The Cure for Sorrow

by DreamingPagan

Summary

Thomas Hamilton has had a rough decade. Getting captured by pirates only seems like the icing on the cake.

Notes

For the following prompt on the Pirate Prompt:

Set after s3 finale. While at sea, intercepting an English ship, John Silver finds one Lord Thomas Hamilton on board. What does he do? Does he tell Flint straight away, or does he hide Thomas and plan to use his presence as some sort of leverage against Flint?
And what does he tell Thomas about Flint, Miranda and the whole situation they are in now?
And how is Thomas, after all these dreadful years?
It doesn't necessarily have to be Silverflint, although I think it would be very interesting.
One thing I really want is for James and Thomas to find each other again and be as in love as they have ever been, and more (because they are such true love material, I cannot cope, hold meee sigh). Which makes it even more interesting if you take into account Flint's feelings for Silver and vice versa.
I also would love some angsty talk about James/Thomas/Miranda, what they had and how much they lost - especially, James telling Thomas about Miranda's death and all the pain and
guilt he feels. How to end it is entirely up to you. Can be angst, can be happy(ish), can be whatever you feel fits best!
"Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him."
2 Corinthians 2:7&8

It was raining.

Of course it was bloody raining, Thomas Hamilton reflected. It wasn’t enough that he had been captured by pirates. It wasn’t enough that he stood to lose what few funds he had managed to scrape together for this journey. No. It had to rain as well. Just his luck, really - or lack thereof. If there was one thing the past ten years had taught him, it was that if it weren’t for bad luck, he wouldn’t have any at all. And now the pirates were looking his way, quite obviously taking in his clothing and the size of his purse against the prospect of further gains to be had by ransom.

“If I ever express a desire to travel again, I sincerely hope someone will cosh me over the head and drag me back to Bethlem. I must have been mad to attempt this in the first place,” he muttered, and the pirate standing nearest him flashed him an incongruously brilliant grin.

“Some might say so,” he agreed. “Although you don’t quite look the part of the poor mad wretch.” His voice sounded - oddly cultured, Thomas noticed. It was not what he would have expected, but then little about this voyage had been thus far. He snorted.

“That never stopped anyone the first time.”

The pirate’s blue eyes narrowed, and he considered Thomas more carefully.

“Bethlem, you say. I wonder - were you familiar with any of the other inmates?”

Thomas frowned. The man’s question had sounded deceptively casual, but he could see by the sudden scrutiny that it had been nothing of the sort. The man was fishing for something.

“Not many I’m afraid, no,” he answered, caution lending his words a certain stiffness. “Forgive me - who are you, sir?”

The pirate grinned again, and pushed himself away from the mast where he had been leaning. He gave a somewhat ridiculous bow, starting at the waist and sweeping his hands outward, and straightened again.

“I have the good fortune to serve as quartermaster aboard the Walrus. You’ve gotten lucky, friend. If you had to be captured by pirates, I would recommend Captain Flint over some others I could name.”

God, Thomas thought, was having a laugh at his expense. Nothing else could explain this odd coincidence.

“Captain Flint?”

“I take it you’ve heard the name.” The quartermaster still smiled, although it had turned to something like amusement now rather than an attempt to reassure or calm, and Thomas laughed, more out of some hysterical instinct toward humor than actual mirth.

“Fate has a strange way of tossing one about,” he answered, and the pirate cocked his head. “He
killed my father,” Thomas clarified, and the quartermaster raised an eyebrow.

“You don’t seem very upset about that.”

“I hated my father. Apparently I wasn’t the only one.” The shorter man was staring at him now, a strange look on his face, and he licked his lips almost as if he were nervous.

“Might I ask your name?”

“So that you can see whether I’m worth ransoming?” The pirate flashed him a half grin.

“There is that, yes.”

Thomas sighed. He contemplated giving a false name. It was the smart thing to do - the thing that would ensure that his relatives heard nothing of this. It might even save his life if Captain Flint proved to have a grudge against his family rather than simply an entirely understandable loathing for his father, but on the off chance that the pirate decided to sink the entire ship and leave no survivors, he wanted at least one person to know where and when he had truly died, even if that person had no idea who he was beyond his name.

