boy, and her, you couldn't stop talking about her. I thought you had half a mind to sail back to Port Royal to break their wedding up."

"...I admired her, that's-"

"No, you didn't just admire her. You don't call out anyone's name during...well, it was obvious that you felt something for her, and you still do."

She withstood the fire in his glare, sending it right back, and he hated the way that she had always been able to figure him out with only a few vague clues.

"Let's go upstairs," he muttered, not bothering to leave payment on the table for the rum.

She sat down on the bed, staring at him expectantly. He chose the chair across from her, settling his head in his hands when he sat down.

"I...truly, I don't know how I feel about her right now."

Anna finally seemed to see the scope, the seriousness of the situation and sobered up a bit.

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"Not really."

"Well, you're going to anyways. How are you alive?"

He laughed, a bitter sound that couldn't decide if it wanted to be sad or annoyed.

"She rescued me. Killed herself to do it."

If Anna was shocked at that information, she didn't show it.

"So she loves you too, then."

His hat nearly fell off when he snapped his head up to look at her.

"Excuse me?"

"Jack, no one willingly goes to the Locker to rescue someone if they don't love them."

He didn't respond to that, didn't really know what to say.

"You're conflicted about whether you love her or hate her, or both."

"I don't hate her," he snapped, surprising himself.

"...but you're avoiding her?"

"No, she is avoiding me."
That topic was not one that he really wanted to talk about, but he was rapidly discovering that he wasn't going to have much of a choice.

"What did you do to her? For God's sake, Jack…"

"I didn't do anything…well, besides saying some things that I shouldn't have, I didn't do anything to her."

"But…someone did?"

"Aye, someone did."

He told her a very brief summary of what happened in the Locker, leaving out the identities of those involved, and then arrived at the nightmare.

"Some…incorrect ideas were planted in her head. Now she is afraid of me."

"…Incorrect ideas?"

"She had a…nightmare. I…Christ…I, or at least something with my body…raped her, in the dream."

Anna's hand flew to her mouth, a sharp intake of breath making the silence of the room even thicker.

"You would never do that Jack, especially not to her…my god, you generally care about the woman's pleasure more than your own—"

"I'm aware of my bedside manners, thanks. But she isn't, and now she has it in her head that I am a danger to her."

"…I'm sorry. I wish I could do something."

"Yeah…well, me too."

They sat in silence for ten minutes, just listening to the other's breath, before Anna spoke again.

"I could distract you. Doesn't have to mean anything, just a bit of fun."

"…distract me?"

"Aye, I seem to remember you having a fondness for—"

"I know what you are talking about," he cut in, glaring at her.

The prospect did sound appealing if only to take his mind off of what actually mattered.

"See, you do love her. Being with another woman makes you uncomfortable, doesn't it?"

It did, but the one he wanted to be with hated him. He regarded the female pirate in front of him, drinking in the warm caramel color of her skin, her full lips, and the way she was staring at him, with a hunger in her eyes.

"Aye, but I can ignore that for the time being, I think."

"Good," she said, getting up from the bed just as he rose from the chair, their lips meeting in a kiss, starting slow, then turning into a war, both of them fighting for dominance as she pushed him against the wall, shoving the chair out of the way.
The bar was making her on edge as she wove her way through the chaos. Her skin was tingling, her muscles twitching as though she had just run a long distance, and her hair was matted to her face with sweat.

"Excuse me, could I please get a small cup of grog? And perhaps a room to stay in just for a few hours?"

The bartender looked down his nose at her, before nodding and handing the grog over to her.

"There is an empty room in the top corner, up the stairs."

"Th-thank you," she managed to get out, closing her eyes to fight off the wave of nausea that had just washed over her, sprinkling the herbs into the grog as she climbed the stairs.

He reversed them, slipping his tongue into her mouth, pushing her against the wall, smiling against her when her moan vibrated in her throat. His hands drug her shirt up and over her head, breaking their kiss, her black hair spilling over her bare chest.

Wasting no time, he bent his head and latched onto her neck, nibbling at her, grazing his teeth just where he knew she liked it.

"...Jack...tan bueno..."

Her hands dove down to his breeches, fumbling with the ties only for a second before he was released, hard and straining against her questing fingers.

"Oh love...eager are we?" he groaned as she stroked him.

"Every woman is eager to touch you, you should know that by now."

He pressed his body against hers, lifting her to pin her between him and the wall, roughly taking a nipple into his mouth, thrusting his hips against her still clothed core.

"Let me down," she breathed as he made quick work of her breeches. When he did as she asked, she spun him around and pushed him against the wall again, relieving him of the rest of his clothes.

"As much as you may irritate me, you're still a beautiful man. Dammit, Jack."

He leaned his head back against the wall, grinning at her, his grin turning into something entirely different when she sank to her knees and took him fully in her mouth.

Just making it up the stairs, she reached out a hand to steady herself, the hallway spinning around her.

She heard voices, coming from somewhere, making some kind of noise, but she couldn't understand...couldn't hear them properly.

Then...

'Oh, darling...'

Her blood froze, the cup of grog nearly spilling over when her hand started to shake.

It was him, Jack.
He stared down at her as her mouth slid up and down his length, his fingers threaded into her hair. Not many women were willing to perform this activity, and it was even rarer to find one that enjoyed it.

This woman certainly did, made evident by how her tongue danced around every ridge, over the hood at the tip, how she sucked at him, burying him in her mouth with every stroke. He could feel the growing pleasure building, tightening, and he didn't want this to end that quickly.

"Anna...Anna...fuck," he pleaded, tugging on her head. She finally stopped, smiling at him after wiping her mouth. He gave her a pleased grin of his own, pulling her up to give her a kiss.

"You're almost too good at that, you know."

"Mmm, I do know," she said, smiling as she pulled him in the direction of the bed, spinning him so that he was sitting. She straddled him, her legs locking around his as he took her mouth again, deepening the kiss when she impaled herself on him, sinking down slowly.

The wall was hard against her back as she flattened herself against it. She should leave, she should go, far away, far away from the two of them, but she couldn't will her legs to move.

Emotions that she wanted no part of warred within her. Jealousy, arousal, excitement, they made her feel disgusted with herself. Jack was disgusting, and there should be no part of her that wanted to barge in the room to...she didn't even know what.

