

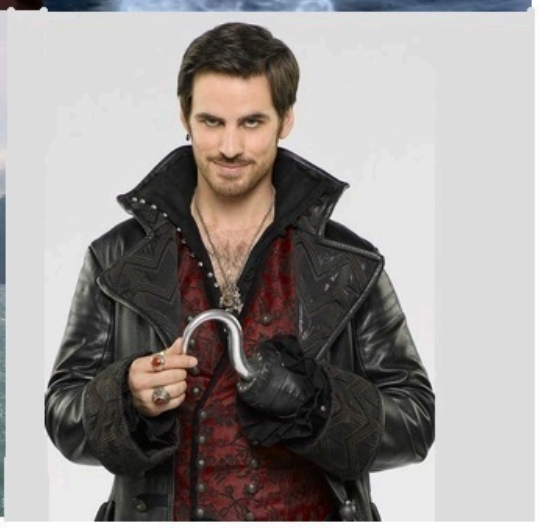
The Pirate & The Tempest
Part 2

By: Debbie Roche









Revised Oct 2026

Copyright July 2025

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This story takes place in an alternate timeline of Once Upon a Time. I spent a great deal of time trying to find a point where this story could fit within established canon, and ultimately only one moment in the series truly worked. To make this story possible, I created a divergence during Season 3. From that point forward, I have tried to preserve the spirit and major events of canon wherever possible, though some details necessarily unfold differently because of the changes outlined below. Events prior to Storybrooke remain unchanged, and Seasons 1–2 occur as aired. The Season 3 divergence, and the immediate consequences that follow, are outlined below.

- *The gang go to Neverland to save Henry. Unlike the series they actually save Henry. But believe they lose Neal.*
    - *When Neal is at his old Neverland "home" he retrieves a black magic bean that he had stashed. No one sees him pocket it.*
    - *The "Showdown" with pan ends differently. Neal lunges at Pan to save Henry. Neal pushes Henry out of the way, Regina grabs Henry. Neal dops the bean, opening a portal. Grabs Pan and jumps into the portal. Rumpel saw that it was a black bean and realized he'd lost his son and his father. Emma yells "No!" Hook grabs her. The portal snaps shut. Emma says they have to go after them. Killian says they have no idea where they are. Rumpel says it was a black bean. Everyone, except Emma, knows what that means. Emma can tell from look on their faces that is a bad thing. Rumpel says black beans only go to one place at that place is certain death. Everyone believes Neal and Pan are dead. They head back to the Jolly Roger and return to Storybrooke.*

- *Emma and Hook start dating.*
- *A few months later my story happens.*
- *1 month after my story ends a portal opens in the forest and Neal and Pan emerge and realize they are in each other's body. They start arguing. Snow and David happen to be nearby having a friendly duel and hear voices. They run towards the voices and see Neal and Pan. They draw their weapons. They take them to town. The town manages to switch them back like they did in the series with Pan and Henry. The price is still the same everyone except Emma and Henry are sent back to The Enchanted Forest.*
- *1 year later Hook brings Emma back to Storybrooke but even though she now has all her memories back she doesn't remember the months she spent with Killian after Neverland or the events of my story.*
- *The rest of Season 3-7 continues as it aired. (maybe with only a slight adjustment. Nothing major)*

Year 3

Interlude: The Vanishing Hoard (Day 15)

The night draped the port town in a cloak of damp shadows, its air heavy with the mingled scents of salt, fish, and the stale musk of spilled ale wafting from the crooked streets. The drizzle had just tapered off, leaving the cobblestones slick and glistening under the sway of rusted lanterns that creaked on their chains, casting pools of amber light across the warped wooden docks.

Path to Harbor

Killian strode at the head of his crew, his black leather coat swaying with each measured step, the hem brushing the tops of his boots. His hook gleamed faintly in the lantern glow, a steel menace catching the eye, while his piercing blue eyes scanned the path ahead, sharp despite the rum warming his veins. Two centuries had honed his edge, but the night's revelry had softened it just enough to let a rare grin tug at his lips.

Desylva walked at Killian's side, her leather cloak fluttering in the faint breeze that carried the tang of the harbor. Her gray eyes caught the flicker of the lanterns, reflecting a storm's quiet intensity, her presence a steady pulse beside his. She matched his stride effortlessly, her boots silent on the wet stones, her dark hair damp and clinging to her neck from the drizzle. Her cursed mark pulsed faintly beneath her sleeve, a subtle blue glow she ignored, her focus on the shadowed docks ahead.

Behind them, the crew staggered in a loose knot, their boots clacking unevenly on the stones. Smee, flushed from drink, clutched a half-empty rum bottle, his laughter a high-pitched giggle that echoed off the damp walls of the alley they'd spilled from. One-Eyed Jack gloomed beside him, his eye glinting with a mix of amusement and disdain as he kept the group moving. The night had been theirs, a raucous escape from the sea's endless call.

Smee, slurring through a grin, "That barmaid, Cap'n. Gave me a wink, she did!" Killian's chuckle rumbled low, "Aye, Smee. Must've been the rum in her eye." Desylva's lips quirked, a rare flicker of amusement crossing her face. Her storm-touched wildness had woven into their rhythm, a thread as vital as the ship itself. The crew's laughter bounced, a rough chorus against the lapping waves.

The group rounded a corner, the harbor sprawling into view. A jagged line of masts piercing the night sky, their tips swaying like skeletal fingers against the clouded expanse. The Jolly Roger waited at the far end, moored against a weathered pier, sails drooping in the still air, her oak hull a dark sentinel against the silvered water.

Billy skipped ahead, his freckled face flushed with drink. He spun to face them, walking backward, his voice bright, "Reckon we sang 'em dry back there, eh, Cap'n?" One-Eyed Jack barked a laugh, "Aye, lad. Voice like a gull, but it'll do," Black Tom trailed silently, his scarred hands steady on his harpoon, his dark eyes flicking to the shadows between the crates stacked along the dock, a quiet sentinel amid the revelry.

Harbor

The air shifted as they neared the water, growing cooler, sharper. The pub's warmth now faded, replaced by the briny bite of the sea.

Killian's grin lingered, his hand brushing Desylva's arm, "A good night keeps the crew's spirits up." Her gray eyes met his, "Till the next fight," she murmured, her voice dry but warm.

The ship loomed closer, their home calling them back.

A sudden stillness gripped the night. The usual creak of the Roger's hull, the slap of ropes against masts, the distant groan of other ships, all fell silent, swallowed by an unnatural hush that prickled the skin.

Smee hiccupped mid-laugh, his bottle clinking as he squinted, “What’s that, Cap’n? Ain’t right.” His slur faltered, his cheer dimming. One-Eyed Jack’s hand dropped to his cutlass, “Quiet’s trouble.” Billy froze, “Where’s the wind?” Black Tom’s harpoon tilted upward, his silence a taut wire.

Killian’s grin vanished, his blue eyes narrowing as he scanned the ship. The dark silhouette stood unchanged, yet a hum vibrated through the air, faint but insistent. Desylva’s step faltered, her hand brushing his arm, her gray eyes darkening. “Something’s wrong,” she said, her voice low and taut. Her cursed mark flared briefly, a blue spark in the gloom. The crew tensed, their revelry snuffed out.

The docks stretched ahead, the ship waiting in eerie repose.

Then it came. An eerie glow enveloped the Jolly Roger, a pulsing shroud of greenish light that shimmered like a mirage over the water, wrapping the ship in a spectral haze, its edges flickered, casting jagged shadows that danced across the pier and rippled over the silvered waves.

Smee’s bottle slipped, clattering on the stones, ““Blimey!” One-Eyed Jack cursed, “What sorcery’s this?” Billy’s jaw dropped, “She’s, she’s glowin’!” Black Tom’s harpoon rose, his stance rigid. Killian’s hook tapped his thigh, his gaze locked, “Bloody hell.” Desylva’s breath quickened, her storm stirring, “It’s not natural.”

The glow pulsed, hypnotic, unnerving. The crew stared, rooted by the sight. Their ship, their sanctuary, transformed into something otherworldly.

A bright flash erupted. A blinding streak that seared the night, a crack of light that split the darkness and burned their vision. Smee yelped, shielding his eyes, “Me eyes!” One-Eyed Jack ducked, “Damn it all!” Billy staggered, “What was that?!” Black Tom flinched, the first crack in his stoic mask. Killian’s blue eyes blazed, his hook slashing air, “To the ship, now!” His roar shattered the daze.

The glow faded, leaving a faint shimmer on the water like spilled oil. Desylva was already moving, her cloak flaring as she broke into a run. Killian matched her, boots pounding. Smee stumbled after, “Wait fer me!” One-Eyed Jack growled, “Move, lad!” Billy raced, Black Tom silent behind. Their voices merged into a frantic cacophony.

The gangplank loomed, slick with mist. The flash’s echo lingered, a mystery pulling them forward.

Dock

Their sprint carried them down the dock, the planks groaning under their weight. The town’s lights blurred into streaks behind them, the Jolly Roger sharpening into focus. Her hull gleamed wet, untouched yet changed.

Smee panted, his bottle lost, “What was that light, Cap’n? Magic?” One-Eyed Jack snarled, “Aye, and not the friendly sort.” Billy’s voice shook, “She’s still there, ain’t she? Ain’t sunk?” Black Tom’s harpoon gleamed, his eyes darting. Killian’s jaw tightened, “We’ll see.” Desylva’s gray eyes flicked to him, her cursed mark pulsing brighter, “It’s inside,” she hissed, her instinct a blade. Killian nodded, “Aye, lass. Let’s face it.”

Their night of laughter forgotten, replaced by a creeping dread. The ship waited, its silence a siren’s call.

Gangplank

The pier trembled faintly as they reached the gangplank’s base. The water lapped against the pilings, a soft counterpoint to the pounding in their chests. The gangplank rose before them, a bridge to the unknown. Killian led, his black coat snapping, Desylva a shadow at his side, her storm-touched presence a tether.

Smee wheezed, “Never seen a glow like that.” One-Eyed Jack’s cutlass rasped free, “Somethin’s aboard.” Billy clutched his jacket, “Hope it’s not ghosts.” Black Tom’s silence weighed heavier, his harpoon a steady threat. The flash’s afterimage lingered in their eyes, a sharp memory of power. Killian’s voice cut through, “Whatever it is, we’ll meet it.”

The crew surged, their boots a drumroll on the plank. The Jolly Roger’s deck empty under the stars. Their home defiled, their spirits steeled. The night’s mystery unfurling with each step.

Main Deck

Desylva's boots struck the deck first, the planks faintly creaking under her weight. Her leather cloak, damp from the night's drizzle, flared behind her like a storm cloud, her gray eyes glinting in the faint starlight that pierced the clouded sky. The air aboard felt wrong, thicker, colder than the harbor's briny bite, a stillness that clung like damp fog despite the drizzle's end. Her breath fogged briefly, her chest tightening as a strange feeling coiled in her gut, not the familiar surge of her storm magic but something deeper, older, like a whisper from the bones of the earth. She froze mid-step, her hand brushing the railing. Its frost-rimed grain bit her palm, a chill that shouldn't have been there. The ship's usual groans were muted, the sails hanging limp as if holding their breath. Her cursed mark pulsed beneath her sleeve, a faint blue glow flickering like a heartbeat. Her time aboard had tuned her to the Roger's pulse, and now it stuttered. Her gray eyes darted, searching the shadows for the source of the unease that had yanked her from the pub's warmth.

Killian landed beside her, his boots thudding a heartbeat later. His black leather coat snapped in the faint breeze that stirred the deck, his hook brushing the railing with a metallic rasp that echoed in the unnatural quiet. His blue eyes, sharp despite the rum's haze, swept the deck, catching the same stillness that had seized her.

Smee's lantern, clutched in his trembling hands as he clambered up, cast a wavering glow across their faces, illuminating Killian's furrowed brow and Desylva's taut jaw.

Desylva turned to Killian, her gray eyes locking with his blue ones. A silent exchange honed over countless nights at sea, a language of glances that needed no words. His pirate's intuition mirrored her storm-touched instinct, both sensing the violation beneath their feet. The flash they'd seen from the docks lingered in their minds, its blinding streak a scar on the night. Her cursed mark flared brighter, a blue spark against the dark. Killian's hook tapped once, a question in his gaze. She answered with a sharp nod, her jaw tightening. Whatever had struck, it was here, now.

The crew spilled onto the deck behind them, their momentum faltering as the quiet pressed in. Smee wheezed, his stout frame swaying as he steadied the lantern, its light flickering over the empty expanse. His voice, still slurred from the pub, carried a new edge of fear. "Where's the watch, Cap'n? Ain't right."

One-Eyed Jack stomped forward, his grizzled face twisting as he kicked a coil of rope. "Somethin's off. Feel it in me bones." His cutlass rasped half-free, glinting in the glow. Billy clung to the gangplank's edge, his freckled face pale, his words trembling. "She's too quiet, like a grave." Black Tom stepped silently, his harpoon raised, his dark eyes scanning the shadows between the barrels and rigging.

The deck stretched bare. No flicker of torchlight, no sway of ropes. The greenish glow they'd seen from the pier had vanished, leaving only that faint shimmer on the water below, a ghostly residue. Killian's voice growled low. "Spread out, lads. Check every inch!" His command a lifeline, but Desylva's hand shot out, gripping his arm. Her touch firm, urgent. Her gray eyes burned. "Wait," she hissed, her voice a blade cutting through the crew's murmurs.

They froze, breaths held. The ship's silence a weight pressing down.

Desylva's senses sharpened. Her storm magic stirred, a restless hum beneath her skin, but this feeling was different. Not the chaos of wind or wave she knew, but a presence that prickled like static, ancient and vast. Her gray eyes flicked to Killian again, finding his steady gaze. They had forged a trust deeper than words, a bond that read her storm as surely as he read the sea. His blue eyes narrowed, catching the flicker of her cursed mark, the blue glow pulsing like a warning.

Killian didn't speak, didn't need to. His body tensing as if bracing for a blow. Her instinct screamed. Whatever had flashed, whatever had glowed, it wasn't done. Her boots shifted, her dagger hand twitching. She bolted for the hatch, her cloak a dark streak. Killian's voice snapped, "Desylva!", his tone sharp, not a reprimand but a tether. His boots thudded after her, the deck vibrating under his stride.

The crew's eyes followed, wide and uncertain. The night's mystery pulling them apart.

Smee's lantern swung as he shuffled forward, "What's she seen?" his voice cracked, the rum-soaked cheer of the pub a distant memory. One-Eyed Jack growled, "What's got her runnin' like that?" his hand tightened on his cutlass,

his eye darting. Billy peered over the railing, “That flash. Magic, aye? Somethin’ bad,” his young voice quavered. Black Tom’s harpoon tilted toward the hatch, his silence a question heavier than words.

The crew stood adrift. Killian’s black coat vanished down the hatch, chasing Desylva’s storm.

The deck’s stillness deepened. The air thick with a charge that lingered from the flash. The ship rocked gently, hull groaning as if stirring from a dream. Their home felt foreign, the planks hiding secrets. The crew waited, their breaths fogging in the chill, their revelry snuffed out by the unknown.

One-Eyed Jack gripped his cutlass, his grizzled voice cutting through the tension, “Raise the plank, lads, then we go after ‘em.”

The crew hauled the gangplank aboard with a collective heave, the wood brushing against the ship’s side as it rose, secured with a thud that echoed in the eerie quiet.

Below Deck

Ladder/Corridor

Killian’s descent echoed. His hook clanged against the ladder’s rungs, a sharp counterpoint to Desylva’s rapid steps. Her boots had already hit the lower deck, her gray eyes narrowing as she ran, her cursed mark casting a faint blue glow ahead.

The corridor stretched dark, hammocks swaying faintly, dented kegs lining the walls. Her storm magic flared, a restless wind in her veins, but that strange feeling gnawed deeper, an ancient pulse she couldn’t name. Killian’s voice rang behind, “Slow down, lass. Where you goin’?” his tone urgent, trusting her lead. Her breath fogged in the chill below, sharper than the harbor’s bite.

She didn’t answer, her instinct a tide pulling her toward the ship’s heart. He kept pace, his blue eyes glinting in the dim, his hook a metallic flash.

Their footsteps pounded, a duet against the muted creaks. The crew’s murmurs faded above. The Jolly Roger’s belly held its breath, its secrets waiting. Their chase a race against the night’s unraveling truth.

Hold

Desylva burst through the doorway into the hold where they kept their relics. A chamber nestled deep in the Roger’s belly, its walls a patchwork of rough-hewn shelves once laden with treasures earned through blood, storm, and steel. Her boots skidded on the planks. Her gray eyes widening as she took in the sight, empty, bare wood stared back where their hoard had gleamed.

The air thick with the absence of their spoils, no glint of gems, no shimmer of enchanted shards, no rustle of cloaks, just silence and shadow.

Her leather cloak, damp from the drizzle, flared as she spun. Her cursed mark flaring bright beneath her sleeve, casting jagged shadows across the void, illuminating the stark nothingness. Her breath caught, fogging in the chill that shouldn’t have lingered below deck.

“It’s all gone,” she whispered, her voice tight with disbelief. Two years of battles, etched into her memory through the weight of those relics, now vanished. The hold’s emptiness echoed the strange feeling that had gripped her on deck, a hollow ache that wasn’t storm or sea but something older, vaster. Her hand brushed a shelf, finding only dust where power once rested.