"Thomas Hamilton,” he said finally. He raised a hand to run it through his rain-sodden hair, and found the quartermaster suddenly much closer to him, his face less than a foot away from Thomas.

"Say that again.” The man’s eyes had suddenly become bird-like, focused with all the intensity of a hawk studying its prey to the exclusion of all else.

"My name is Thomas Hamilton," he repeated, attempting to draw back away from the other man. "There is no one back in England willing to ransom me, so I will thank you not to .”

"And why is that?" The pirate's gaze had not shifted - if anything, it had grown more intense, and Thomas recoiled.

"Do we know each other?" he asked, and the pirate smiled, easy and amiable on the surface with all the intensity of a shark behind it.

"John Silver, at your service," he answered. "We haven't met, but I believe you know a friend of mine - unless I'm speaking to the wrong man." 

"I'm quite sure you are," Thomas answered. "Especially if your friend claims to have met me in the past decade. I was only permitted to leave Bethlem recently because I promised never to darken my uncle's doorstep again."

Silver grinned, and Thomas drew back, uneasy at the gleam in the other man's eyes.

"Oh yes," he replied. "I know someone who is very much going to want to see you." 

He stood.

“Cut this one loose,” he ordered. “We’re going to see the Captain.”
He led them both onto the pirate vessel past about thirty men, and it was a mark of the respect that Silver commanded that none of them asked questions as they headed toward the captain's cabin. Thomas couldn't help but wonder what the mysterious Captain Flint could possibly want with him, unless it was to finish what he started with Alfred. He kept silent, though, afraid to provoke anything until he had a better handle on the situation, and stood behind Silver as he tapped on the door.

"Captain? You have a visitor. You may want to -"

"Fuck off." Thomas raised one eyebrow, a frown etching itself on his face. Whatever else Captain Flint was, he was rude. It didn't seem to daunt Silver, though, who leaned on the door frame with one arm.

"While that does sound like a delightful way to spend an afternoon, I regret to say it's not what I came down here to do. Someone from the prize vessel would like to see you, and I think you might -"

"Unless you're here to tell me that King George himself has come to ask for terms of surrender, I'm not interested. Take our illustrious visitor and stow him in the hold somewhere."

He couldn't quite help the gasp that escaped him. He knew that voice. It had been ten years since he had last heard it, but it was as familiar now as it had been when they had taken him away, and it rendered him temporarily speechless, heart suddenly racing. James. He stared at the door, feeling the floor tilt beneath him and the world tilt with it, and suddenly he understood why Silver had reacted as he had done. He had untied him, dragged him down here, because James was there. James was alive - alive, when Thomas had believed him to be dead for ten years. He was right there. He was just beyond the door -

He was Captain Flint.

It made all too much sense, and Thomas felt something in him twist at the thought of his James, who had always been so proper, so very concerned with perception, turned into the most feared pirate captain in the West Indies. He had done this to him - stolen name, reputation, career, and home. A wave of self-loathing swept through him as he stared at the door, anticipation mixing with dread as he realized what was about to happen. James was here, and alive, and he had never been more sure that his former lover would hate him for what he had done.

"James?" Silver tried again, and there was a sort of urgency to his voice this time. He was staring at Thomas, the small gasp having evidently further confirmed what he had already known. "The person on the other side of this door is significantly more important than that. The aft decks are going to be cleared for the next two hours or so. You really should open up."

They could both hear the exasperated sigh from the other side of the door. Footsteps approached, followed by the sound of the lock being thrown.

"Who the fuck -"

The door opened, and the man in the doorway stood, stock still, green eyes fixed on Thomas even as Thomas stared at him in return, taking in what ten years had done to his lover.