His voice, as he murmured sweet things to Annamaria, burned her ears, and she felt something tugging at her, something buried deep, but she ignored it.

Suddenly she registered that tears were falling down her cheeks, but they had no reason to be there. Why on earth should she care if Jack bedded other women? It kept him away from her.

She stilled on top of him after her orgasm subsided, staring at the mess that he had made on her stomach.

"...thank you, darling."

"You're welcome, Jack," she said, chuckling.

They both dressed after Jack wiped his seed off with a warm cloth, and Anna left the room before he did. He vaguely heard her bump into something before stalking off down the hallway.

Readjusting his hat, he made to leave too, just making it to the doorway when he froze, his heart rate accelerating at an alarming rate. Reality slammed back into him, and he suddenly fiercely hated everything he had just done. He had to support himself against the door frame due to the wave of dizziness that washed over him.

"Lizzie..."
Her eyes were wide, almost bulging, wet with unshed tears, and wild with a fear that he couldn't even begin to formulate a method to chase away. How long had she been there? Had she listened the entire time?

"How...how long were you-"

"Why would any woman touch you? You're disgusting," her voice cut in with a hiss, strained and scratchy, scrambling up his insides until he felt a little sick. How much more of her hatred towards him could he take?

It was starting to become irrelevant that it wasn't real.

"Lizzie..." he tried again, knowing that there was truly nothing he could say to...he didn't even know what.

"Don't say my name."

"...Fine. And plenty of women want to touch me, contrary to what you may believe."

"I don't know why. I would never...I would make love to a corpse before..."

She pressed her lips together, clenching her jaw, and for one second, he had the hope that she was reconsidering her words.

"I would die before I let you touch me."

It felt like she had driven a sword through him. He hated this, he hated that he hated it, the piercing...hurt that her words sent into his chest.

"Good thing it'll never happen then, hm?"

He couldn't help the anger that twisted his thoughts, but that didn't mean that he didn't regret every nasty thing that he said to her. Especially when just for a second, hurt flashed through her eyes. He also didn't miss the irony that she was the one hurting him when it had been the other way around not too long ago.

"Don't worry Miss Swann, I won't be around much longer to bother you."

Shouldering past her, he didn't even bother to wait for her response.

She didn't care if he was leaving. It made her path to Port Royal, to Mercer, much easier.

That her father had been possibly killed in her absence filled her with such overwhelming guilt that she half-thought that her fever stemmed from it.
Mercer was a snake of a man, always creeping and crawling around, doing Lord Beckett’s dirty work. She was sure that she had spotted him in Tortuga when she had been looking for Jack last time.

His beady little eyes had the worst kind of look in them, like a puddle of old oil surrounded by expired milk. She couldn’t wait to watch the life leave them as he died.

Bringing the cup to her lips as soon as her hand stopped shaking, she sipped, squeezing her eyes shut to try and ignore the awful taste of the grog. Taking several deep breaths, she hoped that the herbs would work. This fever would do nothing but impede her progress.

There was a ship in the harbor, a merchant ship like the one that she had hid away on the last time she had come here, and she hoped that it would take her to Port Royal without a lot of haggling.

Her hair was tucked under her hat again, and she had bound her breasts back just like before. Taking a deep breath, she headed up the gangway of the ship, locating the captain pointing at the sails while talking to one of the sailors. He was a tall man with a brown wig and an angular face, with thin eyebrows and barely-there lips.

"Excuse me, are you the captain of this ship?" she asked, changing her voice to a deeper tone, hoping that it would pass as a young man’s voice.

"Aye, that I am, young lad. What can I do for you?"

"I am looking for passage somewhere," she replied as she watched the men bustle around on deck. "I can perform duties on the ship for payment, or anything else that you may require."

The captain looked her up and down, not with suspicion, but with appraisal.

"Indeed? And where might you be going?"

"Port Royal. I have...business there."

"Ahh, that is on the way, lucky enough for you. Well, young sailor, I see no reason to deny you, but keep in mind that I do not take any kind of trickery lightly."

She didn't think that anyone should take trickery lightly.

"I understand. When do we set sail?"

"Tonight, in fact. Your first duty aboard the ship can be the night's watch. I have a lack of men here who are comfortable with the task, it seems."

He barked some orders at the rest of the crew, before motioning her to the crow's nest. Nodding at him, she made to climb up.

The person he was looking for was sitting at the same table that they had been situated at before, nursing a new cup of rum. Dropping himself in the seat opposite her without asking for permission first, he ignored the glare that she sent his way.

"You bumped into Elizabeth on the way out of the room, didn't you?"

She glanced at him, a strange kind of seriousness in her eyes.
"Aye...I did. I'm sorry, Jack. I didn't intend on her...being there during that."

"Ha, and you think I did?"

Having her standing outside of the room was about the last thing he had wanted to happen.

"No..I suppose not. You really love her don't you?"

His head felt heavy with that accusation being thrown at him far too many times in one day.

"I thought you were already convinced of that?"

"I am, but I think you are starting to realize it too."

Maybe he had realized it a long time ago. You can only get that angry when a person kills you if you thought it would be the last thing they would do...bugger everything.

Thinking back to when Anna had said that being with another woman made him feel uncomfortable, he was coming to understand how true that was. Sure, he may have enjoyed it in the moment, but now, it felt like...he had betrayed her, which was ridiculous because they weren't even close to being together. Nevertheless, he wasn't going to put himself in that situation again.

"She looked...jealous, almost. I thought that maybe...maybe she had snapped out of it." He paused to laugh bitterly into the cup of rum that he was holding at his lips. "Then she called me disgusting and said that she didn't understand why women would want to touch me."

"Sometimes I don't understand why women want to touch you either. Then I remember that you look like...well, you, and I get it. You still owe me a ship though."

He glared at her, tried to be offended, but failed.

"Is there a way to...help her?" she asked, her eyes softening.

Another bitter laugh, this time because of the minuscule chance he had at actually succeeding.

"Aye, but it's next to impossible."

"Maybe I can help."

"That's actually why I came to find you. Again."

"Oh?"

"This might...be a...strange request, trust me, just thinking it is strange, but I need you to...fix my hair."

She choked on the rum she was drinking, staring at him from across the table.

"I'm sorry, but what?"

"Exactly what I said. Fix my hair."