Killian stormed in a heartbeat later, his black leather coat brushing the doorframe. His hook grabbed wood with a sharp rasp, his blue eyes sweeping the chamber. His gaze hardened as he registered the loss. “Bloody hell,” he growled, his voice a low snarl that reverberated off the bare walls. His boots thudded as he stepped forward, the rum’s warmth from the pub drained from his stance, replaced by a fury that tightened his jaw. His hook tapped a

shelf, the sound a metronome of rage. Piracy had taught him the sting of theft, but this struck deeper, a violation of their ship, their legend.

A few minutes later, the crew crowded in, their boots scuffing, their breaths fogging. Smee's lantern swinging wildly, its flickering light dancing over the empty space, casting his stout shadow long and warped. "What…" he stammered as he gaped. One-Eyed Jack pushed past, his grizzled face twisting. "Empty as a beggar's purse!" His cutlass rasped free, as if he could fight the void. Black Tom's silent bulk filled the doorway, his harpoon lowering. Billy peeked around him, his freckled face paling, "Everything?" his voice cracked.

Killian paced the cramped hold, his coat brushing bare shelves. His blue eyes glinted with a fire stoked by the night's mystery. "Who'd dare?" His question hung heavy, a challenge to the shadows. His mind raced, replaying the glow, the flash, too swift, too clean for common thieves.

Smee scratched his hat, his rum-slurred voice trembling, "Took it all in a blink," his lantern swayed, casting jittery light. One-Eyed Jack spat on the planks. "Thieves don't flash like that. Too bloody neat," his eye narrowed, suspicion etching his face. Black Tom's dark eyes darted, his harpoon a steady threat. Billy hugged himself, his wiry frame shrinking, "All our work. Gone in a flash," his words quavered, the pub's shanties forgotten.

The crew's voices rose, a tangle of rage and bewilderment. Their hoard, a testament to their grit, stripped bare in a moment. The Jolly Roger's creak above seemed to mourn with them, her hull groaning under the weight of their loss.

Desylva stood rooted, her gray eyes distant. Her cursed mark pulsed, its blue glow steady now, a beacon in the dark. Her hand hovered over a shelf, fingers curling as if she could summon back the relics. Her storm magic hummed, restless beneath her skin, but that strange feeling gnawed deeper. A presence that wasn't wind or wave, but something ancient, vast, stretching beyond the ship's oak ribs.

"Regina, Rumpelstiltskin?" Billy's voice cut through, low and measured. One-Eyed Jack growled, "Could be either, them bastards got the power," his cutlass tapped his thigh. Smee nodded, his hat slipping, "Flash fits 'em, sneaky devils," his lantern trembled. Billy shivered, "They'd love to gut us like this." Black Tom's silence weighed, his harpoon tilting as if testing the air.

Their foes loomed in their minds, familiar shadows of malice. Desylva's gaze held steady, her storm-touched instinct probing beyond the known.

Killian stopped pacing, his hook scraping a final note. "Doubt it," he said, his voice firm. His blue eyes met Desylva's, a spark of trust flashing between them. "Too bold. Too quiet. … No taunts. No games." His words carried the weight of years spent outwitting those very foes. Regina's flair for drama, Rumpelstiltskin's penchant for riddles. Neither matched this silent strike. His hand brushed hers, a fleeting anchor. "Whatcha feel, love?" his tone softened, leaning on her intuition.

Desylva's gray eyes darkened, her breath slow. "Something old, very old, powerful, like a shadow stretched across time." Her words dropped like stones, chilling the hold.

Billy's eyes widened, "Older?" his voice a whisper. Smee gulped, "Blimey, that's bad." One-Eyed Jack's growl faltered, "What's older'n magic?" Black Tom's harpoon steadied. Billy thought of something, "Gods. Maybe Poseidon, or Ares." Killian pondered that idea. The crew stilled, their anger giving way to a creeping dread, an ancient force, unnamed, had brushed their ship.
Billy swallowed hard, his gaze drifting toward the empty shelves. "The Veil too?" Smee's lantern dipped. "Aye." Billy stared at the bare wood. "Crossed three realms fer that thing." One-Eyed Jack's jaw tightened as his hand swept toward the empty racks. "Enchanted blades. Cursed relics. Every bloody trophy we bled fer." Smee shook his head slowly. "That weren't treasure." His voice softened. "That was us."

The hold fell silent. The relics had been more than spoils. Each one carried a story, a battle, a narrow escape, a piece of the family they had become.

Black Tom lowered his eyes briefly toward the empty shelves. Even he seemed to feel the absence.

The hold's air thickened. Desylva crouched, her fingers tracing the floor. No scorch marks, no splinters, just bare planks, untouched. "If there were any burns or scratches, the wood's healed itself, all mended, " she murmured, "It's just... gone," her gray eyes hardened, "It wanted the relics, not us." Her storm stirred, a faint gust ruffling her cloak.

Killian's hook tapped wood, "A power that old'd leave a mark. Where's the sign?" his voice sharp, searching. Smee's lantern steadied, "Lucky it didn't take us," his hope fragile. One-Eyed Jack snorted, "Lucky's losin' everythin'? Bah!" his cutlass sheathed with a clang. Billy's voice cracked, "What now, Cap'n? We're empty-handed," his shoulders slumped. Black Tom's silence pressed.

The crew's eyes turned to Killian, their captain a beacon. The relics' absence a wound deeper than steel.

Killian straightened, his black coat swaying. His blue eyes burned with resolve. "We find it. Track it," he declared, his voice a vow, cutting through the hold's gloom. His hook gleamed, a promise of retribution. Desylva rose beside him, her gray eyes fierce. "If it's that old, it's not done," she said. Her storm flared, a crackle in the air. Her cursed mark pulsed, its blue glow a defiant light. Time had bound them to this ship, to each other. Their hoard's theft a call to hunt.

Smee nodded, "Aye, Cap'n. Chase it down," his lantern steadied. One-Eyed Jack grinned, "Blast it to bits." Black Tom's harpoon lifted. Billy straightened, "We'll get it back!"

The crew rallied, their loss a spur, their bond a fire. The Jolly Roger groaned overhead, its oak ribs creaking as if urging them on.

The hold's shadows stretched. Desylva's hand brushed Killian's, a fleeting touch. Her gray eyes met his blue ones. "It's still here," she murmured, "Not on the ship, but close," her voice low, her instinct a thread pulling them forward. Killian's grin flashed, roguish despite the loss, "Then we've a trail, lass," his hook tapped her arm, "Let's sniff it out," his trust in her a steel core.

Smee clutched his lantern, "Back to deck?" One-Eyed Jack nodded, "Aye. Can't fight air." Billy piped, "We're tougher'n this!" Black Tom turned.

The crew moved, their boots thudding. Their revelry from the pub a faded memory, their purpose sharpened. The hold's emptiness a challenge they'd meet. The Jolly Roger waited above, its deck their stage. Their hunt a new chapter dawning.

Main Deck

They trudged on to the deck with heavy, uneven steps, their boots scuffing the oak planks still slick from the night's drizzle, each sound a muted echo of their earlier revelry now lost to the hollow ache of their discovery below. The night's chill bit sharper as they emerged from the hold's oppressive gloom, a crisp wind curling off the harbor to sting their faces and numb their fingers, the stars piercing through the clouded sky with a cold, unyielding light that glinted off the frost-rimed railing like shards of broken glass.

Smee slumped against a barrel with a groan, his stout frame sagging under the weight of their loss, his patched coat damp and clinging as he shivered in the biting air. "All them trinkets. … Years o' fightin'," he muttered, his voice thick with a mix of rum-soaked melancholy and raw disbelief, his brow glistening with sweat despite the cold. His lantern rested beside him on the deck, its flickering flame casting a weak, wavering glow that danced across his flushed cheeks, dimming as if it too mourned the theft that had stripped their ship bare.

One-Eyed Jack paced with restless fury, his grizzled face etched with deep lines of anger. His heavy steps rattled the deck's planks, sending faint tremors through the stillness as he kicked the railing with a resounding thud that reverberated over the silvered water. "Gems, blades. Gone like smoke," he growled, his voice a rough snarl that carried the weight of a man who'd fought for every scrap, his eye glinting with a fire unquenched by the night's violation. His cutlass hung sheathed at his hip, its hilt worn from use but useless now against an enemy that left no trace.

Black Tom stood silent at the ship's edge, a towering shadow against the harbor's shimmer, his harpoon limp in his scarred hands. His dark eyes fixed on the water's glassy expanse, reflecting the stars in a gaze that held a quiet storm. Billy hugged a coil of rope near the mast, his wiry frame trembling not just from cold but from the loss of something tangible. "Even that shiny cup, me favorite," he said, his voice small and quavering, a boy's lament in a pirate's world.

The crew's murmurs wove a dirge, their voices threading through the night air like a frayed rope. The Jolly Roger rocked gently beneath them, sails drooping lifelessly, a wounded beast cradling its battered crew under the vast, uncaring sky.

Killian lingered near the hatch for a moment longer, his black leather coat swaying faintly as he stood poised between the shadows and the deck's starlit expanse. His hand rested on the frame, feeling the cold bite of the oak through his fingers, a tactile reminder of the ship that had carried him through most of his life. His blue eyes swept over his crew – their slumped shoulders… their hollow voices… the way Smee's bottle dangled forgotten… One-Eyed Jack's restless pacing… Billy's shivering form…

He felt the loss too, a wound deeper than the planks beneath his boots, cutting into the marrow of their shared legacy. Time had taught him to hoard what mattered, to guard the spoils that marked their triumphs, and those relics were more than trinkets. They were their legend, their blood-price, forged in battles that had tested their steel and spirit. His hook tapped the railing with a slow, deliberate rhythm, a metallic rasp that cut through the crew's murmurs like a heartbeat. Its gleam caught the starlight, a cold spark against the night. His gaze shifted, settling on Desylva where she stood near the wheel. Her gray eyes met his across the deck, steady and unyielding amid the storm of their despair, a beacon in the chaos. Her leather cloak, damp from the drizzle, hung heavy on her shoulders, its edges fluttering faintly in the wind. Her cursed mark pulsed beneath her sleeve, a faint blue glow that flickered like a distant lighthouse. Time had bound them through storm and sword, her wildness his anchor, her storm his tide. He stepped toward her, his boots thudding with a purpose that silenced the crew's lament.

Smee's bottle paused mid-tilt, his wide eyes tracking. One-Eyed Jack stopped pacing, his grizzled face turning. Billy's head rose from the rope, his freckles stark in the lantern's glow. Black Tom's gaze shifted.

The night held its breath as their captain moved, his presence a thread pulling them from the edge.

Quarterdeck

Desylva stood firm against the wheel, her gray eyes tracing Killian's approach with a quiet intensity. Her storm magic hummed faintly beneath her skin, a restless thread that stirred with every creak of the hull, its familiar rhythm now disrupted by the night's violation. Her hand rested on the wheel, its cold bite grounding her as her fingers traced the grooves. The strange feeling from below lingered, an ancient echo that gnawed at her senses, deeper than the storm she wielded, a shadow stretching beyond the ship's oak ribs. The ship's stillness pressed in, a stark contrast to the pub's raucous warmth hours ago when Billy's shanties had rung, and Smee's laughter had danced. Her breath fogged in the crisp air, her jaw tight with the weight of that unseen presence. Her leather cloak clung damply, its seaweed stitches glinting faintly in the starlight. Her cursed mark pulsed, a blue flicker that matched her heartbeat.

Killian stopped before her, his blue eyes locking with hers. His presence filled the space, a sea meeting her tempest. His hook brushed her cheek, a cold spark against her wind-chapped skin. His hand cupped her face, warm despite the chill. "They took the lot, lass. But I've still got the only treasure that matters," he said, his voice low and fierce, cutting through the night like a blade.

His words carried the weight of the flash that had seared their eyes. The glow that had shrouded their ship. The empty hold that mocked their efforts. Years of trust flared in his gaze. Her gray eyes widened briefly, a storm catching light, then softened. He leaned in, his lips meeting hers, a kiss fierce and sure, tasting of rum and salt and the sea they both lived. Her storm surged, her lips pressing back with a tempest's reply, her breath hitching as their worlds collided.

Main Deck

The deck fell silent, the crew's gaze a weight that held them in its orbit.

Smee's jaw dropped, his frame jolting upright against the barrel as the bottle clinked against its side, a grin tugging at his flushed face despite the night's sting, his rum-soaked eyes wide with a mix of shock and delight, his lantern's glow flickered across his cheeks, painting him in a warm light that clashed with the cold deck, the pub's revelry flashed in his mind, a night of laughter now crowned by this.

One-Eyed Jack snorted, his grizzled features softening as he crossed his arms. His eye glinted, catching the starlight as he watched, his cutlass hand relaxing from its tense grip, his face creased with a grin, a pirate's approval for a captain's heart. Black Tom's nod was faint, a subtle tilt of his head, his dark eyes softened, a rare flicker of emotion breaking his stoic mask, his harpoon rested against the railing, its gleam a quiet salute. Billy blushed, his freckled cheeks reddening under the lantern's glow.

Their shock melted into warmth, a ripple spreading across the deck, their captain and his storm stood as a light piercing the dark. The ship creaked beneath them, hull stirring as if roused by the spark between them.

Quarterdeck

The kiss lingered, a heartbeat stretched across the night. Desylva's hand rose slowly, resting on Killian's chest. Her fingers curled into the damp leather of his coat, feeling the steady thump of his heart beneath. Their shared perils had flared into something deeper. The night's chill retreated before their fire. The crew a family, battered by loss but held by this moment. The harbor's silvered water lapped below, a quiet witness to their defiance.

Desylva pulled back, her gray eyes sparking with a storm's edge, "Don't get sappy, love," she quipped, her voice dry as the wind that rustled her cloak, but her lips quirked, a flicker of warmth breaking through her storm-touched reserve, her hand lingered on his chest, her fingers tracing the leather's worn seams, feeling the heat of him through the cold, her storm magic hummed, a soft crackle in the air that matched the pulse of her cursed mark, its blue glow dimming but steady, her breath fogged faintly, her jaw softening as she met his gaze.

Killian's grin flashed, roguish and unrepentant, a pirate's charm undimmed by the night's theft, "Never, lass, just truth," he said, his voice a low rumble that carried over the deck, his blue eyes held hers, a sea meeting a tempest, unyielding and sure.

Main Deck

The crew's loss ached, a hollow where their relics had gleamed, a wound carved by the flash and glow, but this moment held them, a tether stronger than steel. Smee chuckled, his stout frame shaking, "Cap'n's gone soft!" he raised his bottle, its last drops glinting. One-Eyed Jack snorted, "He's still Hook," his grin widened, his grizzled face creasing with a rare mirth. Black Tom's silence steadied, his harpoon a quiet pillar. Billy piped up, "She's worth more'n gold," his voice lifted.

The deck warmed with their voices, a weave of rough cheer. Their bond a shield against the emptiness below. The ship's creak rose, a heartbeat beneath their feet. The flash's echo faded, their spirit rising. The harbor glimmered beyond, its silvered surface reflecting the dawn of their resolve.

The night unfurled like a taut sail stretched to its limits, the vast darkness above pierced by stars that glittered with a cold, unrelenting sharpness against a sky still wrestling with the last tatters of thinning clouds. Their silver light spilled across the ship's deck, casting long, jagged shadows that flickered and danced with the faint, wavering glow of a lone lantern Smee had left burning beside his barrel, its flame a fragile ember against the creeping chill. The harbor's gentle lapping a quiet undercurrent beneath the crew's voices as they settled into a low, weary hum, a rough-edged chorus winding down from the day's tumult, their words slurring with rum and exhaustion.

Quarterdeck

Killian's silhouette held steady at the helm, a dark anchor against the shifting night. His black leather coat swayed with the breeze rising off the silvered water, its damp edges glistening faintly as starlight caught the scars crisscrossing his hand. His hook tapped the wheel in a steady, deliberate rhythm, a metallic heartbeat echoing through the stillness, its gleam flashing with each measured strike, grounding the ship and her crew in the wake of their loss. His blue eyes burned with fierce, unyielding resolve, cutting through the crisp air like a blade through fog, undimmed by the centuries of storms he'd weathered.

“We’ll rebuild, hunt what took it,” he declared, his voice ringing out with the tempered steel of a man who’d faced the abyss and emerged unbowed, his words carried the weight of the blinding flash that had seared their eyes hours before, the eerie glow that had cloaked the Jolly Roger in its wake, and the empty hold that now mocked their hard-earned legend as pirates of renown.

Desylva stood as his equal, her gray eyes gleaming with the untamed edge of a gathering storm, she nodded sharply, her voice low and fierce, a growl beneath the wind, “Old or not, it’ll bleed,” her storm magic crackled faintly, a ripple of raw energy snapping through the air as her cursed mark pulsed beneath the damp cloak clinging to her small, wiry frame. Her fingers brushed the wheel’s grain, tracing it with an instinct as sure as the tides, “It’s not far,” she murmured, her words a quiet vow threading through the night’s tension.

Main Deck

Smee hoisted an empty rum bottle with a shaky cheer, “To the chase!” his stout frame straightened briefly; One-Eyed Jack growled low, his grizzled face alight with a savage gleam, “Blast it dead!” his cutlass tapped his thigh in a restless rhythm, a promise of violence etched in every line of his stance; Black Tom raised his harpoon, its polished steel catching the lantern’s glow in a silent, unwavering oath; Billy’s voice rang out clear and bright, “To love and gold!” hope weaving through their rough, guttural song as his freckled hands gripped the ropes. Their boots shifted on the salt-crusted planks, their collective loss a spur that ignited a fire in their blood, a shared hunger driving them forward.