He looked exhausted. Quite beyond any change in superficial appearance, he looked as if he hadn't slept properly in quite some time, with purple shadows beneath his eyes that made him look old.
beyond his years. He had shaved his head, and it only added to the impression of a man in his fifties rather than his mid-forties. Sometime in the last decade, he had acquired at least three new scars that Thomas could see, as well as an earring that glinted in the light of a nearby lantern. He had obviously spent a good part of the last decade in the sun, as his skin was now tanned and weathered. Frown lines had etched themselves in James’ forehead, as if he had worn a permanent scowl for the past ten years. Right now, though he was staring at Thomas as though he had seen a ghost, his eyes wide and face pale.

"Thomas?" James sounded - odd, somehow younger, his voice strangled. He let go of the door slowly, and took a step forward. Thomas swallowed hard.

"James?" He only barely managed to utter the name, the sound more a desperate plea than a question. An odd expression stole over James’ face, and he took a shaking breath.

"It's not possible," he murmured. "You were dead. They told me - Peter's letter -" He stilled, and an ugly something flashed through his eyes. “Peter,” he growled. He met Thomas's eyes, grim understanding passing between them, and then James’ gaze softened. “Son of a bitch,” he murmured. “I believed him. I should have known.”

“He said the same of you,” Thomas murmured, and James snorted.

“Of course he fucking did.” He made an odd, abortive motion with his hands as if to reach out and then stopped.

“Well!” Silver said pointedly. “Glad to be of service. I’ll leave you to it.” Both men started, and James turned to his quartermaster, visibly grasping for words.

"John -"

Silver nodded.

"I know,” he said more seriously. "You'll have privacy for as long as I can manage. You're welcome.” He ducked his head, and James stared after him as he disappeared before turning back to Thomas.

"Thomas, I -" he started, and cleared his throat. “Come in.” He opened the door wider, and Thomas slipped inside.

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James closed and bolted the door, and Thomas could not hold himself back one instant longer. He reached out to touch James' arm, and James froze abruptly, mouth working soundlessly before he reached out to do the same, his hand shaking ever so slightly. He inhaled sharply when he felt cloth under his fingertips, as if afraid that Thomas might have proven to be an illusion, and then he exhaled, a long, shaking breath that spoke of a thousand words all trying to get out.

"Jesus,” he murmured. “You're real.” Thomas smiled, relief tugging the corners of his lips upward without conscious volition.

“You’re alive,” he answered. “All this time, I thought - and here you are.”

“After a fashion,” James answered. “Thomas - how?”

He did not need to elaborate. Thomas grimaced.
“I was released from Bethlem a year ago,” he answered, and James sucked in a sharp breath.

“A year - Jesus. You were there all this time?”

“Yes. My father died and I - He had had me declared incurably insane and put it about that I was dead. My uncle unfortunately took control of the family finances in his absence, and refused to release me until financial difficulties began to infringe upon his ability to pay Bethlem for my upkeep. I swore to take myself off where he would never hear from me again if he would only arrange for my release and he finally agreed. I took ship for the Colonies hoping for - I’m not sure what, now, and you know the rest.”

James was staring at him still, a look on his face that could best be described as horror.

“Nine years,” he choked. “And the spare year?” Thomas looked away, and felt James’ green eyes track him.

“Bethlem - changed me. I was not myself for some time afterward,” he answered, his voice rough.

“When I was released - I couldn’t quite seem to find my place in the world. It’s taken me this long to -” He stopped, unable and unwilling to continue, and swallowed hard, ignoring the sympathy and pain in James’ eyes at the mention of Bethlem. “You look well,” he said lightly, trying to change the subject. James snorted.

“I look like hell. There’s no need to lie.”

"And you're a pirate," he returned, and James flinched, shame and sorrow both flashing across his face.

"It's alright," Thomas reassured him. “Truly. Although the shaved head might take some getting used to." He attempted a smile, but James turned away, his arms crossing as if against a cold wind.

"It's not alright," he argued lowly. "I've changed, Thomas. I've done such things as would make you hate me if you knew."

Thomas shook his head.

"James, I could never -" He took a step closer, and James began to speak, his voice low and frighteningly devoid of inflection.