"Fix it...fix it how?"

Sighing, he resigned himself to the inevitable. "The dreadlocks need to come out."

Her eyes widened even more if that was possible.
"Are you sure you are actually Jack Sparrow, and not someone just wearing his face?"

"...yes, I'm me, and I am in need of a disguise. Well, not really a disguise so much as a reversion."

The pin dropped, and she seemed to catch on to what it was that he wanted to do.

"You...want to look like...ahh, Lieutenant Sparrow didn't have dreadlocks, did he?"

No, he didn't, in fact. He had smooth raven hair that stopped just past his shoulder blades, and it was normally kept back in a low ponytail. He also didn't wear...what he was wearing, which reminded him that he needed to borrow Groves' old uniform.

"I also have to...brace yourself, as this might really have you complaining, I have to shave too."

She actually looked sad, and a little smile found its way onto the corner of his mouth.

"Don't worry, everything I am doing can be reversed in a week or two."

"What will the world do without the devilishly handsome pirate?" she quipped, smiling back at him. "Probably be less stolen ships," she added under her breath.

"Actually, about that. When everything's said and done, providing I have something different, you can have the Navy ship that I commandeered. The Voyager is sitting just in port, pristine as a Navy ship can get."

"Oh my god, you mean you are actually going to not only admit that you made a mistake, but find a solution to it? Now I really am convinced that you aren't Jack Sparrow."

"...I don't have to give you the ship-"

She had reached across the table to shove at his shoulder, laughing musically.

"Careful, I might slap you again. So, where do you have to go that requires a disguise?"

"As much as it pains me, since I nearly died there...well, a lot, I have to go back to Port Royal."

Her dark eyes regarded him, making him feel slightly uneasy.

"You met Elizabeth there too. Saved her life, yeah?"

"Sure did. Then I used her to escape, so don't make me out to be some kind of hero."

"I wouldn't dream of it, Jack. And what precisely is in Port Royal that you need?"

"I need Cutler Beckett to give me the heart of Davy Jones. Give it back to me more like. See, when Elizabeth sent herself to the Locker to save me, she gave him a part of her soul for mine. That's why she is in the current state she's in. And the only way I can fix her is if I get her soul back. And the only way to do that is to threaten Jones with the only thing that he cares about."

"...his heart," she finished for him.

"Aye."

"You weren't kidding when you said it was impossible."

"Well, my original plan was to go to Port Royal anyways, but at that point, the only thing I wanted to
do was kill Beckett. Now, the disgusting little wretch needs to stay alive long enough to cooperate with me."

"So, the disguise is just to make it far enough into the city to slip into wherever it is that he is holed up in?"

"Yep. So, shall we get to it?"

"What, now?"

"No, next week, Sunday, at 5."

She rolled her eyes at him, rising from the table.

"Well, come on then."

It took a long time, longer than he realized it was going to take.

But after five hours of poking and prodding at his head, several incidents where he almost inflicted bodily harm on her, several incidents where she almost inflicted bodily harm on him, the first removal of his bandana in a long time, and a few moments where they both stared at the mirror in shock, he was dreadlock-free.

"God, this is strange."

It could have come from either of them, really, but he was the one who said it as he ran his hands through his hair, now hanging in loose raven black strands just down to the middle of his arms.

"You're telling me."

He eyed the small blade that she had fetched for him, along with a small pot of oil.

"I have a feeling that this is going to be even more strange, actually. I haven't been clean shaven for...fifteen years? Something like that…"

"I'll have a little funeral for your beard if you would like."

Chuckling, he leaned closer to the mirror, rubbed the oil on his face, and set to work, miraculously managing to not nick himself.

After fifteen minutes, they took several more moments to stare.

"You look...younger."

"Because I looked ancient before, I know."

"Hah, no, I didn't mean that, you just look...hmm, maybe younger is the wrong word. Innocent is a better one."

"Innocent? That's probably the biggest oxymoron anyone could ever say...you wouldn't happen to have a hair tie would you?"

"As a matter of fact, I would."

She watched him as he gathered his hair back at the bottom of his neck, twisting the ribbon around it,
tying it off.

"Now I just need the uniform. Then I am Lieutenant Sparrow once again, god help us."

He found Groves still aboard the ship, much to his shock.

"Did you decide that the ladies of Tortuga were not to your fancy, then?"

The man looked around at him in confusion.

"Sorry, what? Do I know you?"

He almost laughed at the irony of the situation. He hadn't been this...ordinary for quite some time. Rolling his eyes, he pulled the sleeve of his coat up, exposing his sparrow tattoo.

He did laugh when Groves' eyes bugged out, before retreating to a more sheepish expression.

"What on earth? Jack?"  

"The one and only, unless my tattoo is a trendy thing now."

"What did you do?"

"Well, since your brain has evidently taken a temporary vacation, I will enlighten you to the fact that the fine men and women of Port Royal do not take kindly to pirates."

That was an understatement. They had a lovely little decoration of hanging pirates near the city.

"So...this is a disguise?"

"Almost. I need your old uniform."

"...Come again?"

"I need your old uniform," he repeated, speaking slowly.

"But...you don't know anything about...oh."

"Oh. Glad to see that your intelligence returned."

The man scurried away looking embarrassed, and then returned with a pile of clothes in his hands.

When he emerged from the same room that he had shaved in, sans the red coat and the hat, which he had wrapped up in his other clothes to avoid suspicion, Anna was standing there again with a warm washcloth.

"You forgot the kohl."

"...oh," he said, letting her rub it off his eyes.

"So, you're going to wear your coat until you get there, then you are going to put that...thing on?"

"I mean, Groves didn't even recognize me with my own clothes on, so I don't think the denizens of Tortuga would recognize me with a Navy uniform on."
"...True. Would probably be attacked before you even made it out of the bar."

Once his eyes were clear, she smiled softly at him.

"Good luck, Lieutenant Sparrow."

He turned to leave, just before she evidently remembered something else.

"Wait. You...you also might want to alter your voice a bit. Make it a little more..."

"Boring?" he finished for her, smirking.

"...Sure, if you want to call it that."

He prepared himself for a second, then tried what he thought to be an ordinary English accent.

"How does this sound?"

"Perfectly ordinary."

He didn't like being ordinary.