Quarterdeck

Killian’s arm slid around Desylva’s shoulders, a gesture both possessive and tender, his hand resting lightly against her cloak as he pulled her closer, “You’re my hoard, lass,” he murmured, his voice dropping to a low rumble that vibrated against the night’s chill, a warmth threading through his usual pirate’s growl. Her laugh broke sharp and bright, cutting through the stillness like a shard of lightning, “And you’re mine,” her gray eyes danced with a spark that mirrored the stars overhead, a wild glint that spoke of battles fought and nights shared.

Their kiss lingered in the air, a fleeting press of lips that carried a quiet intensity, its warmth a defiant flame against the cold harbor breeze, fueling their shared resolve as it hung between them like a promise.

The Jolly Roger stirred beneath their feet, sails rustling faintly as if the ship herself sensed the hunt looming on the horizon. The stars sharpened their glow, their cold light filtering through the dissipating clouds to bathe the deck in a silver sheen that turned the frost-kissed planks into a shimmering stage.

Main Deck

Smee let out a cavernous yawn, his stout frame slumping back against the barrel with a groan, “Need a kip ‘fore we chase,” he mumbled, his voice thick with the haze of rum and bone-deep weariness, his lantern flickered weakly, its glow a dying ember casting faint, trembling shadows across his sprawled form.

One-Eyed Jack stretched his broad shoulders with a grunt, his grizzled face creasing as he cracked his knuckles with a series of sharp pops, “Aye, rest, then fight,” he rasped, his eye glinting with a predator’s hunger beneath the heavy brow, his cutlass leaned against the railing, its hilt worn smooth from countless battles, a silent testament to the bloodshed that fueled his restless spirit.

Black Tom moved with quiet precision across the deck, checking the rigging with methodical care, his scarred hands glided over the ropes, testing their strength against the night’s bite, his dark eyes flicking seaward to the harbor’s shimmering expanse, a sentinel standing watch over the ship.

Billy coiled ropes near the mast, his wiry frame buzzing with a restless energy that belied the late hour, “She’ll sail true,” he said softly, his voice steady with faith in their vessel, his freckled hands worked deftly, his hum threading through the night like a fragile melody amid the crew’s rugged chorus.

Their bodies settled, heavy with the weight of the pub’s revelry and the night’s sudden shock, a crew bound by loss and the promise of retribution.

Quarterdeck

The deck grew still as the crew's weariness took hold, the hum of their voices fading into the harbor's gentle rhythm. Killian leaned against the wheel, his black coat falling open to the breeze, its damp leather catching the starlight in faint, glistening patches that traced the scars on his chest and hand.

Desylva adjusted her cloak over her shoulders with a practiced flick, its stitches glinting faintly as they caught the silver glow. Her gray eyes traced the horizon where the harbor's silvered water met the shadowed shore, a distant line that seemed to pulse with secrets.

"What's it want?" she mused, her voice a low murmur that blended seamlessly with the lapping waves below, her storm magic stirred, a faint gust tugging at her dark hair, sending strands fluttering like ink against the night's canvas, a restless energy simmering beneath her calm. Killian shrugged, his hook tapping the wheel with a casual, almost playful rhythm, "Dunno, yet," he replied, his blue eyes narrowing with a pirate's cunning, a glint of mischief dancing beneath the surface, "We'll ask when we gut it," his tone carried the swagger of a man who'd danced with danger too long to fear it. Her nod was sharp and decisive, "Fair enough." Their gazes locked, gray meeting blue in a quiet accord, a storm and sea united.

The ship rocked gently beneath them as the crew's resolve solidified into something tangible, the harbor's calm surface a deceptive mirror reflecting the stars, a quiet promise of the pursuit that awaited them.

Main Deck

Smee's snores rolled like distant thunder, a steady burr cutting through the stillness as he twitched in his sleep, sprawled beside a crate. "Thieves nabbed the loot, not the ticker," he mumbled, his stout frame jerking as if dodging a dream-punch, his words slurring into the morning hush, his lantern had snuffed out entirely, its glass cool against the deck, a silent witness to his drift into sleep.

One-Eyed Jack sat nearby, his grizzled face set in a scowl that deepened the lines around his mouth. His hands steady despite the cold, flicking his blade to shave a splinter from the crate's edge with a soft scrape. "They'll bleed for it," he growled under his breath, a low, gravelly vow that hung in the air like smoke. His eye glinted with anticipation. His cutlass rested across his knees, its blade catching the light with a dull sheen.

Black Tom loomed silent near the rail, facing the sea. His harpoon propped beside him like a loyal shadow. His dark eyes traced the water's silvered edge, his scarred hands steady as stone. His presence as unyielding as the oak beneath their feet.

Billy's hum lifted into the stillness, "We're tougher'n this," defiance ringing clear. His freckled hands finished the ropes, his wiry frame straightening as he cast a glance at the sails, their expanse taut with potential. He slumped against the mast as exhaustion finally dragged him under, his wiry frame limp among the coiled ropes.

The crew lay scattered across the deck, their breaths fogging in the crisp air. Their rest a fleeting pause before the storm to come.

Later – Quarterdeck (almost dawn)

Killian's hand brushed Desylva's, his fingers grazing her skin with a warmth that cut through the sharp, biting chill. "Never reckoned I'd stumble into somethin' like this," he murmured, his voice a quiet rumble, stripped of its usual pirate's bravado, just a man for a fleeting breath, his blue eyes catching the fading starlight before it melted into the dawn's embrace. His black coat swayed with the gentle roll of the ship, the damp leather creaking softly, a faint echo of battles past.

Desylva's gray eyes flicked to him, keen and piercing, sizing him up before she answered, "Me neither. Don't go muckin' it up now," her tone was dry as old rope, but a thread of warmth softened its bite, sneaking through like sunlight through a crack. Her hand gave his a quick, firm squeeze, her storm magic humming beneath her skin, a subtle crackle syncing with the steady thump of her pulse. Her cloak shifted as she leaned closer, the stitches glinting faintly in hues of green and gray, catching the dawn's timid glow.

Killian's grin flickered, a spark of mischief lighting his eyes as he shook off the rare softness. "Ruin it? Not a chance, lass," he said, his voice regaining its roguish edge, his hook tapping her arm with a playful nudge that rang faintly against the quiet. Desylva's laugh spilled out, low and rich like dark rum, "Damn right," she shot back, her gray eyes dancing with a warmth that tamed her storm into something softer, almost tender.

Their shoulders brushed, a quiet closeness forged through blood and starlit nights, the ship steadying beneath them, hull thrumming like a shared heartbeat.

Main Deck (Dawn)

The horizon softened as dawn's first whispers crept closer, a pale gray seeping into the sky like ink bleeding through damp parchment, chasing the last vestiges of night. The stars began to fade one by one, the air sharpened, the chill sinking deeper into the planks until it prickled the skin and fogged their breaths.

The dawn wove a slender thread of gold through the gray, a fragile seam stitching the horizon as the harbor's silvered waters glimmered faintly ahead.

Smee stirred with a groan, rolling over with a creak of joints, his stout frame shifting as he squinted into the light. "We up yet?" he rasped, voice thick with sleep, groping blindly for his hat. One-Eyed Jack rose from the crate, stretching his wiry frame with a grunt, "Aye, mate," he rumbled, his grizzled face hardening with resolve as he sheathed his cutlass with a metallic rasp that sliced through the stillness.

Black Tom stood wordlessly, hoisting his harpoon in one fluid motion, his dark eyes sweeping the deck, scarred hands steady, he took in the waking ship like a sentinel roused. Billy yawned wide, stretching his lean arms overhead, "Mornin', ya bastards," he mumbled, brushing his freckled hands over the ropes he'd coiled, a sleepy grin tugging at his lips.

Quarterdeck

Killian straightened, his black coat snapping in the freshening breeze as he turned to the crew, "Ready, lads?" His voice cracked through the dawn's hush like a whip, clear and commanding, his blue eyes blazing with a fire that rivaled the rising sun. Desylva pivoted beside him, "Aye," she echoed, her storm waking fully, a faint gust tugged at her cloak as her gray eyes sharpened, locking into a rhythm with his as steady as the tide.

Killian's hook tapped the wheel with a final, sharp ping, the sound cutting through the dawn's hush like a call to arms. "Anchor up! Sails out!" he commanded, his voice crackling with authority, sparking the air like flint on steel, igniting the crew into swift action.

Main Deck

One-Eyed Jack bellowed, "Aye, Cap'n!" his roar echoing as he moved to secure the cannons, his grizzled hands deftly tightening ropes. Black Tom led at the capstan, his muscles straining as he and the crew hauled the anchor, the chain clanking into the locker with a resonant thud, the capstan's runes glowing faintly, stirring the hull's enchanted frame.

Billy, nimble as a sprite, scrambled up the rigging to the mainmast, joined by Smee, whose nervous fingers unfurled the sails, their enchanted canvas snapping taut, runes shimmering as they caught the rising breeze. The ship's bell rang out with Smee's eager chime, signaling readiness.

As the anchor broke free, the crew's shout of "Anchor aweigh!" surged through the air, the sails billowing as the Jolly Roger glided forward. Killian steadied the helm with his hook, his blue eyes lifting to the crow's nest, where Billy signaled clear waters, the ship's enchanted oak hull slicing smoothly through the harbor's silvered waves.

The Jolly Roger shuddered to life beneath them, sails catching the breeze as the deck hummed with purpose. Smee raised a shaky bottle, his cheer wobbly but earnest, "For us, damn it!" his salute sloshing rum onto his boots. One-Eyed Jack's roar shook the planks, "For her, ye scurvy dogs!" his bellow a war cry that rattled the rigging.

Black Tom dipped his head, a rare flicker of agreement in his shadowed gaze, his harpoon steady as stone. Billy's voice soared, "To the sea, lads!" his tune bursting forth bright and bold, shaking off the night's weight as he scrambled to his post.

The crew surged to their feet, boots thudding against the deck in a chaotic rhythm, their weariness drowned by a hunger stoked by loss, a fire in their blood that lifted them like a gale swelling the sails.

Quarterdeck

Desylva's hand grazed Killian's again, her touch firm and sure, "It's out there waitin'," she said, her voice steady as tempered steel, cutting through the dawn's promise. His grin flashed, all teeth and reckless defiance, "Then we'll gut the bastard," he replied, his blue eyes locking with hers, a storm and sea in fierce harmony.

Beyond the harbor, the sea stretched vast and untamed, calling them forth. Their tale rose with the breaking light, a crew bound tight. The horizon blazed gold, a treasure they'd kept, a hunt they'd claim. The Jolly Roger sailed on, their hearts alight with unyielding purpose.

Later that night (Below Deck)

Killian and Desylva descended below deck. The air thickened with the briny scent of salt-soaked wood and the faint musk of lantern oil, the ship's hull groaning softly with each gentle sway against the dock. Their laughter spilled ahead of them like a cascade of bright coins, a defiant melody cutting through the stillness.

Killian's arm draped loosely around her shoulders, his black leather coat brushing against her cloak as he pulled her close, his scarred fingers tracing the edge of her arm. Desylva leaned into him, her gray eyes sparkling with a mischief that danced like storm-light on water, her storm magic humming faintly in the air, a subtle crackle that warmed the damp chill. Her leather cloak rustled with each step, its damp hem trailing faint droplets across the worn planks. Lanterns hung along the passage, their amber glow flickering over the rough-hewn walls, casting their shadows in a playful tangle as they neared their cabin door.

Killian paused, his blue eyes glinting with a roguish warmth as he bent to kiss her. His lips pressed against hers, slow and sure, a lingering heat that carried the taste of rum and sea salt. His hook rested lightly against the doorframe, its curve catching the light as he turned the latch with a soft click.

Killian & Desylva's Cabin

They stepped inside, their laughter softening into a shared grin as the door swung shut behind them, the cabin's familiar confines wrapping around them like an old coat, but the air shifted abruptly, a prickle of unease brushing their senses like a cold wind through the rigging. They weren't alone.

Killian's hand dropped instinctively to his cutlass, his fingers tightening on the hilt with a predator's grip. Desylva's hand slid to her dagger, her gray eyes narrowing as she scanned the shadows, her stance coiling like a spring, ready to strike.

A shimmer of blue light bloomed in the dim corner of the cabin, coalescing into the delicate form of the Blue Fairy, her wings glowed with a soft, ethereal luminescence, casting a sapphire sheen across the cramped space, her serene face framed by a cascade of dark hair that shimmered like spun midnight. Her presence filled the room with a quiet hum, a contrast to the rough-hewn reality of the pirate's lair.

Killian muttered under his breath, "Fairies, bloody hell," his grip on the cutlass tightened, his blue eyes flashing with suspicion as he shifted his weight, poised to draw. Desylva's dagger gleamed in her hand, its blade catching the fairy's glow, her storm magic flaring faintly as her cursed mark pulsed beneath her sleeve.

Before he could unsheathe his weapon, the fairy's voice broke through, soft yet edged with an urgent weight, "Peace. I mean no harm. I come with a warning," her eyes, deep and luminous, held a quiet plea as they met theirs, "Do not pursue what was stolen. The one behind it is not a foe you should cross."

Killian's hand eased off his cutlass, though his smirk lingered, a defiant curl tugging at his lips, "Nothing we can't face, fairy, no danger we can't gut and leave bleedin'," he drawled, his voice thick with the swagger of a man who'd danced with death too long to flinch.

Desylva lowered her dagger slightly, her gray eyes narrowing as she studied the fairy, "Who's this 'one' you're so spooked about?" her tone was sharp, cutting through the cabin's stillness, her storm magic crackling like static, her cloak shifted as she stepped closer, the stitches glinting faintly in the blue light.

The Blue Fairy's wings fluttered, a faint shimmer of dust trailing in their wake, "Forces greater than you can fathom are stirring. Older than your ship. Deeper than your seas," she said, her voice steady but tinged with a tremor of fear, "Killian. You've a destiny woven into this world. Threads you can't yet see. Chasing this theft risks unraveling them."

Killian tilted his head, his blue eyes glinting with a mix of curiosity and defiance, "Destiny, eh? Sounds like a fancy word for trouble. I've faced plenty o' that and come out grinning," he replied. Desylva crossed her arms, her gray eyes piercing, "What's it to you, fairy? Why skulk down here with warnings instead o' pixie dust and wishes?" her voice carried a challenge, her storm magic stirring the air, tugging at the lantern's flame.

The Blue Fairy's gaze softened, a flicker of sadness crossing her serene features, "I shouldn't be here. I risk much to tell you this. … You are being watched. Both of you. … Your raids, your relics, your defiance. …They've drawn eyes darker than you know. Plans are in motion. Sinister and vast. … This theft is but a single thread in their web."

Killian leaned forward, his smirk fading into a hard line, "Watched by who? … Give us names, fairy, somethin' we can stick a blade in," his voice dropped, a growl threading through. Desylva's hand brushed his arm, her touch grounding, "Aye, spill it, fairy, who's pullin' these strings?" her gray eyes blazed, her storm magic pulsing stronger, a faint gust rattling the window.

The Blue Fairy didn't answer immediately. Her wings went still. Completely still. The blue glow surrounding her dimmed for the briefest moment. Her gaze shifted toward the cabin window. Not looking through it. Looking beyond it. Beyond the harbor. Beyond the sea. As though something unimaginably distant might somehow be watching even now. For a heartbeat, fear crossed her face. Genuine fear. Then it vanished behind centuries of practiced composure. When she looked back at them, her voice had grown quieter. "There are powers in motion that even I do not speak of lightly." The fear vanished, but the tension remained in her wings as she continued. "I cannot say more. I've overstepped already. The balance is fragile, and I'm but a whisper in it," she murmured, her voice softening to a near-whisper. "You've heard of me. I see it in your eyes. I am the Blue Fairy, keeper of light and hope, but even I can't shield you from what's coming if you chase this shadow."

Killian's brows lifted, recognition sparking, "The Blue Fairy. … Heard tales o' you in every port from here to Neverland. … Never thought I'd meet the myth in my own cabin," he said, his tone wry but edged with intrigue. Desylva nodded slowly, "Veyra's prisoners whispered your name. Meddler in fates, they called you. Why us, then? Why now?" her voice was steady, her storm magic settling as she processed the weight of the name.

The Blue Fairy's eyes flickered to the floor. "Because your paths twist where others break. … You've caught their notice, and not for gold or glory. … Something bigger brews. … Please, let this theft go, turn your sails elsewhere."

Killian paced a step, his boots thudding softly, "Bigger, eh? … I've gutted krakens and laughed at curses. … What's a few dark eyes to us?" his blue eyes glinted with defiance. Desylva's gaze hardened, "You're shakin', fairy. Spit it out. What's this 'something'?"

Before their questions could pin her down, the Blue Fairy's form wavered, her light dimming, "I've said too much. Beware," her voice faded, and with a final shimmer, she vanished, leaving only the echo of her warning hanging in the air.

The lantern's glow steadied, casting the cabin back into its amber warmth.