“I’ve become a monster. I killed your father, and that’s not even the worst of it. I’ve killed - so many people, so many innocent people who had done nothing but get in my way. And I can tell myself whatever I like about why I did it, and some of it may even be the truth, but it doesn’t change a damn thing. It doesn’t make any of it right. I don’t even know what the fuck I am anymore and now I find that you were - that I could have-”

Thomas stared at his turned back, stomach turning at the sheer agony in his lover’s voice, and he suddenly understood. He blamed himself for the past ten years, and James - James was doing the same, taking on too much of the burden as he had always done. Thomas felt his throat constrict at the thought.

"James -” he started, staring at James’ hunched shoulders, at his hands that grasped the edge of the desk as he leaned against it, white-knuckled from emotion.

“I left you there.” The words seemed torn from him, raw and hopeless and coming from some unfathomable depth of his soul. “I left you to die in that hell-hole. Dear God, Thomas - as if my other sins weren’t enough! I left you to be tortured - never even tried to save you! How can you not hate
me? How can you even look at me knowing -” He cut off, anguish choking the words, and turned back, eyes swimming with guilt that nearly brought Thomas to his knees with the intensity of it. Instead, he crossed the distance between them swiftly and placed both hands on James’s shoulders, squeezing them tightly.

“James - for God’s sake, look at me, will you?” James finally met his eyes, and Thomas met his gaze with his own, compassionate but unyielding. “I forgive you.” He heard James’s breath hitch, and he repeated it firmly, watching the fragile hope that built in James’s eyes at the words. “I forgive you. You did what you had to - what I all but ordered you to do-”

James’ breath caught. He pulled away, and Thomas frowned.

“James?”

James’ hands twitched. His mouth worked, and he stared at Thomas, searching for the words for what he needed to say.

“Miranda,” he choked out finally. “You told Miranda we were to take care of each other. I failed you, Thomas - over and over again, I failed both of you.”

Thomas felt a foreboding chill run down his spine, and he stared at James’ anguished expression.

“What do you mean?”

The look on James’ face was answer in and of itself, and Thomas closed his eyes, grief sweeping over him anew. He had known, he realized dimly, and the thought raised a lump in his throat that he swallowed against. In his heart of hearts, he had known from the moment he laid eyes on James, because she would never have allowed him to go so long without sleep.

“When?”

“Six months ago.”

“Charles Town,” he murmured, and James nodded wearily.

“You heard?”

Thomas nodded.

“I heard. At the time I thought - it doesn’t matter what I thought. Why, James? What happened?”

“They murdered her,” James rasped. “Shot her for nothing more than raising her voice to Peter fucking Ashe and then displayed her body afterward, threw fucking rocks at her. And I - I couldn’t.” He stopped, eyes raised toward the ceiling, visibly trying to blink back the tears in his eyes. “I failed her, Thomas. I should have protected her, and instead I stood and watched while the entire city burned for my failure. I -”

Thomas raised a hand, cutting him off.

“Did you wield the gun?” he asked. “Did you know what would happen?”

James head snapped back toward him.

“Of course I fucking didn’t,” he snapped. “I would never have -”

“Then you are not responsible for her death,” Thomas answered. At James’ startled expression, he
shook his head.

“You can’t take the blame for everything, James. Miranda was a grown woman who made her own choices. She would not thank you for making her choice into your burden. You know that.”

“I allowed her to leave this ship -”

“Do you truly think she would have allowed you to keep her here against her will?” James winced, and Thomas nodded.

“Exactly. She would have had your hide, and you know it.”

James took a breath.

“How can you -?” he started, and Thomas gave a tight smile.

“I have been mourning you both for the past nine years. To have even one of you back.” He took a deep breath, and blew it out. “It wasn’t your fault. Not that I think blowing up a city is an appropriate response, but I can’t say I don’t understand the impulse. When they told me - when they lied to me about you and Miranda.…” He stopped, and swallowed hard against the old, familiar rage. James gave him a startled look, and Thomas grimaced.