Miraculously, he found a ship that was heading in the direction of Port Royal that was in need of a quarter master, as their original one had apparently gotten sick, though he didn't manage to find out how.

After taking a few moments to get past not being in charge, he persuaded the captain that he was qualified to take the position, to which the captain agreed.

The voyage to Port Royal was going to take about three days, if he remembered correctly. Last time he had sailed to Tortuga from Port Royal, he had an annoying blacksmith babbling in his ear half the time, about his father, about Elizabeth, or about some other thing that hadn't interested him.

Well, Elizabeth had interested him, it was just that he hadn't really allowed himself to entertain those thoughts, at least not then.

He was now standing against the railing on the right side of the ship as it sliced through the sea water. It was pure luck that they were leaving immediately, really.

Unfortunately, being alone without anyone else to talk to gave his thoughts free reign to torment him, and the subject matter that they were choosing to torment him with could have literally been anything else.

As the days went on, he was starting to regret more and more the horrible things that he had said to Lizzie. Sure, he may have meant them at the time, but at the time, he was also just fresh from being dead, and betrayed, and he had become friends with the devil himself, which would put a dark cloud over anyone's mind.

'Do not say you are sorry. You told me you were not, and while you lie about quite a lot of things, I would wager that that was not one of them.'

That had been one of the first things he said to her in the Locker.

Those three words to him had been the fuel that had angered him, the very suggestion that she had done what she did to him without remorse stung like nothing else ever had.
But now, after having seen the sorrow, the pleading in her eyes for forgiveness, he was almost sure that it had been a lie.

‘You killed me. You played a ridiculous cheap trick and shackled me to the mast of my own ship. What kind of fantasy world are you living where I feel anything besides hatred for you, especially when the only thing I wanted before was to get you in my cabin. Can’t say I had too far on the ladder to fall from that.’

That made him feel sick. It was certainly a lie. Well, most of it. It was a cheap trick, but he had wanted more things than sex from her. Still did, if he would just admit it to himself. A few moments later, he had learned that she had taken her own life to come and get him.

If anything had made him question how he felt about her, it was that, because when she told him, the images of her dying, of blood spilling from her wrists, too similar to the vision that he had, plagued his mind for hours afterwards, flitting in between angry thoughts.

He had also suggested that she knew nothing about his life. Also a lie. She knew more, far more, than even some pirates he knew. He had just hated that she was still so close to him, so equal to him, that he had tried to separate...for get about that equality by labeling her as a simple woman that only cared about dresses. Lizzie was far more than that.

Then it occurred to him that he might want to communicate all of this to her once he had her back, if he got her back.

If he didn’t, it would be the greatest cruelty that he knew, but he would deserve it, he figured.
Her hair was tangled and windswept from being in the crow's nest, her face stung and itched, and her eyes were droopy from the lack of sleep.

It took them three days to reach Port Royal.

Three days for her to spend mourning over the loss of...a friend...enemy...didn't even know what to call him...somewhere in between friend or enemy perhaps…

But now he was nothing to her...only another disappointment.

None of the memories mattered anymore...she couldn't see the first time she had met him on the Port Royal docks the same way again...or when she had sailed with him to Isla Cruces…

...or their island.

They all made her sick...guilty...like she was being weak by wanting to remember...him...before all of this had happened. She could remember the way she used to see him...fascinating...alluring...but now all she could feel was repulsed by the very image of his face…

...and being alone on a ship for three days had done her no favors.

She couldn't lie and say that she didn't want to turn back time to before...that she didn't sit and wish and hope that it had all been...a fragment of memory, like a window looking back into the lie...

...because she did, and the only thing that ever followed it was the pressure of knowing that he had always intended to hurt her eventually...that he had never intended to forgive her…

That dream...it had been like an awakening...like she had been blind to his true nature toward her before...she couldn't fathom how...but now she knew that she could never go back to the way...could never go back to loving him.

And it hurt like nothing else had ever hurt before...that love being broken...poisoned...tainted.

She could remember what it felt like...loving him...always discovering new things about him...seeing his rare smiles...the way he would look at the Pearl...how she wished he would look at her like that...wondering about all of his stories and adventures...and beyond all of that...loving him just for him...for the man, not the legendary captain.
Could remember the warmth...the light that she felt every time she looked at him...the feeling of something scrambling up her insides when he looked at her...

...but didn't feel it anymore...could see the memories...but it was like watching the memories of someone else.

And now, standing on the dirt path right next to the dock, the absence of light everywhere around her besides the blue from the moon above, she only had one resolute goal.

*To feel okay with forgetting him.*

To let him drift away like poison from a wound…

To live with the empty feeling in her body…

Even though each step up the dirt path felt like she was walking away from something she should turn back to.

This town...the one she had grown up in...it used to be somewhere that she felt safe...that she felt welcomed...but the air felt stale now...the colors were muted...and she didn't even care to search for the feelings that she had once felt by being here…

Didn't really care to feel at all…

Perhaps it was the harsh reality of the life she had now...that the mundane she forced herself to be comfortable with before was just not palpable...not possible now...the town felt suffocating rather than welcoming...and looking back on all of the tea parties, the dresses, the ceremonies...the suitors...it seemed so...bleak.

*She had been a prisoner here.*

And now she was a prisoner in her own mind.

But that wasn't true...*that she didn't feel*...with each step she was reminded of why she was here...her father...the only remaining person that didn't see her soul, blackened and charred with the deeds she had done...from the deeds done to her…

That didn't mean that he wouldn't...that he wouldn't see that darkness…

Didn't matter...all that mattered was making sure he was safe...making sure he still had something to live for...to hope for.

*She didn't.*

The streets were dark and empty as she made her way through them, stray cats streaking past her with their feet scampering against the stone, the faint orange light from behind windows creating orange stones instead of dark grey stones beneath her feet...but there weren't many windows that had light...most of them were dark...betraying nothing that lay inside.

When the town receded behind her, when she reached the ornate gates of her father's mansion, she looked behind her for one moment, and then stepped through, ignoring the loud squeal of the hinges.

Everything looked exactly as she had left it the day she had escaped to go after Jack...almost like this place had been frozen in time until she returned.

Taking a deep breath, she climbed the hill to the double doors, and stepped through them, the smell
of emptiness assaulting her nose...it was dusty in here, and even in the dark, she could tell that no one had entered in some time.