Killian exhaled sharply, running a hand through his dark, tousled hair. "The Blue Fairy. Bloody hell. Didn't see that comin' in a hundred years," he said, his voice a mix of amusement and unease as he leaned against the wall.

Desylva sheathed her dagger with a soft rasp, “Heard she’s tangled fates before. Never straight with it, though. Sneaky as a siren,” she muttered, her gray eyes flicking to the spot where the fairy had stood. Her storm magic settled into a low hum, “So, what now? Heed her cryptic babble?” her tone probed, a challenge beneath her calm.

Killian’s hook tapped his chin thoughtfully, “She’s spooked proper. Big forces. Destinies. Watchin’ eyes. Sounds like a fight worth pickin’ to me,” he said, his blue eyes glinting with a spark of mischief.

Desylva stepped closer, her cloak brushing his coat, “It’s just stuff. Gold, trinkets. Plenty more out there to snatch. We could start fresh. Leave this shadow be,” she offered, her voice softening as her arms slid around his waist. Her gray eyes searched his blue, a rare gentleness breaking through her storm-touched edge.

Killian paused, his gaze softening as her words sank in. His arms wrapped around her, pulling her close, “Aye, for now,” he murmured, a smile tugging at his lips as he traced her cheek with his hand. Her gray eyes sparkled, “Good,” she grinned, a flash of teeth against the lantern’s glow. He kissed her again, deeper this time, a slow burn that carried the weight of their time together, a promise woven into the press of his lips against hers.

They stumbled backward, laughter bubbling up as they moved toward the bed, their bodies already reaching for the comfort they’d forged together.

His black coat slipped to the floor with a soft thud, the leather crumpling in a heap. His hook caught the edge of her cloak, tugging it free with a playful yank, the fabric pooling beside his coat. Their boots hit the planks one by one, a scattered rhythm echoing in the cabin’s hush. Killian kicked his off with a rough jerk, Desylva twisted hers free. Her gray eyes never leaving his.

Her hands fumbled with the laces of his shirt, yanking it open to reveal the scarred expanse of his chest, her fingers tracing the jagged lines of battles won and lost before tossing the linen aside. His hand slid beneath her tunic, peeling it over her head, the fabric catching briefly on her dark hair before falling, baring her shoulders and the cursed mark pulsing faintly blue on her arm. She unbuckled his belt with a sharp clink, shoving his trousers down, her nails grazing his hips as she freed him, his arousal evident in the lantern’s amber glow. He tugged her trousers off, fingers deft despite the urgency, kicking them aside with a rustle, leaving her bare, her skin flushed and glowing, storm magic crackling faintly in the air.

Their laughter softened into breathless gasps as they stood naked, bodies pressed close, the cabin’s air thick with salt, sweat, and the electric hum of her power. The ship swayed gently beneath them. A distant squall rumbled beyond the window, its wind whistling through the rigging like a siren’s call.

They fell onto the bed, linens tangling as their lips crashed together, a hungry edge to the kiss, his breath hot against her skin as he growled, “Worth more than any hoard,” his voice a low rumble vibrating against her throat. Her laugh was rich and throaty, “Aye, don’t lose it,” her nails grazing his back, pulling him closer, her storm magic flaring, a warm gust ruffling the sheets, the air sparking with her energy.

His hook rested against her hip, its cool curve a stark contrast to her heat, guiding her as he pressed himself closer, their bodies molding together. Her gray eyes locked with his blue, a storm meeting the sea in a collision of need and trust. His hand roamed her curves, fingers tracing the dip of her waist, the swell of her breasts, coaxing a sharp gasp as he teased her nipples. Her back arched into his touch. She hooked a leg over his hip, her thighs parting, urging him nearer. Her fingers digging into his shoulders. The ship rocked with a sudden swell, timbers groaning in sync with their rising urgency. Rain beginning to patter against the window, a staccato beat mirroring their quickening breaths.

His lips trailed down her neck, nipping at her pulse, tasting the salt of her skin. She moaned, low and jagged, her storm magic surging. The lantern swayed wildly, casting their shadows in a frenzied dance across the walls. He positioned himself above her, muscles taut under scarred skin. His hook braced beside her head, its metallic gleam catching the light like a predator’s eye.

Her hands gripped his hips, guiding him. Her breath hitching as he entered her with a slow, deliberate thrust that stretched and filled her, her warmth enveloping him in a searing tide. His growl was primal, a guttural sound that echoed off the cabin’s beams. Her moan rising in answer, sharp and electric. The air crackling with tiny arcs of her magic, singeing the sheets as their bodies joined.

The ship lurched with a fierce wave, hull shuddering as if caught in their storm. Rain lashing the window, the wind's howl weaving into their rhythm. Her thighs clamped around him, hips rocking to meet his. Each thrust deep and unrelenting. Her nails raking his back, leaving red trails that burned with their shared fire.

Their movements grew frantic, a relentless tide of need and trust. His thrusts quickened. Each one a claim staked in her heat. Her body arching to match him, breasts pressing against his chest. Her gasps mingling with his grunts. Her storm magic pulsed wilder, sparks dancing in the air. The bed's oak groaning as if alive, its runes flickering faintly under their fervor.

His hand cupped her face, thumb brushing her parted lips. His blue eyes burning into hers, "Mine," he rasped, voice rough with possession. "Yours," she gasped, her gray eyes blazing. Her body trembling on the edge. The cabin shaking with a thunderclap outside. The ship tilting as waves smashed the hull. His rhythm drove harder, deeper. Her moans escalating, jagged and raw. Her fingers clutching his hair, pulling him into a bruising kiss, tongues clashing. Their bodies surged together. The lantern's flame flaring as if fueled by their passion.

Her release hit like a tempest. Her body tensing, then shattering beneath him. A cry erupting, thunderous and raw, tearing through the cabin's hush. Her nails digging into his shoulders as she convulsed. Her storm magic flaring in a cascade of sparks that singed the air. Her warmth clenched around him, a pulsing tide that unraveled his control.

His release followed in a primal roar. His body shuddering as he poured into her. Every nerve ablaze with fierce love. His body collapsing into hers as their shared storm broke. The ship rocking, waves crashing against the hull, rain hammering the deck above. The cabin's air heavy with ozone, sweat, and their mingled scents.

Their bodies trembled together, aftershocks rippling through them. Her legs still wrapped around him, his face buried in her neck. Their breaths ragged, syncing with the ship's slowing sway. The squall outside began to ease, the rain softening to a gentle drizzle.

They lay tangled in the linens, the bed creaking one last time as they shifted. He pulled her close, her head nestling against his chest, her dark hair fanning across his scarred skin like spilled ink. His hook traced idle patterns on her hip, a tender contrast to its earlier fire, his blue eyes softening as he watched her, the lantern's steady glow bathing them in amber warmth. Her storm magic simmered to a low hum. Her cursed mark pulsing faintly. Her fingers resting over his heart, feeling its steady thump, a rhythm that anchored them both.

The Roger rocked gently now, timbers settling. The drizzle outside a soft whisper against the window, the ship cradling them like a lover's embrace. "Still worth more than any hoard," he murmured, his voice a quiet rumble, lips brushing her forehead. She smiled, eyes half-closed, "So are you," her voice soft, a warmth threading through her storm's edge, her body curling tighter against his, their shared heat a shield against the night's chill.

The cabin held them, a sanctuary of fire and trust, as the sea whispered beyond. The Blue Fairy's warning lingered in the air, a shadow they'd face come dawn, but for now, the night wrapped them in its embrace as they surrendered to each other fully. Their tale paused, held in the quiet heat of their closeness, a moment of peace.

The Starlit Expanse: The Veil of Ether (Day 35)

The Jolly Roger carved through the twilight chill, sails taut against a gentle wind. Lanterns swayed in the rigging, their warm flickers pooling across the deck and stretching the crew's shadows long and jagged over the wood. Weariness lined their faces, etched by countless quests, yet their eyes still glinted with restless hunger — the ember of their piratical spirit flaring anew at the promise of something extraordinary.

Quarterdeck (Twilight)

Killian stood at the helm, his hand on the wheel, his black leather coat swaying with the ship's gentle rock, his hook catching the lantern glow as he traced its curve along the wheel's grain, his voice cutting through the quiet with a low, commanding rumble, "Heard any tales in the last port, lads? Somethin' worth chasin?'" the words hung like a challenge, stirring the air as the crew leaned in, their breaths fogging faintly.

Main Deck

Smee broke the expectant hush, bustling forward with the eagerness of a man who lived for a good yarn. His hands gesturing wildly as he launched into the legend, his rum-roughened voice rising with excitement, his round face flushed beneath a scruff of graying beard. “They say that in the Starlit Expanse there’s the Veil of Ether. Woven from starlight and mist. Shimmers like a ghost. Cloaks ye unseen. Slips past magic and eyes alike. Guarded by spirits o’ the sky. … Been whispers ‘bout it in every tavern from here to the cursed coasts!”

One-Eyed Jack puffed on his pipe, sending a curl of smoke spiraling upward to mingle with the starry haze, his gravelly snort cutting through Smee’s tale, “Sounds like a trick. Prob’ly cursed, mark me. Seen too many baubles turn sour.” His eye glinted with skepticism, his hands pausing as he polished a cannon barrel with a rag, his grizzled features set in a scowl that belied the flicker of intrigue beneath.

Black Tom loomed near the railing, his scarred face half-shadowed, his harpoon tapping the deck in a slow, deliberate rhythm, a mute nod of agreement to One-Eyed Jack’s caution, his presence a steady anchor amid the crew’s chatter. Billy leaned forward from his perch on a coil of rope, his voice cracking with enthusiasm, “Invisibility’s a pirate’s dream, aye? Could sneak past any fleet, or worse!” His wide eyes darted between his mates, his hands itching for action

Quarterdeck

Desylva stood at Killian’s side, her leather cloak rustling faintly, her gray eyes catching the starlight like storm clouds lit by lightning, her cursed mark pulsing a faint blue beneath her sleeve, her voice slicing through the debate with a steely calm, “If it’s real, it’s a shield, could hide us from anything, even them.” Her words carried the weight of experience, her gaze flicking to Killian with a spark that stirred his blood, her storm a constant beside his sea, her wildness a force he’d come to crave.

Killian tilted his head, his hook tapping the wheel’s grain with a rhythmic clink, his mind racing. A shroud to vanish from their relentless foes, those shadowy figures whose curses had hounded their sails across realms, was a prize that could shift their endless game.

Smee chuckled, nudging Billy, “She’s gotta point, Cap’n!” The crew’s murmurs swelled, their captain’s silence a signal they knew well.

Killian’s blue eyes locked with Desylva’s gray ones, a flicker of something deeper… trust, fire, a bond forged over time… passing between them before his grin flashed, roguish and bold, “Aye, then we’re settin’ course. Veil of Ether’s ours, lads. Full sail to the Expanse!” his voice rang out, a pirate’s call to glory.

The crew erupted in a roar of approval, their weariness cast aside, their captain’s decision a spark igniting the twilight. Killian’s resolve hardened like steel as the Jolly Roger surged forward, its prow cutting through the starlit waves with a purpose that thrummed through its frame.

Arrival (Night - A few hours later)

The Starlit Expanse unfolded before them, its waters a liquid mirror to the heavens, the sea gleaming with a thousand pinpricks of starlight, each ripple catching the glow of constellations that pulsed overhead in a celestial dance of silver, indigo, and violet, their light weaving a canopy that seemed to hum with ancient power.

The horizon stretched unbroken, a seamless blend of water and sky where no land dared intrude, only the faint shimmer of ethereal currents hinting at the mysteries below. The air hung crisp and cool, laced with a sweet, otherworldly tang that tickled the throat and sharpened the senses.

Main Deck

Smee, his voice a nervous trill over the wind, “Hope them spirits don’t spot us, or we’re in for it!” as he steadied himself, his face a mask of anxious glee. One-Eyed Jack abandoned his pipe to load a cannon, his growl a low rumble, “Let ‘em try stoppin’ us, I’ll blast ‘em to stardust,” his hands moved with practiced ease, the cannon’s barrel glinting as he braced for trouble, his skepticism giving way to the thrill of the hunt.

Black Tom sharpened his harpoon in silence near the railing, the rhythmic scrape of steel on stone a quiet promise of readiness, his dark eyes scanning the horizon. Billy scrambled up the rigging, nimble as a cat, his voice echoing down with a thrill, “Stars’re dancin’, Cap’n, never seen ‘em so bright!” his silhouette framed against the constellations.

Quarterdeck

Killian’s blue eyes traced the celestial patterns, his heart a tempest of vengeance and something softer, stirred by Desylva’s steady presence at his side. Her storm-touched magic pulsed in rhythm with the Expanse’s ethereal hum, her dark hair whipping in the breeze, her dagger twirling absently in her hand. Their fates bound tighter than any rope, her wildness a shroud that both shielded and captivated him, her gray eyes a storm he’d sail into without a second thought.

He leaned closer, his voice dropping to a murmur meant for her alone, “A veil’s a rare prize, lass, worth the risk of tanglin’ with spirits?” Her gray eyes locked with his, unflinching, a smirk tugging her lips, “With you? Aye. Let’s steal it from the ether and vanish from their games,” her voice was a challenge, her storm a vow that set his pulse racing.

Main Deck

Smee’s nervous laugh broke the moment, “They’re sparkin’ again, two years and still at it!” The crew’s chuckles rippled.

Killian’s hook tapped the wheel with a decisive clink, his grin widening, “To the stars, then, retrieve the Veil, and we’ll slip through their grasp like ghosts!” his command roared over the deck, “Into the Expanse, lads!!”

The Jolly Roger leapt forward, sails billowing.

A few hours later

The Jolly Roger sailed deeper into the Starlit Expanse, sails catching the radiant shimmer of a sea aglow with starlight, each wave reflecting the pulsing constellations overhead in a mesmerizing dance of silver currents that hinted at unfathomable depths. Above, the sky thrummed with a celestial rhythm, faint ghostly whispers vibrating through the air, weaving an ethereal spell over the ship.

The hull groaned softly as it sliced through the glowing waters, while lanterns swayed in a restless rhythm, casting erratic golden beams across the deck where the crew stood poised, senses sharp for the unknown. A chilling breeze swept through, biting at exposed skin with a sharp edge, laced with the same ethereal sweetness, now intensified, as if the Expanse itself stirred in response to their daring intrusion.

Quarterdeck

Killian stood at the starboard railing, his black leather coat snapping like a flag in the rising wind, his hook glinting with a cold menace as he braced against the railing, his piercing blue eyes narrowed on a faint shimmer ahead. Desylva flanked him, her cloak rustling with every gust, her gray eyes sharp and storm-lit, scanning the horizon with a predator’s focus, her dagger clutched tight in her hand, its blade catching the starlight in fleeting flashes. Her cursed mark pulsed faintly beneath her sleeve, a blue glow that flickered in time with the sea’s hum, her storm magic stirring as the air thickened with portent.

Main Deck

Smee clung to the rail muttering, his voice a nervous trill over the wind’s low howl, “Too quiet, don’t trust it one bit, feels like them spirits’re watchin’!” One-Eyed Jack, his grizzled face set in a scowl, growled from beside a cannon, his hands steady on the barrel, “Somethin’s brewin’, I can smell it.”

Black Tom loomed silently near the railing, his harpoon raised, its tip gleaming like a star of its own. Billy, perched halfway up the rigging, called down with a crack in his voice, “Light ahead, faint but growin’!”

Water

A shimmer rippled across the starlit waves, then the sea heaved upward. A platform of mist-wreathed stone breaching the surface directly in the Jolly Roger's path. Its edges glowed silver under the constellations, the Veil of Ether draped atop it, a gossamer shroud of woven starlight and mist, its folds rippling as if alive, glowing with a soft, elusive luminescence that promised secrets and shadows.

Quarterdeck

Killian's eyes widened. "Hold!" he barked, wrenching the wheel hard to starboard.

The Jolly Roger lurched, timbers groaning as she veered just shy of colliding with the rising stone. Lanterns swung wildly, rigging snapped taut, and the crew staggered as the ship fought the sudden shift.

Killian steadied the wheel, muscles taut. "Easy, girl… easy." He eased her into a slow drift, then braced the helm, letting the sails slacken.

The Jolly Roger settled in place on the glowing water without dropping anchor — as though the Expanse itself held her still.

Desylva's storm-mark pulsing. "Spirits wanted us to see it," she murmured, gray eyes locked on the Veil's shimmering folds.

Main Deck

The crew gathered at the rails, breath held, the ship now perfectly still as the platform awaited them.

Billy blinked down from the rigging. "Funny thing, innit?" Nobody answered immediately. His gaze remained fixed on the platform. "Whole sea out there." He pointed toward the endless horizon. "Yet this thing pops up right in front of us." One-Eyed Jack snorted. "Call it luck." Billy scratched his head. "Aye." His voice carried a trace of uncertainty. "Just seems like somebody knew exactly where we'd be."

The words drifted away on the starlit wind. Nobody answered.

Yet for a moment even Killian's grin faded. Then the platform pulsed again. The Veil waiting. The thought left behind.

Full Deck

The Jolly Roger held steady beside the mist-wreathed platform, her sails slack in the starlit air, the sea glowing beneath her hull like molten silver. Every lantern flickered in anticipation, their light bending toward the Veil as though the ship herself sensed the prize within reach.