“You’re not the only one that wanted revenge,” he said, and James bowed his head, seemingly overwhelmed. It only served to emphasize his shaven head, and Thomas found himself looking at his former lover, cataloging all the differences wrought by time and grief and hardship, fresh pain welling in his stomach along with the urge to reach forward and gather the other man into his arms.

“James - God in Heaven, I’m sorry,” he murmured. “Can you ever forgive me?”

"Forgive you?" James looked up, bewilderment painted on his face. "Forgive you for what? For getting arrested?"

"For my part in all of this. For doing this to you. For being so incredibly stupid as to think that my actions wouldn’t -" James shook his head, and this time it was his turn to grasp Thomas’ shoulders.

"It wasn't your fault," he said fiercely. "It was never your fault. God Almighty, Thomas - of course I fucking forgive you. You did nothing wrong."

"Yes, I did."

James started to protest, and Thomas overrode him ruthlessly, continuing despite the mulish expression that was starting to replace guilt on James’ face.

“I ruined all our lives. You say you’re a monster. Well, if you are, then so am I, because I caused this, James. I should have stopped when Miranda warned me - when you warned me. I was a fool, and it has cost you everything. I’m so sorry. I-"

“Jesus Christ, what the hell have they done to you?” James voice startled him, and he stopped abruptly. James, for his part, looked just as surprised, but at something else altogether. He reached forward and, with a look at Thomas for permission, moved the taller man’s shirt collar aside, his fingertips brushing against the skin beneath. He was staring at Thomas’ neck, and with a start, Thomas realized that James had spotted the scar that had been left by the thick, heavy collar they had seen fit to grace him with in the asylum. He pulled at his shirt collar self-consciously, shooing James’ fingers away, and cleared his throat.
“I think the question is rather what didn’t they do, but that’s not really the point here. I -”

James shook his head, green eyes now focused on Thomas’ face.

“Jesus,” he repeated. “There are more?” Thomas nodded silently. He rolled up one shirtsleeve, looking away as he did so, and heard James give a surprised hiss at the visible marks at his wrist. He felt the other man reach out and run his fingers across the marks, turning his arm carefully to examine them, his hands gentle against Thomas’ scarred, abused skin.

“That’s the least of them, I’m afraid,” he said, his tone light despite the ache that had started to build in his chest. James’ eyes darkened, and he stared at the scars until Thomas pulled his cuff down again, pulling his arm away from James’ hands. He looked up at Thomas, something lost in his eyes, and Thomas watched as horror turned to boiling anger, his jaw clenching as he lowered his hands to his sides again.

“I don’t know,” he growled, “who the sick bastards were who did this - who convinced you that what they were doing was in any way your fault - but if I ever find them, I’ll run them through for it, that much I promise you.”

“James -”

“No,” James insisted, green eyes blazing now, all trace of anything resembling guilt gone. “No. You can’t tell me you think they deserve anything less. They hurt you, Thomas - goddamn tortured you. They had no right to lick your damned boots, much less lay a hand on you, and they still -” His voice broke, and he shook his head. “They had no right,” he repeated in a furious, horrified, half-choked voice. “No right at all.”

The words made something in Thomas’ stomach do a funny little flip, and he stared at James, an odd feeling bubbling up from somewhere inside him. They had no right. It seemed like such a little thing - meaningless validation of a self-evident truth, but it left him breathless, trying hard to swallow past the lump that had suddenly built in his throat. With a start, he realized that his eyes were wet. It had been ten years - ten years since he had wept over anything, and yet now, suddenly, he was weeping - not doing anything so dramatic as sobbing, but rather feeling tears rise, unbidden, to the corners of his eyes as if of their own will. He blinked, and felt the wetness increase, threatening to run down his cheeks.

“Thomas? What -?”

He squeezed his eyes shut, taking a few deep breaths, and felt James move closer - felt the other man reach out and hesitantly place one hand on his shoulder and then seem to throw caution to the winds and pull him into an embrace.

“Come here,” he murmured, arms tightening around Thomas’ body, and Thomas held on for a moment, allowing James’ presence to steady him, breathing hard against the onslaught of tears.