She could also tell that the last person *to* be here had made sure that nothing looked out of place...that everything appeared to be ordinary.

Where was her father?

Turning to the left, she followed the line of the staircase all the way to the top, still remembering the day of James' coronation...the day she had met...no one...

...the day she had met no one.

Every room in the house was empty, devoid of life... *a ghost house*, filled with ghosts of her as a child...of her reading pirates stories, of her father, scrambling to take the books away from her...

Romanticized...all of them...they painted pirates as beacons of freedom, as people who weren't constricted by laws or rules...but now being a pirate, she knew that even with freedom and agency, it didn't mean happiness or fulfillment...it just meant a different set of problems.

She wandered around the house for as long as her heart could handle it, for as long as it took for the weight of the past to sink in, to permeate her thoughts until she could barely focus...until she wondered if her life had been better if her father had not been promoted...if they had never left England...

Which led her to wonder if perhaps she had made the wrong choice with her heart too... *of course she had...* Will was a good man, would have provided a good future for her, a family, a stable home...what could *he* have offered her? Long stretches of sailing, eating nothing but dry meat and drinking dirty water...he would spend the nights they were ashore entertaining prostitutes...then return to her drunk and just interested in her body...not that any of that mattered...

Will Turner had been the right path, but somewhere along the way, the wrong path had become more attractive.

What kind of fool had she been?

Her fingers curled around the frame of her bedroom entryway when she heard the faint sound of the front door opening downstairs. She went very still, listening, yet unable to move...

Had she been wrong? Was there a person...or persons that came in here frequently?

They were whispering her name, then saying it louder...it echoed off of the walls, that crisp tone of a naval officer, unwavering, tense...

*James?*

He was looking around with suspicion when she arrived at the bannister... *back in the Navy* uniform...

"Enjoying your promotion, Admiral?"

There was a little twitch of his shoulders, and then his feet nearly caught on each other when he turned around slowly to look up at her. "Elizabeth...and here I thought that maybe I was being lied to."
"It wouldn't be the first time."

There was a kind of challenge between them now...a battle of moral choices and sides chosen.

"You would know all about that. How is William faring these days? Or have you started lying to him too?"

It would be a grand bit of fun to regale him with all of the people she had been dishonest with...maybe then she could work out who had deserved it and who hadn't...

"Will's fine."

He watched her for a second more than she was comfortable with.

"And Jack?"

The words "he's fine too" were barely held back from spilling out...it occurred to her that he might not know about what had happened to Jack...and if he did...whether he knew that Jack had survived or not...

"Why do you ask?"

James started to climb the stairs, alternately watching his feet and watching her.

"Why do you ask?"

"Well," with a small shrug of her shoulders, "forgive me for suggesting that Jack is the last person you would be concerned about."

A wicked gleam entered his eyes. "It appears we have that trait in common."

Now.

"...he is a manipulative snake who, coincidentally, is only ever concerned about himself."

"Ah, truer words have never been spoken. Is that why you killed him?"

He might as well have slapped her for it would have had the same impact, and it took her all of five seconds to decide that twisting the story would serve no purpose for either of them.

"He put us all in danger because he was too concerned about his own safety and because of his stupidity when he struck a deal with Davy Jones thirteen years ago. I only made the choice that he couldn't, that he was too cowardly to make."

"Ah, a noble sacrifice for the crew, yet done with a ruse. You're a proper pirate now."

"You don't approve?"

"I don't think you give a damn about whether I approve or not. I'm curious though, is William truly alright? He did lose his fiance, his friend, and his entire capacity to trust..."

"Will didn't lose a friend, nor did he lose a fiance."

"No? Surely he approved of your trickery even less than I do...especially due to the nature of that trickery...doing a legendary pirate in with a kiss..."
"Who told you all of this?"
"While you lot were worrying about Jones's crew, I managed to slip away with his heart-"
"Yes, I assumed that. I didn't think Beckett would promote you for anything less."
"And since Beckett now controls Jones, any and all information that we need is freely given. My condolences, by the way, about Jack."
"Thanks, but I'm not interested in them. Speaking of, did Jones tell you that we rescued him? No? That's curious…"
"Jack's...not dead?"
"No, no, far from it. Alive and well, in fact. Where he is, I have no idea, so don't bother trying to use me to find him."
He had made it to the top of the stairs and was leaning against the banister with his hip.
"You're here alone. And forgive me if I am reaching too far, but you do seem quite...cold towards Jack."
"He deserves far more than that, but I have more important things to worry about."
Something lingered in his eyes like he wanted to press her for more about the pirate, but then he dropped them to the floor.
"Your father."
"You know where he is?"
"I know where he was yesterday. Talking to Lord Beckett, not sure about what, but I don't know where he is now."
"And who does?"
"Why should I tell you?"
At first, she wondered how on earth they had gotten to this point...this point of battle...of distrust...then she remembered...he'd chosen a side...she'd chosen a side...he had chased Jack through a hurricane just because he was a pirate…

*Perhaps everything would be better had he actually captured him...he would be a skeleton lying God knows where now, instead of...*

"Because not even you will stay my hand if you don't tell me."
"Are you threatening me, Elizabeth?"
"Did that sound like a threat to you?"
A twitch of his eyebrow, something that looked like calculation, and a drift of his hand towards his sword.
"You can find Mercer in the fort. He sleeps there. But I told you nothing."
"Of course. Would hate to make you lose your precious promotion…"

"You chose piracy. I chose redemption."

"I chose freedom. You chose a cage. We'll see which side is better."

Mercer.

Always lurking around, salivating on Beckett's heels, the man would probably do anything for him...lick his boots, shine his shoes...murder...

The fort loomed up above her, unyielding, shimmering with the silver moonlight...

Even the sound of his name, the way the C hissed through her teeth, the syllables arranged the way they were...he was pollution...his name, his face, the evil that came through his eyes...and as she walked through the night of the town, looked at the griminess of the windows, the soot on the ground...it made her feel like those eyes were everywhere, watching her...like it wasn't even Mercer that bothered her, but the corruption that poisoned the very air, made it thick and hard to breathe in...

Finally, after what seemed like ages of keeping a close eye behind her and in front of her, after she could barely stand the way her muscles were tensed, the fort loomed up above her, unyielding, stones shimmering with the silver moonlight...