Killian's grin flashed, roguish and fierce, his voice cutting through the crew's tension like a blade.
"There she is. Ours for the takin'. A prize to slip us past any foe." Desylva's head tilted, her storm coiling tighter, her gray eyes narrowing with battle-ready fire. "Not without a fight. Those spirits won't part with it easy," her words sharp as she met his gaze,

The air crackled with sudden static, the sea's hum rising to a keening pitch. The calm shattered.

A star wraith descended from the constellations above. A spectral weave of light and shadow, tendrils of mist curling from its edges, its eyes blazing like twin novas that seared the darkness with an unearthly brilliance. Its wail tore through the night, a piercing gust of despair that rattled the rigging and sent a shiver down every spine aboard.

Smee yelped, ducking behind a barrel, his voice a panicked squeak, "Blimey, ghosts o' the sky, just like the tales!"

Rumpelstiltskin's shadow curse struck without warning, a wave of darkness bleeding from the wraith's outstretched hands, swallowing the starlight in tendrils of ink. Killian's vision dimmed, his blue eyes clouding as he snarled,

“Bloody imp, meddlin’ again!” His cutlass flashed free, slashing blindly at the air, sparks scattering as steel met void-light.

The Veil brightened atop the platform. Its starlit folds rippled though no wind touched them. For a heartbeat the shadow curse faltered. The darkness recoiled from the Veil’s glow, thinning around its edges. Not broken. Not banished. But weakened. As though the relic itself refused to be found by hostile magic.

Desylva’s eyes flashed toward it. Killian’s grin sharpened despite the darkness clawing at his sight. They shared a look. His hook tightened around the rail. “Worth stealin’ already.”

Desylva’s thunder cracked. A jagged bolt splitting the night, its white-hot glare banishing the curse’s grip. Rain followed, a sudden deluge, hissing as it met the wraith’s starlight. The creature wailing in fury as its form flickered. She darted forward, boots slipping on the wet deck. “Cover me,” her voice a sharp command, “Keep it off!” Her dagger slashed upward, carving through the wraith’s misty flank, starlight bleeding in shimmering droplets that sizzled as they hit the sea. Killian’s grin widened, his hook slashing in tandem, their movements a seamless dance.

One-Eyed Jack roared, his cannon booming as a shot tore through the wraith’s form swooping from the sky, scattering its light. Black Tom’s harpoon sailed true, pinning a tendril to the mast with a thud, Billy waved a torch from the rigging, shouting, “Hit it again, Cap’n!”

Desylva’s lightning flared once more, a final strike that shattered the wraith into a burst of fading sparks, its wail dying on the wind. Her chest heaved as she steadied herself, her gray eyes meeting Killian’s with a fierce grin, “One down,” she panted, “spirits don’t scare easy.” Killian’s blue eyes sparked with pride and something softer, “Aye, lass, keep ‘em comin’, we’re not done yet!”

The platform shimmered brighter, its mist coiling as if alive, more threats stirring beneath the sea’s silver skin, the crew’s shouts rising as the starlight pulsed with menace. The water erupted in a violent churn.

A lunar serpent surging from the depths. Is scales gleamed silver under the starlight, each one catching the glow like a polished mirror. Its eyes twin moons that burned with a cold, unyielding light. Its hiss slithered through the air, a sound laced with Regina’s trance curse, a hypnotic pull that tugged at the edges of their minds.

Desylva swayed, gray eyes glazing as her cursed mark pulsed erratically, visions of chains and a tower flashing behind her lids. Her dagger slipped from her grip, clattering to the deck as she clutched her head. Killian’s hand shot out, gripping her arm with a strength that belied the blood streaking his sleeve from the wraith’s earlier strike, his voice a low growl, “Don’t let it in!” His hook slashed at the serpent’s neck lunging from the sea, the steel tip sinking into its scales with a wet crunch.

Her gusts roared to life, a sudden blast of wind that shattered the curse’s hold, her eyes snapping clear. Thunder followed, a deafening crack that stunned the serpent mid-lunge.

Killian dodged its snapping jaws, a fang grazed his side, blood blooming dark against the leather. He cursed, “Bloody beast!” Desylva’s dagger flashed back into her hand, her slash carving a line across its flank. Lightning split the sky. Her strike driving the serpent back into the sea with a splash that sent silver waves crashing over the deck.

Smee wailed, “Another one, spirits ain’t quittin’!” One-Eyed Jack’s cannon roared again, the shot grazing the serpent’s tail as it thrashed beyond the hull. Black Tom speared its retreating form, ichor staining the water. Billy clung to the rigging.

Desylva’s rain surged, washing the deck clean as she steadied herself against Killian. His arm lingered, steadying her, his voice softening, “With me.” Her gray eyes blazed, breath ragged, “Always.”

Their storm danced in unison, starlight pulsing around the platform as the sea growled with renewed fury, the Veil’s glow a beacon through the chaos.

The air thickened as a constellation beast took shape. Its form coalescing from the stars above. A wolf wrought of shimmering light; Its fur a cascade of twinkling points, its claws glinting like blades of pure radiance. Its snarl unleashed Rumpelstiltskin’s vertigo curse, a dizzying whirl that sent the deck tilting beneath their feet.

Killian spun, his boots slipping on the wet planks, his curse sharp, “Bloody stars, playin’ tricks now!” he stumbled, his hook scraping the railing as he fought to stay upright.

Desylva’s gusts roared forth, a fierce wind that pinned the wolf’s claws to the air as it lunged from the sky. Thunder cracking overhead to shatter the curse’s grip. Her voice cut through, steady and fierce, “Get up. Shake it off!” She darted forward. Rain lashing the beast as she pulled Killian to his feet. Her touch a lifeline. His blue eyes cleared. His cutlass slashing upward to meet her dagger’s arc.

Their blades carved twin arcs of silver through the wolf’s star-forged hide. The creature roared as starlight spilled from its wounds in burning rivulets, each drop hissing against the air like dying suns.

Smee tripped over a coil of rope, tumbling with a yelp, “Help, someone grab me!” Killian hauled him up with a grunt, his hook steadying the man as Billy shouted from above, “Sails holdin’!” One-Eyed Jack bellowed, “Hold her steady, lads!” his cannon fired, the shot scattering the wolf’s flank as it swooped near the ship; Black Tom’s harpoon sank into its starry hide, pinning it long enough for Desylva’s lightning to strike, a blinding flash that burst the wolf into a shower of fading sparks, its snarl fading into the wind.

Desylva’s storm surged around her, her cloak dripping as she caught her breath, her gray eyes meeting Killian’s with a wild grin, “Keep up, Cap, I’m not draggin’ you!” His laugh was rough, his hand brushing her arm, “Aye, lass, wouldn’t dream of slowin’ you.”

The platform trembled as though rebelling, the Veil’s mist tightening around it while the sea’s hum rose to a fevered pitch, peril gathering like a storm about to break. Its mist-wreathed stone shuddered as Regina’s blaze curse ignited. Starlight-flames erupted from the water, licking the hull with heat that seared the air. The rigging’s runes flared in sharp pulses, shielding the ropes from smoldering.

Killian’s voice roared over the chaos, “There, Veil’s close!” his blue eyes locked on the prize. Desylva nodded, her storm coiling, “Let’s end it!”

A nova sprite flared into being, its form a blinding orb of light that pulsed with a radiant fury, its touch burning as it darted toward them. Desylva’s arm seared as it grazed her, a cry escaping her lips as her cursed mark flared blue, her dagger slashing wildly. Killian’s hook sank into its core, his snarl fierce. Desylva’s rain surged, a torrent that doused the flames licking the deck, her thunder following to dim the sprite’s glow.

Killian lunged to the starboard main-deck rail, boots skidding on the slick planks as the sea’s glow surged beneath him. He leaned out over rail, hook flashing in the silver light. “Come here, beauty,” he growled. His hook snagged the Veil’s starlit folds with a precise, practiced sweep. The gossamer fabric slid into his grasp, cool and weightless, its mist coiling around his arm like a living thing. A pulse of ethereal power tingled against his skin, dancing up his wrist and into his chest. The Veil’s luminescence flared, reflecting in his blue eyes. “Got it!” he roared, hauling the shroud aboard.

His coat snapped in the rising wind as he braced against the rail, the prize secured in his hand. Desylva’s gusts blasted past him, scattering the last remnants of the nova sprite’s light.

One-Eyed Jack’s cannon roared, “Clear the way, ye blighters!” his shot blasting the sprite’s remnants beyond the hull. Billy waved from the rigging.

Desylva’s lightning struck the sprite’s fading light, the flames dying as the crew’s roars rose in triumph. Her storm peaked, the Veil’s glow cloaking the deck in a faint shimmer.

The platform sank back into the sea, the starlight pulsing one last time before the night stilled.

The pulse lingered. Once. Twice. Then softened. The furious hum that had filled the Expanse eased into something quieter. Almost peaceful. The mist drifting above the sinking platform curled briefly toward the Jolly Roger.

Not as an attack. Not as a warning. As acknowledgment.

The sea's silver glow dimmed. The constellations overhead seemed brighter for a fleeting moment. Then the platform disappeared beneath the water. The Expanse fell silent. Its judgment rendered.

Black Tom recalled his harpoons from the sea, hauling taut hemp lines with steady hands, their barbed tips dripping ichor as he coiled the ropes neatly. Moving to the mast, he yanked a harpoon's tip from the rune-scarred wood, the ship's enchantments flaring silver to mend the gouge. He then gathered the others lodged in the deck, ichor staining the planks where glowing runes sealed burns and scars.

The Jolly Roger rocked gently as the sea settled.

Killian clutched the Veil, its mist curling around his arm like a living thing. Desylva steadied herself beside him, her cloak singed and dripping, her gray eyes fierce with the fire of their victory, her breath fogging in the cooling air. She wiped ichor from her dagger, her voice steady, "Ours now, earned it." Killian's grin was wild, his hook resting near her hand, "Aye, lass, stole it fair and square."

Smee scrambled upright. Billy slid down the rigging. Black Tom secured the deck's lashings with a silent nod. One-Eyed Jack wiped soot from his cannon.

Desylva's thunder rumbled one last time, a parting shot as the rain washed the last of the starlight from the deck. Killian's hand brushed hers, lingering, his voice softening over the crew's cheers, "Well fought. You still surprise me." Her lips quirked, a rare warmth in her storm-lit gaze.

Their storm met in the quiet, Rumpelstiltskin's distant giggle fading into the wind, Regina's hiss swallowed by the sea. The Veil pulsed in Killian's grasp, its starlight cloaking them in a faint shimmer. Their bond a shield stronger than any magic, a force unbreakable, the Expanse calming as the crew's triumphant shouts echoed, their tale soaring beneath the fading stars.

Departure (Dawn)

The Jolly Roger broke free of the Expanse's shimmering grip, sails billowing as they caught a starlit breeze that carried the ship away from the silvered sea. The horizon softening into a dawn streaked with hues of gold and rose, the constellations above fading into a pale, quiet sky. The waters behind them rippled faintly, their starlight dimming as the Expanse retreated into memory, leaving only the whisper of its ethereal hum on the wind. The ship's hull sighed with relief, her enchanted oak settling after the tempestuous dance through the platform's chaos, serpent ichor still on its planks like badges of honor. The lanterns swung gently now, their golden glow steadying as the crew shook off the battle's haze, their breaths fogging in the cooling air, the tang of salt and ozone mingling with that lingering sweetness of the realm they'd conquered.

Quarterdeck

Killian stood at the helm, his black leather coat patched with burns and tears, its edges stiff with dried blood and seawater. His hook rested on the wheel, gleaming in the dawn's light, while his hand cradled the Veil of Ether, its gossamer folds of starlight and mist shimmering faintly against his palm, a prize that pulsed with a cool, elusive power. His piercing blue eyes shone with a fierce triumph, tempered by a rare softness as he surveyed his crew. His voice rang out over the deck, rich and commanding, "We've a shroud now. A cloak to slip us past any foe's grasp!"

Main Deck

Smee's rum-roughened cheer broke the quiet, "We faced stars and lived to tell it!" One-Eyed Jack's grizzled face split by a rare grin as he wiped soot from his cannon, his growl a mix of pride and challenge, "Next time, I'll blast 'em afore they blink. Spirits or no!" Black Tom leaned against the railing, his harpoon cleaned and propped beside him, his scarred face offering a silent nod of respect. Billy slid down from the rigging, buzzing with adrenaline.

Quarterdeck

Killian's gaze shifted to Desylva, standing at the quarterdeck railing, her leather cloak hung singed and sodden, her dark hair plastered with rain and ichor, her gray eyes glinting like storm clouds kissed by sunrise, her cursed mark

pulsed faintly beneath her sleeve, her storm settling into a quiet hum. His voice dropped, a private challenge laced with warmth, “You’re a storm worth sailin’ with, lass.” Her nod came firm, her lips quirking in a sharp, defiant grin, “Don’t show us up with that thing,” her words cut with a playful edge, her storm a fire that set his heart racing, his chest tightened, her wildness a blaze he couldn’t quench, their bond a cloak stronger than the Veil itself.

Water

The Jolly Roger surged forward, sails cutting through the sea with a grace born of survival. The horizon stretching wide and open before them. A new day unfurling. The deck slick with rain and ichor slowly drying under the rising sun.

Main Deck

Smee, face flushed with relief and rum-fueled bravado, muttered, half to himself, “Good riddance to ‘em spirits!” Billy broke into a sea shanty, his voice rough but spirited, the tune lifted the crew’s spirits, One-Eyed Jack joining with a gravelly chuckle as he reloaded his cannon. Black Tom’s dark eyes tracing the horizon, his harpoon resting at his side like a sentinel.

Quarterdeck

Killian lifted the Veil, its mist flaring briefly as the dawn’s light touched it, cloaking his arm in a shimmer that danced like liquid starlight. He tested its weight, its coolness a promise of shadows and secrets. Desylva leaned against the helm beside him, her gray eyes tracking the Veil’s glow, her storm-touched presence a steady anchor. Her cursed mark pulsed faintly, her hands wiping her dagger clean on her cloak, the blade’s edge catching the sun in a fleeting gleam.

She tilted her head, her voice a low murmur, “Where’s this shroud takin’ us?” her grin was sharp, a challenge that matched the fire in his chest. Killian’s hook tapped the wheel, his blue eyes glinting with a pirate’s hunger, “Somewhere rough, lass, fits us, our foes’ll rue the day we slipped their nets.”

The shadowy figures who’d cursed their path loomed in his mind, Rumpelstiltskin’s schemes and Regina’s wrath a constant thorn. His revenge burned steady, but Desylva’s fire beside him hinted at something more, a purpose woven through shared storms.

The Jolly Roger sailed on, sails a banner against the dawn.

Morning

The Jolly Roger dropped anchor in a sheltered cove as the dawn deepened into a golden morning, the sea lapping gently against the hull. A tranquil mirror of clear blue stretching to a rocky shore fringed with jagged cliffs and tufts of wind-bent grass, the air soft with the scent of salt and wildflowers, a stark contrast to the Starlit Expanse’s ethereal bite. The ship rocked gently, sails furled, deck still damp from Desylva’s rain, planks creaking softly, as the crew settled into a rare moment of peace.

Main Deck

Killian’s voice carried over the quiet, a tired but firm command, “Rest up, lads”

Smee bustled to light a small fire in a battered iron brazier, his hands trembling slightly as he struck flint to tinder, the crackle of flames rising with a thin plume of smoke. Rum flowed freely from a cask Billy hauled up from the hold, the amber liquid glugging into dented tin mugs as the crew gathered round. One-Eyed Jack sprawled on a crate, his grizzled face softened by the firelight, spinning a tale of a star-beast he swore he’d once wrestled in a tavern brawl, his gravelly laugh punctuating the yarn as he waved his mug.

Black Tom sat cross-legged near the railing, his harpoon laid across his knees, his scarred hands methodically cleaning its tip with a rag, his silence a steady counterpoint to One-Eyed Jack’s bluster. Billy, his wiry frame buzzing with leftover adrenaline, strummed a soft tune on his battered lute, his voice low and melodic, weaving a lullaby about lost ships and starlit dreams.

Quarterdeck

Killian leaned against the ship's wheel, the damp leather of his coat gleaming faintly in the firelight. Before him, on the map plate, lay the Veil, folded with a pirate's precision, its starlight mist catching the glow of the deck's small fire in delicate, shimmering threads that pulsed like a living thing. With no charts beneath it, the shroud seemed to claim the space entirely, its drifting haze turning the bare plate into a quiet altar of starlight. His blue eyes softened as they roamed over his crew, sprawled and weary, rum warming his chest and easing the weight of years into a quiet ache.

Desylva sat nearby, her storm magic a low, steady hum now, a rhythm he felt deep in his bones like a song he'd always known. He tilted his head toward her, voice a rough whisper cutting through Billy's faint tune, "Go on, lass, throw that Veil on. See if it can hide you from me." His hook nudged the shimmering fabric toward her, a glint of mischief dancing in his gaze, daring her to play along. Her fingers brushed its folds, lifting it with a ripple of mist that cloaked her arm in a fleeting haze. She draped it over her shoulders, her form blurring for a heartbeat into a ghostly outline against the paling sky, then let it slip back down with a flash of a grin. "Not now," she said, her tone light but firm, the firelight sparking in her gray eyes. Their shared storm beating steady in the morning's hush.

Main Deck - Later (Night)

The Veil was now stashed below in the hold, secured in a runed chest.