“I’m sorry,” he choked. “I’ve never -” He took several deep shaky breaths, and began again. “My uncle,” he said finally, “was of the opinion that my father had been right, both in disowning me and in having me locked in Bethlem as a lunatic. He - that is -” He stopped, unable to continue, but James seemed to understand what he was saying anyway.

“He told you that Alfred was right, and you were wrong - that you were insane.” His voice was a study in contained fury. “He lied, until you started to question - started to wonder -”

Thomas nodded, face still buried in James’ shoulder, and James swore softly. He pulled back, only to
put one hand on either side of Thomas’ face.

“They lied,” he said firmly, his green eyes fixed on Thomas’ blue ones. “You’re not mad. You never were. Even if you had been, no madness could possibly justify this.” He laid his palm on the side of Thomas’ neck against the scar, and Thomas leaned into the touch. “They were wrong,” he promised. “They were wrong,” James repeated, and Thomas could not help but stare. He was aware suddenly not so much of the differences in James’ face as of the overwhelmingly welcome sense of his presence, familiar and comforting, and of his hand resting against Thomas’ skin. It had been so long - so very long since anyone had touched him like this. James’ hand was hard and calloused against his neck, but warm, and very suddenly Thomas wanted to reach up and take that hand, to run his fingers over the callouses and scars there, to discover with hands and teeth and tongue everything new about James’ skin. He wanted to reach out and find out what the copper fuzz on James’ head felt like against his palms - to reclaim the part of his life that had been so violently torn from him all those years ago. James was still talking, still saying reassuring words, and yet all Thomas could feel was the warmth that was spreading through him from that hand downward.

“James,” he interrupted, and suddenly the longing was too much to bear. He reached forward, taking James’ face between his hands, and kissed him, his lips hard against James’. James made a tiny noise, either need or surprise, and Thomas pulled back, eyes questioning, only for James to raise his chin and return the kiss fervently, hands curling around the back of Thomas’s shoulders, pulling him closer, kissing him as if he might never stop, and Thomas reciprocated in kind, mouth open, teeth and lips and tongue all entangled with James’ in an attempt to be as close as was physically possible. It felt - god, it felt like coming home after so very long away, and he drank in the smell of James, the feel of him as he ran his hands down Thomas’ sides, coming to rest at his waist to pull them closer together. He was still holding onto James’ face when they finally pulled apart, pressing their foreheads together as they both panted from lack of breath. Finally, James opened his eyes again, and the ghost of a smile flitted over his face as he looked at Thomas

“God, I’ve missed you,” he breathed, and Thomas smiled.

"Remind me that I owe your quartermaster a great debt," he murmured. James gave a quiet huff of laughter.

“Don’t worry - he won’t let you forget it,” he said. “The man’s an opportunist of the highest caliber.”

“For this - for giving you back to me - he can have whatever he wants.”

“Whatever you do, don’t tell him that.” They laughed, and then quieted, and Thomas swept a thumb across James’ cheek, wiping away the last of the tears that had run down his face and into his beard.

"We still have a great deal to discuss,” James said softly, and Thomas nodded.

“I know. I’d like to change into something a bit warmer first, if you wouldn’t mind.”

James looked down, and seemed to register for the first time that Thomas was still utterly soaked from the rain still pouring down against the windows, and James was little better for having embraced him so tightly.

“Jesus,” he muttered, and Thomas laughed. James let go of him reluctantly and crossed to the door. He stuck his head outside for a moment, and Thomas heard Silver’s clumping footsteps approach. He leaned against the cannon that took up far too much space at one end of James’ bed, watching James’ muscles move under the black shirt he wore. There, he thought, was a change he could appreciate, and the thought brought a wicked smile to his lips as he allowed his gaze to wander from the black cotton-clad shoulders to the wonderfully tight seat of James’ pants.
James turned back, shutting the door behind him. He came to sit beside Thomas, hands folded in his lap, fingers playing with the rings on his right hand.

“I’ve sent Silver to fetch your things,” he said. “It shouldn’t take long.”