Keeping her footsteps quiet, she slipped into one of the side doors, closing it without making a sound, and then peered into the darkness, hoping that finding him wouldn't prove to be more trouble than it was worth.

She traversed the cool passageways, empty thankfully, her thoughts drifting back to...get out...get out was all she could immediately think, tried to banish his name from her mind, his face...those cold eyes above her as he...

Stop. Find Mercer.

But even now she knew that pushing him away every time he arrived uninvited would never work...it made her so angry, that she could be that weak, that some part of her still wanted to think about him, some part of her that was out of her control...

He had never struck her as someone that could do...that to her...hurt her like that...but every look he had ever given her, every one of his touches that she had ever felt...she remembered them differently now, like they had been hostile...lecherous...instead of...

It made her stomach churn...the knowledge that she had wanted him to touch her before...had wanted him to make love to her...had made the grievous mistake thinking that he could make love to her...he wasn't capable of that level of tenderness...he wouldn't care, had never cared about her...

The light was getting brighter the more stairs she climbed, and her arms were quivering with muscle ache every time she pushed open another heavy door, until she finally came upon an office...his office.

Stopping outside, leaning against the wall, she remembered the conversation that she had had with...him...in his cabin after she had brought the brig keys back...a moment of weakness for her is what she had chalked it up to being...

Trying to tell him that she wanted to go back to the way things were before...but the more time she
spent away from him, the more she knew that there never was a before...at least not the one that she had lived in...it had all been an illusion, one that she had been too blind to see.

The truth was plain to her.

He had always been a monster, just like the man in the room just behind her.

A worthless man, selfish...lacking compassion...cowardly...cruel...

Mercer was bent over a desk when she slowly pushed the door open. The room was big enough for him to be unaffected by the draft of air, and not a sound disrupted him as the door closed.

He was dressed in nightclothes...plain breeches and a white t-shirt...his greasy hair in a ponytail at the base of his neck…

"Hello, Mr. Mercer."

The man tried to hide his shock and failed miserably, choosing instead to grip the edges of the table until his hands turned white, a noise of fright cutting her off.

"Hello, Mr. Mercer," she said again. "A fine evening, isn't it?"

"Miss Swann…"

"You remember the sound of my voice...good. Not surprising, the last time you saw me, I was being put under arrest."

He gave a small hum, as though he was going to argue that claim.

"...Where you," his eyes widened when he turned around enough to see the clothes she was wearing, "vehemently defended Jack Sparrow, just like you did at the gallows. It is hard to mistake the voice of a woman in love. Leaves a mark on you."

"Yes, I was in love, with my fiance, whom your lord and savior also had arrested."

"Your...fiance? Oh, no that wasn't who I was referring to. You said the pirate's name like you would say it to him in bed, a passionate caress with your voice."

"Does it sound like I'm in love with him now?"

"Perhaps, perhaps not. Women are fickle creatures."

So were men.

"I'm not. You'll find, I think, in the next few minutes, that I am a very goal-oriented person, and the only thing that matters to me is meeting my goals."

"And what goal could a governor's daughter turned pirate possibly have that involves me?"

She crossed the room slowly to him, managing to keep her face straight despite how much she wanted to let it twist itself into an expression of distaste at his gaunt slimy form.

"You aided in the harm recently brought to my father, as I have been told. Tell me where he is."

"I thought that might be it. But before I disappoint you, I still have questions-"
"I don't care about your questions. Tell. Me."

"My, I see what the captain of the Black Pearl saw in you now-"

That comment had her entire body tensing.

"-what exactly are you insinuating-"

"-Only that a woman like you, stubborn and goal-oriented wouldn't give a man the time of day unless she felt he was worth it, unless she felt that he felt for her-"

"I feel-"

"-And, a man like Jack Sparrow, selfish and guarded to the world, a man like that needs a stubborn woman, a woman that can meet him on the battlefield without yielding-"

Her shoulders squared, eyes turned to slits, and somewhere in her anger, she felt like Lucifer himself had burrowed inside of her heart, for it burned with a ferocity that she hadn't yet felt.

"-I feel nothing for him but hate, he is poison, worse than you, worse than your Lord, worse than all of those souls in Hell and the Locker, and none of your ridiculous speeches, not that you know what you are talking about anyways, will change it."

The air in the room remained unchanged, still musty and thick, yet it did change in character, swirling about with a new energy, one that sparked between the two of them.

"Ah, well, tales and stories of love are all fantasies anyway, fairy tales for those that have yet to grasp reality. Whatever Jack Sparrow did to you, that was simply the true nature of humanity showing through...unfortunate, but inevitable."

"You would know all about the true nature of humanity, snake."

"Yet, Lord Beckett swore up, down, and sideways...kept saying something about fate intervening, kept slipping it in at odd times...I finally managed to work out that he was talking about your wedding...if even he, one of the most cynical men I know, was able to see that you were in love with a pirate, then Sparrow truly did something evil. Tell me, was it the reminder of what he is, of what the definition of piracy is, that drove you away?"

"You overstep your bound-"

"-Allow me to remind you of that definition, then. Pirates take what they want, without permission, without compassion, and without a regard for the consequences. They do not care about other people, they do not concern themselves with the feelings or comfort of silly women, and they certainly don't feel love...all they feel is the desire to conquer, steal, and ravage."

When all he got was her hard glare, he continued.

"Jack Sparrow was always a pirate, the entire time, so while I may be overstepping my boundaries, I will say that you were a fool for expecting anything more out of him."

"And I would say that I agree with you, for the second time tonight. While we are on the topic of pirates, allow me to remind you that I'm a pirate, and what I currently want is the location of my father. I'm not leaving this room until you either give his location to me, or tell me where I can find Beckett so I can ask him."
The man finally left the spot that he had been standing, walking to the left, but still keeping his eyes on her.

"Haven't you learned that women are not just entitled to things they want? Pirate or no, whether you leave here with the information you want is up to me, not you."

She stepped forward to balance out the distance between them, keeping her eyes on him too, enjoying the friction between them.

"In my experience, women should get what they want far more often than men, and more often than not, they do. Men are simple creatures, only functioning to a point where they have their base desires fulfilled...greed, lust, hunger, the list goes on."