Desylva eased onto a barrel, her cloak's singed edges and stitching glowing faintly. Her gray eyes caught the fire's flicker, taming the tempest within them to a quiet simmer, her cursed mark pulsing softly beneath her sleeve as she cradled a chipped mug of rum. Her dark hair hung damp and wild, framing a face carved sharp by piracy, though a rare warmth softened it now as she watched the crew unwind.

Killian sat down beside her, his shoulder brushing hers, her heat seeping into him like a cure for the night's lingering bite, He held out his own mug, the rum sloshing faintly, his voice a low growl softened by the drink, "Take it, you've earned it."

She slowly took it, her fingers grazing his with a spark that kicked his pulse up a notch, her reply dry as salt but tinged with a laugh, "I ain't some fragile thing needin' coddlin'. Don't you dare start now." Her grin stretched wide as she took a swig, the rum's bite pulling a husky chuckle from her throat, warm and unguarded.

Smee stirred from across the deck, mumbling thickly, "Them two, sparkin' like flint'n steel!" His stout frame twitched, one arm flopping over a coil of rope. One-Eyed Jack, perched on a crate with his pipe freshly lit, puffed out a cloud of smoke and winked, his voice a gravelly drawl, "Aye, thick as a pair o' cutthroats and tied tighter'n a bowline."

Killian's blue eyes locked with Desylva's, rum fuzzing the edges of a weariness that stretched back centuries, her storm a tide that kept him afloat. His hook rested near her hand, close enough to feel her warmth but not touching, his voice dropping to a raw whisper, "Still can't wrap my head 'round you stickin' with me, lass."

She tilted her head, her gray eyes steady and unflinching, "Where else am I gonna be?" Her words landed solid, no frills, and then she leaned in, kissing him, short, fierce, real.

Their storm thrummed in the quiet, the fire's embers painting their faces in a soft, golden glow, her wildness wrapping around him, a shield against everything beyond this moment. His heart was hers, carved into every look, every graze of their shoulders, every shared breath on the quiet deck, a claim as fierce and certain as any oath sworn on a pirate's deck. Their love, kindled under skies they'd robbed and seas they'd tamed, held fast like the Jolly Roger's hull.

Killian leaned closer, his breath warm against her ear, as he whispered something low, too soft for the wind to steal. A slow smile curled her lips, sharp and knowing, and he took her hand, tugging her toward the companionway with a quiet, "C'mon."

They slipped below, her storm-gray eyes catching a last glint of starlight, her fingers laced with his, a signal the crew knew all too well.

Smee, slumped by the brazier, hiccupped through a grin, his voice slurring, “Off to hump like the ship’s on fire, makin’ the planks moan louder’n a banshee!” One-Eyed Jack stood at the stern, his eye glinting as he watched them go, rasping through a plume of pipe smoke, “Cap’n’s gonna plow her ‘til the oak splits!” Black Tom coiled a rope nearby, his scarred arms flexing, the deck creaking softly under his boots, his silence a knowing smirk to their lusty retreat. Billy’s torch glowed warm, his voice lilting soft over the hum of the waking ship, “Gonna shag her ‘til the stars blush, bet they’ll rock the bloody keel!” One-Eyed Jack glanced up at the sky, where clouds were just beginning to gather, dark smudges on the dawn’s edge. “Below, lads, ‘fore the real blow kicks in,” he grunted, stumping toward the hatch himself, leaving the deck to the quiet and the promise of what brewed beneath.

Killian & Desylva’s Cabin

The cabin flickered with the lantern’s soft glow, its flame a steady pulse casting a warm amber sheen over the planks, their faint runes shimmering briefly as the ship’s magic hummed. The door opened, and Killian and Desylva entered. He pulled her close, his hand splaying across the small of her back, fingers pressing into her damp leather. Her storm-gray eyes gleamed like stars piercing a midnight squall, sharp and luminous, locking onto his with a hunger that quickened his pulse. Her lips claimed his, a slow, deliberate press tasting of salt from sea-spray and the crisp bite of the cove’s breeze, her dark hair a silken tide slipping through his fingers as he tangled them in its damp strands.

His hook grazed her hip, the cold steel scraping her leather belt’s buckle with a faint metallic whisper, drawing her nearer until her curves molded against his chest. Their boots came off first, kicked aside in a hurried rhythm, thumping against the planks as the ship rocked gently. Her hands yanked at his coat, tugging it free with a heavy thud as it hit the floor, then pulled his shirt over his head, revealing the scars crisscrossing his chest, before unbuckling his belt, the clink of metal sharp as she shoved his trousers down, baring his muscled thighs and evident arousal, kicking them aside in a rumpled heap. He unclasped her cloak, the fabric pooling at her feet, unbuckled her belt with a swift tug, letting it clatter to the floor, and peeled her tunic over her head, revealing the cursed mark pulsing blue beneath her sleeve, then tugged her trousers off, her skin flushing as they joined the pile, their nakedness a stark intimacy in the lantern’s glow.

The sea’s murmur beyond the hull swelled into a low growl, waves slapping the planks in time with their quickening breaths. Her storm magic stirred, a crackle of static charging the air, the wind outside rising, tilting the Jolly Roger with the surge of her desire.

The bed creaked as they sank into it, the enchanted oak frame’s runes glowing faintly. The air thickened with ozone and the briny tang of wet rigging, her power a pulsing undercurrent summoning a storm beyond the cabin’s walls, the sea surging, swells crashing with growing force, the ship swaying in rhythm with their need.

His mouth found her throat, lips brushing the wild pulse beneath her soft skin, his stubble grazing as her storm-gray eyes fluttered shut, a shiver racing through her. Her magic flared, wind howling outside, waves crashing against the hull. Her fingers traced the scars on his chest, lingering on a jagged line from a kraken’s claw. “You wear the sea like a map, Killian,” she murmured, her voice a husky gust against his ear, gray eyes glinting with mischief.

His grin flashed, roguish and warm, “And you chart its every wave,” his tone rough with desire as his hook caressed her thigh, the cool steel tracing a slow, teasing arc, her gentle loving currents flowing through it, a warm tingle that made him growl low, his arousal twitching against her hip.

The ship pitched starboard, as a swell rocked them, rain pattering the deck above, quickening to a steady drum as her storm magic intensified, the Roger lurching with her rising heat. Her legs tangled with his, thighs parting as she pressed closer, her laughter a gust dancing through the cabin, lantern shadows swaying wildly over their skin. “Stir me up, pirate, see what blows in,” she teased, lips brushing his jaw, her nails biting lightly into his arm. His hook slid up her side, caressing the curve of her ribs, its steel kissed by her loving currents, a soft electric pulse that drew a ragged breath from him, his hand gripping her waist to anchor her.

“Careful, love, I’ll ride this wave ‘til it breaks,” he growled, blue eyes burning with a pirate’s fire. Her storm-gray eyes darkened with want, hair splaying across the pillow in an inky cascade, her body arching into his. The air heavy with her musk, wildflowers crushed in salt, sharp and untamed. He kissed her deeply, tongue exploring her mouth, tasting

rum and sea, her moan vibrating against him as she hooked a leg over his hip, urging him closer, the bed's runes flickering, healing a fresh nick from his hook's restless graze.

Their rhythm built slowly, his lips trailing down her chest, nipping her breasts, coaxing sharp moans as her fingers clutched his hair, tugging him back to her mouth for a bruising kiss. The tempest swelled outside, waves roaring, the ship bucking as her magic surged, lightning flashing beyond the window, illuminating her scarred skin like silver threads.

His hook caressed her inner thigh, its cool edge sparking her currents again, a loving pulse that made him shudder, his voice a low rumble, "Ready for me, lass?" Her gray eyes blazed, fierce and certain, "Yes. More'n ready, pirate." He smirked, all teeth and rogue, "Then take me, Des, all of me."

He entered her with a slow, deep thrust, stretching her heat, filling her completely, her slick warmth enveloping him in a searing grip. Her moan was raw, a jagged cry swallowed by the wind's howl, her thighs clamping around him, nails raking his back, leaving burning trails.

The ship lurched with a monstrous swell, rain hammering the deck. The bed's runes glowing, healing a splintered dent from their fervor.

His thrusts were steady and deep, each one a claim staked in her core. Her hips rocked to meet him. Her gasps mingling with his grunts. Her storm magic pulsed wilder, sparks dancing in the air. The bed groaned, runes shimmering to mend micro-cracks from their force.

"Faster, Killian, harder, please!" she begged, voice ragged, gray eyes pleading. Her nails dug into his shoulders. He growled back, "Aye, love, I'll break the bloody skies for you," quickening his pace, thrusting harder, deeper. Her cries escalated, sharp and desperate.

The sea surged in time, waves crashing with their rhythm. His hook caressed her cheek, her loving currents tingling through it, urging him on. His lips tasted the salt of her sweat as he drove into her, relentless. Her legs tightening, urging him deeper. The cabin shuddered, the lantern swinging wildly, shadows jagged across the walls.

Thunder rolled, born of their fire. The storm peaked, the Roger tilting hard to port, His hand gripped her hip, fingers bruising her flesh. His hook gouged the bedframe, runes flaring to heal the splintered oak instantly, wood dust scattering across the furs. Her arms looped around his neck, nails biting his shoulders. Her magic bursting in an electric pulse, rattling the cabin's walls with a crackle.

Her release shattered through her, a tempest's climax. Her body convulsed, a primal scream tearing free, swallowed by thunder's roar. Her slick heat clenched around him in pulsing waves, sparks singeing the air. The bedframe rattled, runes glowing to mend a cracked slat.

His release followed, a guttural roar. He surged into her, spilling hot and fierce, every nerve ablaze with raw love, His body trembled, collapsing into her. Their sweat-slick skin fusing.

The ship rocked violently, waves slamming the hull, rain hammering the deck. The air thick with ozone, salt, and their mingled musk. Aftershocks rippled. Her legs still wrapped around him, his face buried in her neck. Their breaths ragged, syncing with the Roger's slowing sway.

The storm eased, rain softening to a drizzle. The sea steadied, waves lapping gently against the hull. The bed's runes faded as the oak settled, fully healed. The air cleared, rain's crisp veil lingering.

Her damp hair clung to his chest, strands fanning across his scars. Her fingers brushing his cheek, tracing his jaw with a tenderness that softened her storm-gray eyes. "You're still my sea, Killian, wild, uncharted," she murmured, voice a warm breeze, lips curving as she pressed a lingering kiss to his mouth, tasting of salt and calm.

His hand slid to her back, pulling her close, hook resting beside her, its gleam kissed by her faint currents, "And you're my fierce storm, Des. To sail forever," he growled softly, a rogue's edge tempered by love.

The lantern's glow steadied, bathing them in a golden hush, their pulses easing as the Roger settled, the air heavy with ozone, salt, and the quiet bloom of wildflowers in the stillness.

Crew Quarters
(Simultaneous with the Cabin Scene)

The crew huddled in the cramped quarters. The air thick with the stench of damp hemp and smoked cod. The ship's wild pitching swaying the hammocks. Runes flickered faintly, steadying the wood against the storm's fury.

One-Eyed Jack grinned, his eye glinting with the lightning's flash through a porthole, "Bugger me, they're slammin' the stars to bits, her storm's rippin' the bloody skies!" his gravelly voice boomed, the thunder's rumble echoing his crude delight. Black Tom sat silent, his scarred arms steadying a crate, his harpoon's barbed edge catching the light, a faint nod betraying his amusement.

Billy's torch flickered, his voice cutting through the wind's banshee wail, "Cap'n's poundin' her into a frenzy, lucky bastard!" Smee, sprawled on a hammock, his stout frame jolting with each roll, hiccupped through a rum-soaked grin, "They're humpin' so hard the hull's groanin' louder'n a whorehouse!"

The ship rolled hard, waves crashing against the planks, and Billy sang.

Billy (cheeky)
Under stars so bright,
with a lass so tight,
Cap'n's storm screws the night just right.

Her thunder roars,
as their passion soars,
Rockin' the deck from the cabin's floors.

His hook's a spark,
in her tempest's dark,
Ridin' her waves 'til they break the bark.

(After the Cabin Scene)

The storm hushed to a whisper. The Roger settling into a soft roll. The air lightened as the crew relaxed. The scent of wet wood mingling with the quiet. The enchanted oak creaking softly, their runes dimming as the ship calmed.

One-Eyed Jack stretched, his grizzled voice a low rasp, "They've shagged the bloody stars out, now we can finally get some shut-eye, lads." Black Tom nodded, his mute relief in the slow tap of his harpoon against the deck, its ichor-stained tip glinting faintly.

Billy doused his torch, smoke curling upward, his voice a cheeky murmur, "Aye, sea's calm, Cap'n's screwed her spark dry, bet she's limp as a jellyfish now." Smee mumbled through a yawn, "Buggered each other senseless, they did, ship's rockin' like a cradle after all that ruttin'."

The crew drifted off to the Roger's gentle breath, the quiet hum of the sea wrapping the quarters in a rare, easy peace.

The Ebon Abyss: Quest for the Abyss Pearl (Day 50)

The Jolly Roger swayed atop a midnight sea, drifting in place. Her sails hanging slack beneath a sky thick with roiling clouds, their edges bruised black and gray, swallowing all but a faint, sickle-thin sliver of moon that cast a ghostly pallor over the deck. The water lapped at the hull with a restless, almost impatient murmur, its surface a deep, unbroken obsidian that shimmered faintly with an unnatural glow, as if something ancient stirred in the depths, its breath sending up tendrils of icy mist that curled around the ship like spectral fingers, chilling the air to the bone and raising gooseflesh on exposed skin.

The air hung heavy, saturated with the sharp bite of salt and a colder, more primal scent, something raw and unyielding, rising from the abyss beneath, prickling the skin and tightening the chest with each breath, a whisper of dread that tasted metallic on the tongue. The lanterns swayed from the rigging, their amber flames flickering as if reluctant to pierce the darkness, casting jittery shadows across the deck that twisted and leaped like living things, the ship's timbers creaking in low, uneasy groans as if the Jolly Roger herself sensed the weight of what lurked below.

Main Deck

The crew gathered, boots scuffing the boards with a nervous scrape, rum mugs clinking softly as they huddled close, the warmth of their bodies a fragile bulwark against the encroaching chill. Smee clutched his hat with one hand, his other gripping a mug that sloshed amber liquid onto his patched coat, his round face pale in the dim light, beads of sweat tracing his brow despite the cold.

One-Eyed Jack leaned against a cannon, his pipe puffing faint rings of smoke that dissolved into the mist like fleeing ghosts, his grizzled fingers drumming the barrel Black Tom stood silent by the railing, his scarred hands resting on his harpoon, knuckles white with grip, his dark eyes fixed on the sea as if daring it to rise. Billy perched atop a barrel, his wiry frame coiled with restless energy, his freckled face taut, lost to a sun-hardened tan, fingers twitching at his sides.

A weathered band, their faces etched with the hard lines of survival, yet their eyes glinted with a stubborn spark, a hunger for the next chase unbroken by the weight of their journey, though tonight that spark warred with a deeper unease, the fog's tendrils coiling around their ankles like unseen chains.

Quarterdeck

Killian stood poised at the helm, his black leather coat billowing faintly with the Jolly Roger’s gentle sway, the hem glistening with sea spray as it brushed the deck, damp and heavy. His hook rapped against the wheel in a slow, measured cadence, each strike a quiet drumbeat in the night’s hush, echoing off the mist-shrouded rails.

His voice sliced through the stillness, a low, rumbling growl steeped in a pirate’s allure, rich and commanding, “Word reached me in the last harbor. A tale shadowed and sunken, ripe for the takin’.” His words dangled like a baited hook, rousing the crew from their idle murmurs, the fog seeming to thicken in response, the lanterns' flames guttering lower.

Main Deck

Smee’s reedy voice broke in, tinged with a jittery thrill that cracked slightly, “What’s brewin’ this time, Cap’n? Somethin’ to set the blood racin’, or just another ghost story to chase?” One-Eyed Jack exhaled a plume of smoke, his gruff mutter cutting the air like a blade, “Better not be another tall tale. I’m done chasin’ ghosts and comin’ up empty-handed, leavin’ us with nothin’ but sore heads and empty pockets.”

Black Tom’s harpoon struck the deck once, a sharp, unspoken query that vibrated through the planks. Billy leaned in, his grin a flash of teeth in the lanternlight, though his voice held a nervous edge, “Spill it, Cap’n.”

The ship pulsed with their eager tension, Killian’s shadowed figure the ember that set it ablaze.

“The Abyss Pearl,” he declared, his tone steady as iron, letting the name settle like a stone dropped into deep water, heavy and inevitable.

The crew’s eyes locked on him, recognition flickering, then dawning horror as the pieces slammed together like a cannon's breach. Smee’s mug slipped from his fingers, crash, rum splashing across the deck, his face draining to ashen gray as he whispered, “The Abyss… gods, Cap’n, we’re floatin’ right over it, ain’t we? That black water… that’s the Ebon Abyss itself!” One-Eyed Jack’s pipe fell from his lips, clattering to the planks, his eye widening in sudden realization, “Bloody hell… the glow, the cold… we’re smack in the beast’s maw!”

Black Tom's grip tightened on his harpoon until his knuckles cracked, his dark eyes darting to the rails where the mist coiled thicker, as if the sea itself breathed upon them, while Billy nearly toppled from his barrel, scrambling to his feet with a yelp, "We're right on top of it? The place where ships vanish without a scream? Cap'n, tell me we're not divin' in!"