They sat, silent for a moment, and then James spoke again.

“You know,” he said, “There are other ways to get warm.” He turned to face Thomas. He eyed the still-wet shirt that clung to Thomas’ torso and raised one eyebrow questioningly, and Thomas realized abruptly what he was suggesting. He felt his lips tug upward of their own will, and he met James’ eyes.

“Yes,” he answered. “Yes, there are.”

Silver knocked on the door ten minutes later. They didn’t answer.
Chapter 3

A week later:

"I owe you a considerable debt, you know."

The voice came floating down from the rigging, and Silver looked up to find Thomas sitting, his legs halfway through the holes, looking for all the world as comfortable there as if he had been part of the crew for years. His blond hair shone in the sun, and Silver shielded his eyes and cocked his head.

"I suppose you could look at it that way," he agreed. "After all - I found you, dug deep enough to learn your name and history, and brought you to Captain Flint, all without demanding any repayment."

"Or?" Thomas raised an eyebrow, and Silver flashed him a brilliant grin.

"Or, you could look at it as self-interest. Since you’ve come aboard, do you know how many crew members I’ve had to placate? How many times the Captain’s lost his temper?"

Thomas shook his head, and Silver held up one hand, his thumb and index finger forming a circle.

"Not one, and not once. He’s been all but dancing on air. So you see - I was acting in my own interests, really."

"Or in his?"

"That too," he admitted. "Luckily for you, it so happened that my interests and his coincided. Then again - I’ve often found that the universe conspires in his favor on such things."

"And if your interests had diverged?"

Silver looked away. Thomas was looking at him with an assessing gaze, and he briefly considered the other man, considering his answer. It had only been a week and while he could safely say that he was beginning to understand Flint, Thomas Hamilton was something new and unknown and potentially dangerous. It would hardly be the first time someone had looked harmless and proven to be quite otherwise. The man had survived nine years in Bethlem, after all, and not broken. That spoke of hidden depths of will the equal of Flint’s, and if he was anything like his ruthless, backstabbing father, it might prove dangerous to admit to having an agenda that did not necessarily match Flint’s. All in all, the truth might be called for. On the other hand, though - he did not want to reveal his entire hand to an unknown, not so quickly. Perhaps -

"You couldn’t have known," Thomas said, interrupting Silver’s calculations.

"Beg pardon?"

"You couldn’t have known the outcome of your actions," Thomas elaborated, and Silver frowned.

"What do you mean?"

"There were a hundred ways it could have ended, some of them worse off for you than the way you began. James and I could have blamed one another for our mutual misfortune. I could have decided I
couldn’t accept the person James has become, and walked away. He could have decided to try to drive me off for my own good - in fact, it was all too likely, and it would have left him miserable and you, if you’ll forgive the pun, in the same boat.”

“Ship,” Silver corrected automatically, and Thomas smiled.

“The point stands,” he insisted. “James clearly told you what had happened to separate us. You know him even if you do not know me, and I’m certain you understood the potential for disaster. A careful man such as yourself would have considered the possibilities and concluded that there was only one chance in five that bringing me on board would result in a favorable outcome. Why did you do it, if not for your own self-interest?”

“One,” Silver argued, “He was hardly likely to drive you away. He’s waged a war in your name. Faced with the possibility of reunion, I don’t think he was mentally or physically capable of doing anything other than welcoming you back with open arms. Two - yes, I considered what he had told me of you, and gambled that your experiences might have changed you enough for you to understand his motives. I was right. Here you are.” He gave Thomas a shark’s grin, and the other man’s eyes narrowed.

“And three?”

“How do you know there is a three?”

“He doesn’t let just anyone call him by name. I think you might actually be the only person on this entire ship that I’ve heard doing so. Which means that there is, of necessity, a third point.” He seemed unperturbed, and Silver faltered. He was used to Flint, who would have been very much done with this conversation at this point. Thomas, it seemed, was truly going to take some getting used to.

“I could still plead self-interest, you know,” Silver said, stalling for time. “If he’d ever found out that I’d seen you and not said anything, I’d not live to see the next dawn.”