"And you believe that women are paramount of intelligence and deeper thinking?"

"Mostly, yes. Of course, both genders have their exceptions. There are are a fair amount of stupid women and plenty of smart men."

"And you? Where do you fall?"

"I'm close to just forgetting all this and finding Beckett myself, and I think that answers where I believe myself to be, and where I believe you to be."

He made a noise of disapproval.

"What did Jack Sparrow do to you? What crimes did he commit?"

The question threw her off for a moment; she had believed Mercer had lost the scent of that conversation.

"Why does it matter?"

"Because, this hardness of yours is either a result of that, and if so, easily overcome, since women's emotions generally rule their head...or this is you now, a cold person...if that is the case, then perhaps I would be almost inclined to believe your claim that smart women exist."

She stayed silent for a moment, realizing that he was half-right on both accounts.

"He violated me, but I promise you that my regard for you right now has nothing to do with that. You would do well to avoid getting them confused."

Mercer reeled back only slightly, but she couldn't fathom why.

"Violated you? How atrocious," but he didn't sound like he had much sympathy for her. "Was his death what you wanted? I was surprised to hear that a simple girl had taken down a pirate captain, but now I see. You're no simple girl."

So he knew too.

"No, I have no qualms about solving problems that stand in my way. He was a problem to us, to our survival, so I removed him from the equation, something I will not hesitate to do to you."

"I admire your perseverance, but you cannot honestly expect me to give you information that would be detrimental to my well-being."

"I can, and I do. Where is my father?"
"...I will tell you where Lord Beckett is, if only because I doubt you can even make it all the way to him. He has put himself up in the old mansion on the edge of town."

He didn't want to put his position in jeopardy, but he needed to give her something to make her go away. She understood.

And she was done with the games. She nodded once, turning to leave…

Quick footsteps that she had been prepared for slapped against the floor behind her, and she twisted, shoving Mercer into the wall, unsheathing her dagger from her belt.

"I told you, Mr. Mercer, women usually get what they want, but you never asked me what I wanted with you. You can't honestly believe that I would let you live when you have participated in hurting me, my fiance, and my father. I want nothing more than to see you dead, and when I find Beckett, he will suffer the same fate."

The gasp of shock turned into a gurgle when she pushed the dagger deeper into his neck, feeling the life leaving his body as it grew slacker with each second, then she let him drop into a contorted lump on the floor, a steady stream of blood still leaking around the blade.

It had always been her plan to kill him, but she hadn't prepared for the satisfaction that filled her with the knowledge that she had removed his pitiful existence from the world.

As an afterthought, she crisscrossed the room, blowing the candles out until the only light left was the small shaft of blue from the moon, only barely illuminating Mercer's corpse.

Human life was interesting in how easy it was to eliminate.

The top half of her hair was damp now, while the ends remained dry.

She had removed her hat, letting her hair spill over her back and shoulders...hadn't seen much point in continuing on with the disguise from here, and the hat had become itchy from sweat.

The air was hot, and it was raining.

Hot and muggy enough to almost distract her from the almost disarming appearance of the mansion in front of her, looking far too homely for a man like Cutler Beckett. The only kind of house that suited him was a prison cell.

Or Hell, or any number of cruel and unforgiving places. While Mercer had been a slimy human version of oil, seeping and slipping, staining everything in its path, Beckett was the equivalent of disease itself, the disease of evil, housed within him, turning everything that he surrounded himself with dark, as though he was the sole bearer of the power to steal life and light…

Perhaps Jack and Beckett had more in common than she had originally thought, when she had sensed the connection between them...there was history there, but maybe it was just a game of which one of them could be the bigger villain in their own story. Jack Sparrow, the rogue, self-serving, seeing the world as a playground to take what he wanted from it and damn the rest, and Cutler Beckett, a grand architect in making sure that world gave Jack as much ease to destroy and ruin as he needed...an architect of exposing humanities limits and follies, faults and trespasses...exposing the reality that they would never escape their own nature.

The door creaked a little when she opened it, slipping inside the dark house, smelling the distinct scent of a candle just put out, the aroma of lingering dust, and that more subtle inlay of this little
world in this little house *laughing* at her, like Beckett himself was watching her from upstairs, just
waiting.

He wouldn't be laughing when she was done with him.

His study was empty, yet one candle remained next to the desk, blowing about in arcs and bends
from the crack in the window on the other side of the room.

She'd cleared the bottom floor, finding nothing, and this had been the first room with an open door.

He kept things tidy, almost obsessively...neat stacks of papers on his desk, books arranged straight on
the bookshelves, hardly any dust anywhere, even the room itself was arranged with neat lines and
pleasing symmetry.

Stepping over to peruse the spines of the first couple of books in the shelf to the right, all about
history, she heard the wooden floor creak down the hall in varying impact...footsteps…

Good. She had been growing impatient already. Striding back to his desk, she took a seat in his
fancy chair, pretending for the world that it was *her* study rather than his.

When he entered, walked into the room far enough to stand across from her...they just looked at each
other, more fascinated with the other's presence than anything else.

His wig was off, and she discovered that the color of his hair was an ashy blonde...he wasn't wearing
his whole uniform either...the coat was missing, and he was barefoot...strange, seeing him that way,
then again, the last time he had seen her, she was wearing her wedding dress.

"Elizabeth Swann, we meet again. I presume my search and rescue party was...unsuccessful."

"You could say that. I'm surprised you recognized me."

"Ah, the wedding dress wasn't that distinctive, I would know your face anywhere...that fire in your
eyes…"

"And what do my eyes tell you now?"

He smirked, stepping forward to place the tips of his fingers against the edge of his desk. "That you
are getting supreme satisfaction in thinking that you have already conquered me, sitting there."

"You think I haven't?"

"What...precisely makes you think you *have*?"

The chair creaked when she sat back, contemplating the question.

"Most likely the same thing that made me think I had conquered Mercer just before I stuck a dagger
in his neck...a *superiority* to men like you."

Only a small flash of acknowledgment crossed his face, a twitch of his head, a minute movement of
his lips.

"That's...unfortunate."

She ran her finger along the edge of the desk, her eyes following the movement.
"I can't tell if you are happy he's dead or if you are just...feeling the inconvenience of it."

This time she heard a little grunt of a laugh. "A little bit of both."