They'd all caught whispers of that legend in salty dives and shadowed docks. Smee, ever the storyteller, launched into it with gusto despite his pallor, his stout frame swaying as he gestured wildly, rum forgotten on the deck. His voice climbed over the sea's soft hum, brimming with fervor laced with fear, "They say the pearl lies in the Abyss's belly. Black as pitch. Shimmerin' with a strange light that twists fate like a helm in a gale. Bends the tides o' fortune. Turns curses to coin. Guarded by the sea's own fiends, krakens with tentacles like chains, shadows that swallow light whole! Heard it from grizzled sailors and wide-eyed divers, a prize as cursed as it is blessed, mark me, steal it, and the Abyss claims its due!" His beard quivering with each vivid word, his round eyes gleaming with equal parts wonder and unease.

One-Eyed Jack snorted, a curl of pipe smoke drifting upward to blend with the mist, his raspy drawl slicing through Smee's zeal, though his voice held a tremor now, "Sounds like a snare waitin' to snap shut, and us the fools steppin' right in." he said, his eye narrowing with hard-earned doubt, "The sea don't hand out gifts without bitin' back. There's always a price, and it's got fangs sharper than Tom's harpoon." His fingers paused, tapping ash onto the deck as his scowl deepened, weighing the lure of treasure against the sting of betrayal he'd known too well, the fog seeming to press closer at his words.

Black Tom's harpoon resumed its slow, deliberate beat against the wood, thunk-thunk, his scarred face half-gilded by the lantern's glow, his silence a heavy echo of One-Eyed Jack's wariness, heavier now with the realization of their precarious perch. His gaze drifted to the dark waves, as if peering through them to the devils Smee conjured below, bubbles rising faintly in the distance, the water's unnatural glow pulsing like a heartbeat.

Billy's grin stretched wider, undaunted though his voice cracked with excitement, "A twist o' luck like that? That's a prize worth snatchin'! Think of it, dodgin' doom with a flick o' fate in our pocket!" His hands tightened on the barrel's rim, his eagerness a bright spark against the older men's caution, fanning his thirst for adventure into a blaze, though his eyes darted nervously to the rails.

Quarterdeck

The night seemed to tighten around them, the air thick with the clash of dread and desire, Killian's steady presence at the wheel the anchor holding their restless spirits fast. Killian's hook tapped once more, a crisp note that drew their eyes back to him, his lips curling faintly as he let their words simmer, the fog swirling thicker around the ship, the air growing colder, heavier. "Dark and deep, aye," he mused, his voice a velvet blade, "but what's a pirate's life without a plunge into the shadows? We're already floatin' over the beast's lair. Might as well dive in and take what's ours."

Main Deck

The challenge hung there, daring them to bite, to cast their lot with the Abyss Pearl's promise, the ship creaking as if in agreement. Smee's mug stilled mid-swig, One-Eyed Jack's pipe hovered near his lips, Black Tom's harpoon paused mid-tap, and Billy's grin sharpened with a hunger that mirrored Killian's own. The ship rocked gently beneath them, the sea whispering secrets of its own, as if it too awaited their choice. Caution or courage. Skepticism or greed. The unnatural glow below pulsing stronger, bubbles rising like warnings from the deep.

Quarterdeck

Killian's gaze swept over them, a flicker of amusement in his stormy eyes, knowing full well the pull of a tale like this would drag them all into the depths, hook, line, and sinker. Desylva stood at Killian's side, her leather cloak swaying with the ship's motion, its hem damp with spray, her gray eyes gleamed like storm clouds caught in the moon's faint light, her cursed mark pulsing a faint blue beneath her sleeve, a quiet testament to her storm-touched power. She was a force as fierce as the sea itself, her voice slicing through with a steely resolve, "If it's real, it's a weapon. Could sway more'n just luck. Could break their hold on us for good."

Her words landed like a stone in still water, her gaze flicking to Killian with a spark that stirred his blood, her storm a steady pulse beside his sea, her wildness a current he'd learned to navigate and crave. Killian's hook traced the wheel's grain with a sharper tap, his mind churning through the tale. A pearl to bend fate could tip the scales against the shadowy foes whose curses had dogged their wake for too long, a prize worth the plunge into the black. His blue eyes locked with Desylva's gray ones, a flicker of challenge and a deeper fire passing between them, battles weaving their fates tight.

Main Deck

Smee chuckled nervously, nudging Billy, his voice a bit higher than usual. "Blimey, we're really doin' this—divin' straight into the Abyss's gullet!"

The crew's murmurs swelled, their captain's silence a signal they'd come to trust. Killian's grin flashed, sharp and daring as a blade, "Aye. We're divin' for it, lads." His voice roared over the deck, a pirate's call to the abyss, and the crew's shout split the night, their doubts drowned by the thrill of the chase,

Killian's decision set the Jolly Roger ablaze with sudden purpose. The ship jolted as a gust ripped through the slack sails, the clouds parting just enough to let the sliver of moon cast a pale, silvery gleam across the deck, illuminating the crew's flurry of motion.

Smee's legs wobbled, his voice a frantic bark, "Hope them devils sleep deep, or we're chum!" as he steadied himself, his face flushed with a mix of fear and excitement. One-Eyed Jack raised his musket, his growl firm as he loaded his weapon, "I'll blast anythin' that moves down there, pearl or no. Abyss or not. No beast takes Jack without a fight!" His grizzled hands moved with practiced ease, his eye glinting with a hunter's focus, ready to meet the sea's teeth with his own.

Black Tom sharpened his harpoon with a silent intensity, the rhythmic scrape of steel on stone cutting through the wind, his scarred face set in a mask of resolve, his dark eyes tracked the water's surface, where bubbles began to rise, faint and ominous, larger now. Billy's voice rang out with a thrill, "Moon's out, Cap'n, sign o' luck, maybe, shinin' for us right over the Abyss!" his silhouette danced against the sails, though his grin faltered slightly at the glowing depths.

Quarterdeck

Killian's blue eyes swept the sea, their depths a storm of vengeance and a growing warmth, stirred by Desylva's unflinching presence at his side. Her storm magic thrummed in rhythm with the ocean's restless pulse, her dark hair whipping in the gusts, her dagger spinning absently in her hand. Their fates bound tighter than any chain, her wildness a current he rode with a pirate's reckless glee, her gray eyes a tempest he'd dive into without a second thought. He leaned close, his voice dropping to a murmur meant for her alone, "A pearl to shift fate, lass—worth the dive into the black with me?" Her gray eyes met his, steady and fierce, a smirk tugging her lips, "Aye. Let's pluck it from the abyss and twist their game forever." Her tone was a dare, her storm a vow that sent a shiver down his spine, the wind howling stronger in response.

Main Deck

Smee's nervous laugh broke the moment, "Blimey, they're at it again. Plottin' like the sea itself!" The crew's chuckles rippled.

Quarterdeck

Killian's hook tapped the wheel with a decisive clink, his grin widening, "Dive bell down, lads!" his command thundered across the deck.

The Jolly Roger trembling as the crew sprang to action.

Killian left the wheel with a sharp turn, boots thudding down the quarterdeck steps as the ship shuddered beneath him. Desylva fell into stride beside him, her cloak snapping in the rising wind, her storm-mark pulsing faintly as the fog thickened around the rails. The two descended, their presence cutting through the tension like twin blades.

Main Deck

Black Tom and One-Eyed Jack hauled the dive bell's ropes from the hold, muscles straining as the enchanted oak-and-glass vessel rose through the midship hatchway and swung out over the port rail. With Billy's nimble hands working the davits beside them, the three operated the pulleys in practiced rhythm, lowering the dive bell smoothly into the inky sea with a muted splash. A rope ladder, secured to the rail's oak cleats, was lowered, its wooden rungs clattering against the hull's tarred planks.

Ladder

Killian stepped to the port rail, the dive bell bobbing in the inky water below, its runed oak-and-glass frame glowing faintly beneath the mist. He gripped the rope ladder and swung over the rail, descending with steady, practiced movements as the wooden rungs clattered softly against the hull.

Smee followed next, muttering breathless prayers as he clambered down after his captain, his stout legs wobbling with every step. His eyes stayed locked on the bell's shimmering dome, the wave-and-star runes pulsing like a heartbeat in the dark.

Desylva descended last, her cloak snapping in the rising wind, storm-mark flickering beneath her sleeve. She moved with a predator's grace, boots landing lightly on each rung as the fog curled around her like a living thing.

Dive Bell (Exterior/interior)

Exterior

Killian reached the dive bell first. He braced himself on the frame, then swung the hatch open with a sharp pull, the runes flaring silver in greeting.

Interior

He stepped inside, boots thudding on the enchanted oak floor as lanternlight cast jittery shadows across the curved interior.

Exterior

Smee reached the bell moments later, scrambling through the open hatch with a nervous grunt.

Interior

He squeezed past Killian and planted himself at the runed helm, hands already twitching over the wave-and-star carvings.

Exterior

Desylva reached the bell, unhooking the pulley ropes with swift, sure motions. The bell dipped slightly as the lines slackened, settling fully into the water with a muted splash.

Interior

She slipped inside after the others, her cloak brushing the hatch's rim. She seized the hatch and pulled it shut. The lock clicked. The runes flared. The dome shimmered with protective magic.

Exterior

The dive bell began its descent, sinking into the abyss until the glass dome vanished beneath the waves. It plunged deeper into the inky blackness, its enchanted oak and glass frame creaking under the grasp of the Ebon Abyss.

Interior

The runed glass dome sealed the air-filled chamber, the interior lit by a single swaying lantern that cast long, jittery shadows across the curved walls.

Smee piloted at the fore, his trembling hands white-knuckled on the runed helm carved with wave-and-star runes that hummed softly under his grip, guiding the bell's enchanted ballast and rudder-fins toward the faint, ominous black glow far below.

Killian and Desylva stood behind him, boots planted firmly on the slick floor, eyes scanning the oppressive darkness through the dome. Killian's black leather coat still carried the chill of the surface wind, his blue eyes sharp with resolve as the last traces of moonlight faded above.

Desylva leaned forward, her leather cloak dripping with residual spray, gray eyes piercing the murk like twin storm clouds. Her dagger gleamed in her hand, its blade catching the glow of a lantern secured to the iron bench. Her cursed mark pulsed faintly beneath her sleeve, a blue glow flickering in rhythm with the sea's restless hum.

The large, enchanted conch shell mounted near the helm suddenly glowed softly. Billy's voice crackled through it from the ship above, tinny but clear. "Anythin' movin' down there yet, Cap'n? The water's gone dead quiet. Gives me the creeps!"

Killian leaned close to the shell, his voice carrying back strong and steady. "Dark as the devil's pocket. We're pushin' deeper. Stay sharp." Desylva added, her voice steady and commanding through the shell. "Tell Jack to watch the starboard side. Somethin' feels off. Like the sea's holdin' its breath."

Smee's stout frame hunched as he steered, runes flaring silver to steady his course. "Too deep, Cap'n… This black's got teeth, I swear it! Feels like we're divin' straight into a grave!" he whimpered, knuckles white on the helm.

Killian's hook steadied Smee's shoulder with a firm grip, his grin roguish even in the dim light. "Into the black we go. Pearl's waitin'." Desylva met his gaze, her storm coiling tight. "Deep's no match for us," she vowed, her wildness surging like a tide beside his sea.

The bell continued its descent, the darkness pressing in like a living thing.

Shapes emerged from the murk. Not creatures. Wrecks. The rotted remains of ships rested upon shelves of black stone, their broken ribs jutting from the abyss like ancient bones. A shattered mast drifted slowly past the dome, its splintered wood wrapped in ghost-pale seaweed. Beyond it sat the remains of a much older vessel, half buried in silt and coral. Its bell still hung from a shattered beam. Silent. Motionless. Waiting. No treasure remained. No bodies. Only fragments swallowed by centuries of darkness.

Smee stared through the glass. "How many came lookin'?"

Nobody answered. The abyss offered no count.

Jolly Roger

Billy spoke urgently into his small, enchanted shell. "Careful down there, Cap'n. Somethin's stirrin' in the murk! Currents are shiftin' weird!" One-Eyed Jack leaned over the railing, musket ready, his grizzled face set in a scowl, his growl steady as he spoke into the shell. "We're watchin' every ripple up here. Blast anything that twitches!"

Black Tom stood poised at the ship's edge, harpoon raised, its tip a deadly star against the dark, his scarred hands steady despite the wind whipping the sails. He nodded once, the tap of his harpoon against the rail echoing faintly through the shell as a rhythmic signal of readiness.

The crew's tension crackled in the night air, their eyes fixed on the dark water where faint bubbles rose ominously. Smee's nervous chatter echoed through the shell from below. "Too dark… Feels like eyes watchin' us from every direction!" One-Eyed Jack barked back, "Eyes or no, we've got your backs. Hold steady and keep talkin' so we know you're breathin'!"

Dive Bell

The sea churned around the dive bell, bubbles rising in slow, ominous bursts, each one breaking with a hiss that echoed inside the chamber. A faint, black pulse of light glimmered below, the Abyss Pearl calling from the depths.

Smee whimpered, his hands twitching on the helm, “Somethin’s down there, Cap’n, I feel it!” They braced, their descent a plunge into the unknown, danger stirring in the abyss’s heart.

The sea exploded as a deep kraken erupted from the darkness, its tentacles unfurling like midnight banners, black and slick with a sheen that swallowed the lantern’s light, its eyes glowing like twin lanterns of sickly yellow, cutting through the murk. Its roar bubbled up, a low, resonant growl that vibrated the dive bell’s frame, its wave-and-star runes flaring silver in warning.

Smee screamed, steering wildly, “Blimey, sea devil’s real! It’s comin’ right at us!” A massive tentacle grazed the dome with a sickening scrape.

From the shell, One-Eyed Jack’s voice roared, “Kraken!”

Rumpelstiltskin’s chill curse struck, a wave of ice creeping from the kraken’s grasp, frosting the glass and making the runes pulse frantically to heal faint cracks. Desylva’s hands numbed, her gray eyes clouding as her cursed mark dimmed. Her dagger slipped from her fingers, clattering to the floor. Her boots slid on the slick oak.

Killian’s cutlass slashed from behind Smee, the bell’s runes blazing as his blade’s force pierced the glass ethereally, slicing deep into a tentacle outside. Black ichor clouded the water in swirling clouds. “You bloody beast—back off!”

A second tentacle slammed the dome, its suckers scraping with horrifying strength, but the runes held firm, more blood seeping dark outside from Killian’s strike.

Desylva’s thunder cracked, her magic surging through the runes to boom outside, shattering the ice into glittering shards, her rain manifesting beyond the glass and loosening the kraken’s hold. Her mark flared brighter, her lightning arcing through the dome’s runes to strike the beast’s flank, its thrashing rocking the bell violently. Smee wailed, fighting the helm, steering to dodge a coiling tentacle.

From the shell, Billy’s voice crackled urgently, “Jack’s firin’. Hang on down there!”

Jolly Roger

One-Eyed Jack’s musket roared from the railing as he shouted into the shell, “Take that, ya slimy bastard!” Shots skimming the water to ward off the kraken’s thrashing tentacles, ichor clouding the depths in dark blooms.

Black Tom hurled his harpoon with a powerful grunt, the line singing through the air before it sank deep into a tentacle, pinning it momentarily as he hauled back with grim strength. Billy urged them on through the shell, “It’s weakenin’! We see the bubbles from up here. Don’t let it wrap you!”

Dive Bell

The crew’s voices overlapped through the conch in the bell, a chorus of support, warnings, and raw encouragement that kept the divers anchored to the ship above even as the abyss tried to claim them.

Desylva’s lightning flared again, a rune-channeled strike that felled the kraken, its eyes dimming as it sank into the depths, trailing clouds of ichor. Her chest heaved, her cloak dripping, her grin fierce as she leaned to meet Killian’s gaze, “We’re not down yet.” His blue eyes sparked, with adrenaline, blood streaking the water outside from the kraken’s wounds, “Aye, lass!” Their storm flared, the pearl’s black glow deepening below, the abyss stirring.

From the shell, One-Eyed Jack’s voice growled, “Leviathan risin’. Brace yerselves! Big one comin’ from below!”

A spectral leviathan rose, its scales shadows woven with glimmers. Its venom-dripping fangs striking with a hiss that vibrated the bell's walls, its eyes cold slits of malice. The bell lurched violently. Smee yelped, fighting the controls, "Another beast! We're done for!" as a fang grazed the bronze, venom clouding the water in green tendrils that hissed against the runes.

Regina's despair curse hit, clawing their minds with visions of loss. Desylva's knees buckled, her mark flickering, memories of a tower and chains flooding her. Her dagger sunk into the bench as she clutched her head, a choked "No!" escaping.

Killian's hook thrust through a firing slit, piercing the leviathan's jaw. A wet crunch echoing outside as he cracked a fang with a stone-like snap, venom clouding the water. The serpent recoiled.

Desylva's gusts roared, blasting through the runes to shatter the curse's grip outside, her thunder rolling outward in a shockwave that rattled the bell and stunned the beast. Her eyes cleared, her dagger slashed from behind Smee, its force projected through the glowing runes to carve the leviathan's flank.

Smee steered frantically, the helm's runes humming to veer from the beast's jaws, a fang grazing the dome, its runes healing a crack as blood streaked the water from his thigh, "Bloody ghost!" Desylva's lightning split the murk, rune-channeled to drive the leviathan back with a bubbling wail.