Thomas shook his head.

“No. That’s not it. You were delighted when you learnt my name, and you didn’t stop to prepare me, didn’t tell me about Miranda - didn’t give any thought to your own stake in things, in short. You took me straight to James, as if you couldn’t wait for him to see me and vice versa. Why?”

Silver stared. Yes, Thomas Hamilton was dangerous. Flint had said he had a keen mind, and yet somehow Silver had expected time to have gilded the lily, so to speak - made him seem more brilliant, more observant in Flint’s mind than he really was. With a start, he realized that he was going to have to concede this one. It was not a loss - the true answer to the question was neither secret nor particularly embarrassing, but being forced to admit it was disturbing.

“I -” he started, and blew out a breath. He turned away. “Maybe I just thought you’d both been through enough shit and that I shouldn’t add to it,” he said finally. He turned, and found that Thomas was smiling. He scowled. “Tell me,” he said, “how did we start at you owing me a favor and end up discussing my motivations for bringing you aboard?”

“Just taking the lay of the land.” The man’s answer was irritatingly flippant, and Silver felt something stir in him - anger, perhaps, at being bested, and his answer, when he gave it, surprised even him in its heat.

“Taking the lay of the land. Well, for the sake of the crew, Lord Hamilton, I’ll thank you to keep one
particular geographical feature in mind. That man,” he pointed toward Flint, “has spent the past decade trying to avenge you. He’s been through hell more than once, put himself and all the rest of us through truly unbelievable amounts of pain and suffering trying to achieve your vision for Nassau. So, if at any point you find yourself contemplating doing something stupid and reckless and noble again, please, don’t. I don’t know that any of us could survive him losing you a second time, and I know he certainly wouldn’t.”

The edge of Thomas’ mouth curled upward.

“You’re angry,” he observed, and Silver shook his head.

“No. I’m - concerned,” he corrected, and Thomas inclined his head to the right.

“Concerned, then,” he accepted, “but not just about the threat I might pose to James. Tell me, Mr. Silver - how long has James been fiddling with his hands when he talks to you?”

“Beg pardon?”

“How long?” Thomas asked again, patiently, and Silver felt his heart skip a beat. He knew, and if he knew, it was only a matter of time before Flint found out. And that - that would be distinctly bad.

“For about ninety-five percent less time than he’s been brooding over your death,” he answered. “I assure you -”

Thomas held up a hand.

“I don’t know if James mentioned, Mr. Silver, but I’ve never been the jealous sort. What you and he share is obviously something more than simple friendship. If -”

“Whoa, whoa.” Silver held up both hands. “Hold on a moment. We’ve never been -”

He was about to explain - truly, he was. He was about to lie and tell Thomas that there was nothing between him and Flint, save wary partnership. It would even have been a sort of truth, but at that moment, Flint laughed, and Silver made the mistake of turning to look at him.

The sight took his breath away. James Flint was laughing - really, truly laughing, and it took years off his face, smoothed out lines and created others around his eyes in a truly fascinating way. Mr. De Groot was standing, looking puzzled, and Flint bent at the waist, resting his hands on the tops of his thighs to keep himself from falling over at whatever had been said. He was - Jesus, he was happy, in a way that Silver had never seen since he had come on board the Walrus for the first time. It was like looking at a different man, and he stared for a moment, unable to tear his eyes away. When he did, he found Thomas sitting, eyes full of sympathy and amusement, and he swallowed hard.

“I know,” the taller man said. “It’s enough to make saints weep, isn’t it?” Silver didn’t answer - he didn’t have to, unable to form anything resembling a coherent sentence. Thomas pulled himself up out of the rigging and landed with a thump on the decking. He patted Silver on the shoulder.

“Come on,” he said, eyes dancing with mirth. “Let’s get it sorted out before he finishes realizing how he feels about you and starts thinking he’s betraying me or some such nonsense.”

He walked away, toward Flint, and all Silver could do was follow.

Chapter End Notes
That's all, folks! Hope it's to your liking, OP!

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