A few seconds passed before he turned away from her, stepping over to the window. "Tell me, do you feel either of those about Jack Sparrow’s death, or do you feel something else?"

*Of course he would ask…*

"Previously, you pretended to be an expert on my feelings for Jack, and since I am tired of talking about him in the company of others, why don't you tell me."

"...William Turner is simply...not a large enough force to match a woman like you. He never was. You *do* have the will and determination of a conqueror, Elizabeth. What it is that you conquer...you have the fine makings of a military general...you would make an excellent captain...land, titles, people, they could all be yours…"

"...But?"

"But what you are best at conquering, I think, is *men*. Their hearts, their minds...even the likes of Jack Sparrow, one of the smartest men I have ever met, couldn't withstand you."

She must have been silent for a moment too long, because he was looking at her with newfound curiosity.

"You...disagree?"

"...No...at least not with what you said...but what you said did bring up issues that I have."

"And what are those?"

"In your...experience with Jack...there is a long history between the two of you...did he ever strike you as the violating type?"

It was the first time that she had ever seen Cutler Beckett genuinely confused.

"...Violating? He violates plenty...laws, codes, manners...you didn't think he'd seen the wrong end of a noose all those times for nothing, did you?"

"I violate laws and codes. Why do you think I had to sneak in here wearing men's clothes? But that wasn't what I was talking about."

"And what were you talking about?"

"What you said, before...*Mercer* said it too...you knew of his death."

"Yes...Jones was kind enough to relay that information to us-"

"-Mercer didn't know that he was rescued-"

"-because I *wasn't* kind enough to relay that information to him."

"...I see. And you're aware of the manner of his death, obviously."

"A kiss. Very creative, and something that told the both of you more about the other than I think you were prepared for."
"Yes, well...whatever feelings I had for Jack...before all of that...they were misguided."

"Feelings for pirates generally are-"

"I wasn't finished. I'm sure you're aware that Jack isn't the type to take kindly to being murdered-"

"Hardly. He wished death on me just for burning his precious ship down."

"Then it shouldn't come as a surprise that as punishment...he intended to rape me. Everything he ever said to me...before and after his death...it was all just manipulation...he was never honest about anything...always using me for something...and then, I became so invested in gaining his forgiveness that I...failed to see that he's no different than you...than Mercer...never was. He's just another source of corruption, only living for himself."

The silence stretched out for a long time, six minutes at least, while she waited.

"...and...how did you...come to this conclusion?"

"...Just a push in the right direction...a catalyst I guess…"

Beckett left the window and crossed the room to the bookshelf, pulling a book out and flipping through it.

"I have known Jack a long time...and the man has done many things that have provoked my...distaste for him...but even I have to say that I don't believe him capable of rape."

She didn't respond, only watched him finger the pages as he turned them.

"When I...implied that you had feelings for Jack that night...I wasn't being flippant or manipulative...I was merely testing a theory. And then, that spark of truth in your eyes when...you were in love with him, I think."

"Is that your answer to my feelings for him?"

"Part of my answer. I believe you killed him because you were in love with him as well, and you were so grief-stricken and guilt-ridden after his death that...well, you said it yourself, all you wanted was his forgiveness."

"And now? What are my feelings for him now?"

"A lie. Only someone so in love can be corrupted so spectacularly...because whatever...or whoever did this to you...made you believe him to be capable of that, made you hate him so...they had to go to great lengths to do that, to succeed as much as they did."

She bristled in the chair. "You think I'm in the wrong?"

"I think that a great force can only be overcome by a force just as great...fire and water, ash and air, good and evil...love and hate."

"That all seems so...fantastic."

"Indeed. I've seen that type of corruption before, Elizabeth. Where the mind is so waylaid by a separate reality...ah, here it is…"

His footsteps barely made a sound as he returned to the desk. "What's that?" she asked, looking at the open page on the desk.
"That is the record of Jack Sparrow's arrest and branding."

The page was worn, as though someone had spent a great deal of time returning to look at it.

"Why do I care?"

"If you actually look at it, you will see that the reason for his branding, and the reason the Pearl exists at all, is because Jack tried to be a hero. He freed a hundred slaves from his ship without my permission. He betrayed me, because he took it upon himself to...well, it doesn't really matter. The point is...do you really believe a man that would risk his entire life to do that would be capable of harming the woman he loves?"

"Excuse me?"

"Only a man in love, especially when we are talking about Jack, would not only let his guard down enough to get trapped into going down with his ship, but let it happen. I'm sure Jack knew what you were doing."

"You're forgetting that he threatened your life just because-"

"Your mind has left you far more than I had thought if you believe he loved me."

"You didn't hear the things he said to me when we got him back...the terrible things-"

"I never said he wouldn't be angry. But he would never rape you, for Christ's sake."

"Look at you, defending a man that you were more than willing to hang."

"I still am more than willing to hang him, but accusing a man of a crime that he did not commit...that is just bad for business. Those kinds of lies...they eventually become a mountain that will crash down around you, no matter how high up the ladder it gets you."

They were looking at each other again, as if seeing the other in a new light.

"It was a dream...what made me...he raped me, in the dream...I could feel it...could feel everything...and now, all I can think of when I think of him is...that pain, all I can see is darkness surrounding him...how everything I thought he was...was a lie. I just...can't feel for him."

When he didn't say anything, she searched for something...something more to question him with…

"You've told me what my feelings were for him, you have shared with me your opinion of my feelings I have for him now, but you haven't told me what you think my feelings should be."

That got a noise of humor out of him. "You're sorely mistaken if you think I'm going to tell you that you should love him. No woman should love him, because he simply isn't built for that kind of commitment. He is outside of the law, he is very selfish...and he would sooner see the hangman's noose before he admitted love."

"I'm outside of the law as well, and some say I can be selfish."

"Did I say I think men should love you? You murder men because you love them, you're a pirate through and through...and I seem to remember you leaving your father here to go gallivanting off after Jack. Funny, that."

That stung.
"Regardless of how you, I, or anyone else thinks I should feel about Jack, I've decided to move on from him, which brings me to why I'm here."

"I was wondering when we were going to get around to that."

"-You're going to tell me where-"

"-your father is? Certainly. He's buried in an unmarked grave at the cemetery. I thought it prudent to at least give him that."

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