Billy's voice crackled through the shell, "Jack and Tom firing!"

Jolly Roger

One-Eyed Jack's musket cracked again, bullets rippling the water to scatter the leviathan's tail. Black Tom's harpoon, pierced the serpent's neck, ichor blooming.

The crew's voices overlapped, a chorus of support and warnings keeping the divers anchored.

Dive Bell

Killian spoke into the shell, "Good shot, Tom! That thing's down. Keep watch up there!"

Desylva's rain surged outside, washing blood and despair from the dome. Killian steadied her, his arm firm, his voice softening, "With me?" Her gray eyes blazed with unyielding resolve, breath ragged, "Always." She leaned against the bell's wall, her breath evening, her storm a faint crackle as she nodded. "Keep sharp. More to come," her words a vow as the crimson murk thickened, the bell's lanterns casting eerie beams into the abyss.

Their rhythm danced, the pearl's glow closer, danger pulsing.

Beneath them, the Pearl pulsed once. A faint ripple spread through the black water. Smee jerked the helm just as the bell drifted between two jagged stone spires hidden in the darkness. A heartbeat later the wraith's claws slammed into the stone instead of the dome. Rock exploded into clouds of debris. The dive bell shook violently but remained untouched.

Smee blinked. "Didn't even see them rocks." Killian's eyes narrowed toward the distant glow below. "Lucky turn."

Desylva studied the darkness surrounding the Pearl. For a moment her storm-mark pulsed. Then the feeling vanished.

A chasm wraith swirled into being, a vortex of mist and bone, skeletal claws spiraling, its void-black eyes sucking light, its shriek unleashing Rumpelstiltskin's vertigo curse, spinning the dive bell.

Smee yelped, "Bloody deep, playin' tricks!" Killian steadied him with a grunt, his hook firm on Smee's shoulder. Desylva's gusts roared, rune-channeled to pin the wraith's claws outside. Her thunder shattered the curse's hold, her voice fierce, "Up, shake it!" She pulled Killian up, her rain lashing the wraith beyond the glass. His cutlass slashed, runes blazing to project the strike, mist bleeding from the wraith's wounds.

Smee steadied the helm, the runes humming to right the bell's spin.

Jolly Roger

One-Eyed Jack bellowed, "Back!" his musket spitting fire, shots disturbing the wraith's misty edge. Black Tom's harpoon struck again, pinning its core, mist bleeding.

Dive Bell

Desylva's lightning struck through the runes. A blinding flash burst the wraith into fading mist, its shriek dying. Her storm surged, her cloak dripping, her gray eyes meeting Killian's with a wild grin, "Keep up, Cap!" His laugh rough, his hand brushing her arm, "Aye, lass, wouldn't dream of slowin' you."

The sea roared. Regina's tide curse unleashing waves that crashed against the dive bell, its runes flaring to hold the dome. Smee clutched the helm as waves rocked the bell. Killian roared, "Pearl's close!" his eyes locked on the black glow. Desylva nodded, her storm coiling.

An abyss eel lunged, its electric-blue body whipping. Desylva slashed wildly with her dagger through the runes to strike outside. The eel's bite seared Desylva's arm. Killian's hook sank into its side, his snarl fierce, "You slimy bastard!" Her rain doused the eel's glow beyond the glass, her thunder dimming its thrashing. Smee steered toward the pearl, the helm's runes pulsing as he dodged the eel's coils.

Killian spotted the Abyss Pearl nestled in a jagged coral throne. Its smooth, black surface pulsing with an otherworldly sheen. Veins of violet and silver swirling within like captured starlight trapped in a midnight tide. Its glow casting writhing shadows that seemed to whisper ancient vows.

He lunged forward in the dive bell, his boots gripping the floor. His hook braced against the runed helm as he thrust his hand through the dome's ethereal runes, their silver flare parting the water outside. His fingers closed around the pearl's cool, heavy form, its hum surging through his bones, a tide of fate that stilled the sea's roar, "Got it!" he exclaimed as he pulled it in.

Jolly Roger

High above, Billy paused in the rigging. Something flickered far beneath the ship. Not lantern light. Not lightning. A pulse. Deep in the water. The black sea briefly gleamed with streaks of violet and silver before the colors vanished into the abyss once more.

Billy lowered his spyglass slowly. One-Eyed Jack looked up from the rail. Billy simply pointed downward. One-Eyed Jack followed the gesture.

The water had already gone dark again. Yet the old gunner's scowl softened. Black Tom's gaze lingered on the suddenly calmed surface. The anxious current surrounding the ship faded. The sea settling for the first time that night. No one spoke. But all three knew something had changed below.

Dive Bell

Desylva's storm flared, her gray eyes locked on the pearl, her voice sharp with triumph, "Ours!" Her lightning cracked through the runes, guarding their ascent as the pearl's eerie light danced across the dome, its pulse syncing with their racing hearts. His grin flashed, fierce and wild, "Aye, lass, we've plucked the abyss's heart!"

Their hands brushed, a spark sealing the moment, a fire kindled in their shared gaze. Her gusts blasted the eel back, her voice urgent, "Go, now!" Smee piloted the dive bell upward, its runes glowing in the murk.

Jolly Roger

One-Eyed Jack's musket roared, "Clear the way!" Billy waved from the rigging. The dive bell breached the surface with a rush of bubbles and a triumphant surge of water. Its glass dome shimmering under a veil of sea spray that caught the light like shattered diamonds.

Dive Bell

Smee steered the bell smoothly alongside the ship, the runed helm humming in his hands as he aligned it with the port side. “Steady… steady… we’re home, Cap’n!”

Jolly Roger

Black Tom descended the rope ladder dangling from the rail, his scarred hands moving with a practiced certainty securing the pulley ropes to the bell’s rings with swift, reliable knots. Once fastened, he climbed back up, joining One-Eyed Jack at the winch. Together, their muscles straining in unison, they hoisted the bell upward, the ropes creaking rhythmically until it cleared the rail and settled onto the deck with a heavy, resounding thud, its frame steady beside the railing.

Billy darted to the rail as the dive bell settled onto the deck. “Ladder up!” he called, already hauling the rope ladder hand-over-hand. The wooden rungs clattered against the hull as he drew it upward, water streaming from the tarred planks. Black Tom stepped in beside him, bracing his weight and helping pull the last length over the rail. Together they coiled the ladder neatly and secured it.

Killian opened the hatch and stepped out with the Abyss Pearl clutched securely in his hand, its glow pulsing like a captured heartbeat of the sea. His black leather coat torn and dripping. His hook steadied Desylva as she followed, her leather cloak rippling with residual moisture, a confident smirk playing on her lips.

The deck swayed beneath their boots, sea spray mingling with a faint rumble of Desylva’s thunder. Rain washing ichor from the dive bell’s dome as it stood scarred but intact.

Killian’s hand brushed hers, lingering, his voice softening, “Well fought, love.” Her lips quirked, warmth in her storm-lit gaze, “Well stole, love.”

Smee stumbled out after them, gasping dramatically for the fresher air “Blessed air! Them runes saved me bones, Cap’n!”

The crew’s roars rose. One-Eyed Jack bellowed, “Blast off, abyss can keep its devils!” Black Tom braced against the rail, his scarred hands gripping sodden ropes tight, shoulders taut as he hauled his harpoons aboard, their steel tips gleaming clean, lines coiling at his feet with flecks of seaweed.

The pearl pulsed in Killian’s grasp, its black light a tide of fate.

Dawn (Departure)

The Jolly Roger broke free of the abyss’s suffocating clutch, her enchanted hull groaning in relief as a faint dawn breeze filled the sails, parting the heavy clouds to unveil a sky streaked with gold and amber. The sea settled into a glassy calm, its inky depths yielding to a gentle lap against the ship.

The dive bell’s runes glowed faintly where it rested on deck, its oak and glass scarred but healing from the night’s perils. The deck’s planks, slick with seawater, shimmered as the ship’s own wave-and-star runes pulsed, mending scratches left by kraken tentacles and spectral fangs. Lanterns swayed lazily, their amber light steadying as the crew’s breaths fogged in the crisp morning air, salt mingling with the fading primal scent of the deep.

Quarterdeck

Killian stood at the helm, his leather coat torn at the seams, edges stained with blood and ichor. His hook rested on the wheel. His hand gripped the Pearl, its cool, black light pulsing beneath his fingers, a heartbeat of power wrested from the sea’s dark core.

His piercing blue eyes blazed with triumph, softened by exhaustion and a flicker of warmth as he scanned his crew, his voice ringing out, rich and commanding, “We’ve got fate in our grip now, a pearl to bend the tides!”

Main Deck

The crew erupted in a ragged cheer. Their faces lit by dawn's glow. Smee scrambled to his feet, soaked and trembling, his rum-roughened cheer piercing the stillness, "Aye, and we're still kickin' to drink to it!" One-Eyed Jack wiped ichor from his cannon, his grizzled face splitting into a rare, toothy grin, "Next time, I'll blast 'em afore they breach. Sea devils be damned!"

Black Tom leaned against the railing, harpoon propped beside him, his scarred face offering a silent nod of respect. Billy dropped from the rigging, wiry and buzzing with adrenaline, his voice cracking with glee, "Toughest dive yet, eh?!"

The crew's victory surged through the deck, a fire rekindled after relentless strife, their bond a family forged in salt and steel. Billy broke into a rough shanty, raw and spirited.

To pearls and gold, we sail so bold,
out o' the deep, our tale's retold!

The tune lifted the crew, One-Eyed Jack joining with a gravelly chuckle as he reloaded his cannon, "Aye, and a shot for any fool darin' the next plunge!" Smee bustled to the helm, muttering, "Abyss behind us. Good riddance to them cursed depths!" his round face flushed with relief. Black Tom's dark eyes traced the horizon, harpoon at rest like a silent guardian.

Quarterdeck

Killian's gaze shifted to Desylva, her leather cloak dripping with seawater, dark and sodden, her dark hair plastered with spray, her gray eyes glinted like storm clouds kissed by sunlight, her cursed mark pulsing faintly beneath her sleeve as her storm settled into a quiet hum. His voice dropped, warm yet edged with a private dare, "You're a squall worth divin' with, lass, still ridin' with me after that black hell?" Her nod was firm, lips quirking into a sharp, defiant grin, "Aye, don't waste that pearl's luck tryin' to tame me." Her words carried a playful bite, her wildness setting his pulse racing, their bond a force outshining the pearl's dark gleam.

Killian rolled the Pearl in his palm, its black light flaring briefly under the dawn, casting eerie shadows across the deck, its cool weight hummed with fate bent to their will. Desylva leaned against the helm, her storm-touched presence steady, wiping her dagger clean on her cloak, the blade flashing briefly in the sun. Her voice came low, a challenge wrapped in a grin, "Where's that black pearl steerin' us?" Killian's hook tapped the wheel, blue eyes glinting with a pirate's hunger, "Somewhere fierce, right up our alley. Our foes'll choke on their own curses when we twist this tide."

The shadowy figures of Rumpelstiltskin and Regina lingered in his mind, their schemes a persistent thorn, his revenge a steady burn, Desylva's fire beside him hinted at a deeper purpose, woven through their shared storms.

The Jolly Roger surged forward, sails cutting through the dawn-lit sea with a survivor's grace, the horizon stretching wide before them. The crew rallied around their captain and his storm-driven partner, their tale rising from the abyss with each mile gained, a family forged in the deep.

Morning (A few hours later)

The Jolly Roger dropped anchor in a tranquil bay, the sea stretching still and clear, a blue mirror reflecting the sky's warmth, framed by a rocky shore where jagged stones stood like sentinels, seaweed swaying at their bases in the gentle tide. The air carried salt and damp earth, a soothing balm after the abyss's primal chill. The ship rocked faintly, sails furled after the night's ordeal, the deck streaked with drying ichor and Desylva's rain. The dive bell now stowed below in the hold during the morning's sail. Planks creaked as the crew eased into a rare respite.

Main Deck

Smee struck flint to tinder, coaxing a small fire to life in a battered brazier near the helm, its flames crackling as Billy hauled a cask topside, amber rum sloshing into dented mugs.

The crew gathered, exhaustion mingling with relief in their slumped postures, the fire's glow warming their salt-streaked faces.

One-Eyed Jack sprawled on a crate, firelight softening his grizzled features as he spun a tale of spearing a sea beast with a broken oar, his gravelly laugh punctuating the yarn, mug waving in hand. Black Tom sat cross-legged by the railing, harpoon across his knees, scarred hands wiping its tip with a rag, his silence a steady counterpoint to One-Eyed Jack's bluster. Billy strummed his lute, his wiry frame humming with energy as his low, melodic voice wove a ballad of treasures snatched from darkness, the tune lulling Smee into a doze, his head tipping back with a soft snore.

Quarterdeck (Several Hours Later)

Killian leaned against the wheel, the Pearl on the map plate, catching the fire's glow in faint, shimmering pulses. His blue eyes softened as he watched his crew, rum warming his chest, easing the night's weight. Desylva beside him, her leather cloak's singed edges hinting at their plunge, her storm now a quiet rhythm he felt in his bones. Her dark hair hung damp and wild, framing a face tempered by piracy yet softened by the moment, gray eyes catching the fire's flicker as her cursed mark pulsed faintly beneath her sleeve.

Killian nudged the pearl toward her with his hook, a playful glint in his gaze, his voice a rough whisper over Billy's tune, "Feel its luck yet, lass?" Her fingers brushed its smooth surface, lifting it as black light flared briefly in her palm, her grin sharp and curious, "Not swayin' me that easy."

She set it back, the firelight dancing in her storm-lit gaze. Killian slipped the Pearl into his coat pocket, its cool weight secure against his side.

They sat down on a barrel. His shoulder brushed hers, her heat chasing off the lingering chill. He offered his mug, voice a low rumble, "Fought like a cyclone out there. Deserve better than this swill." She took it, fingers grazing his with a spark that quickened his pulse, a soft laugh escaping as the rum's burn hit her throat, her grin widening.

His blue eyes locked with hers, the pearl's eerie shimmer fading against the pull between them. The rum softened his worn edges, while her storm surged beneath his skin, rekindling his fire. His hook hovered near her hand, a silent promise in its stillness, as he leaned closer, murmuring words meant only for her, tender and low. She nodded, gray eyes unwavering, her quiet strength answering without a sound.

Their lips met in a soft collision, igniting the air. A swirl of storm and stillness as the fire's dying embers bathed them in flickering warmth. Her wildness wrapped around him, fierce and untamed, a tide shielding him from the world's chaos, drawing him deeper into her orbit. He threaded his fingers through hers, leading her toward the companionway.

Main Deck

The bay glimmered under a silver moon's rising glow. One-Eyed Jack tilted his head, his eye catching the lantern light as Killian and Desylva slipped away, chuckling roughly. Black Tom grunted, harpoon in hand, while Billy's grin flashed wide, his song shifting, "Cap'n's got a fire tonight. Ship's gonna feel it!"

Killian & Desylva's Cabin

The cabin door slammed shut with a resonant thud, the heavy oak rattling in its frame. The Roger lurched as a towering wave crashed against the hull, sending a tremor through the timbers. The air thick with the faint char of pitch, and the sharp, intoxicating edge of their desire, a primal pulse that drowned the storm's roar.

They kicked off their boots, leather thumping onto the warped planks.

Killian pinned Desylva against the wall with a pirate's force, his hand clamping her waist, fingers digging into the leather. His hook gleamed in the lantern's dim flicker, a crescent of steel snagging the rough hem of her cloak as she surged into him, her storm-gray eyes blazing with hunger that mirrored the wildfire in his chest. Her dark hair spilled wild, tangling in his grip as he tugged her closer, lips crashing into hers with a guttural growl, a fierce collision of teeth and need. Her breath scorched, jagged, nipping his lip to draw a coppery tang, her tongue chasing the sting

with a hungry sweep. Her fingers clawed his coat, nails scraping as she tore it free, the leather thudding to the floor, scattering salt dust across the planks. Killian's hand slid to her cloak, peeling it slowly, the fabric slithering down her shoulders to pool at her feet. Her scent, wildflowers crushed in a gale, rising to mingle with his musk.

Outside, waves slammed harder, a thunderous echo of Desylva's storm magic, her cursed mark pulsing blue beneath her sleeve, summoning a gust that rattled the cabin door's latch, lightning splitting the sky in a jagged, blinding flare, bathing their entwined forms in silver.

The ship rocked wildly, as his palm roamed her frame, tracing the curve of her ribs through damp linen, his touch igniting a slow burn beneath her skin. He tugged her shirt free, the fabric joining the tangled pile at their feet, Her skin, electric under his fingers, sparking where her cursed mark glowed with a pulsing blue fire. She shoved back, her strength a fierce match, fingers ripping his shirt open letting it fall to the floor in a crumpled heap. Her hands roamed his chest, nails grazing the jagged scars etched across his skin, each touch a claim.

She unbuckled his belt with deft, hungry precision, the leather creaking under her pull, the buckle's metallic clink echoing like a struck coin in the charged air. Her fingers brushed his skin with deliberate tease as she yanked his pants down, leather pooling in a chaotic sprawl as he stepped out of them. Their breaths a heated tangle woven with salt and desire. He removed her pants, his hand and hook caressing her thighs with a reverent hunger. His fingers mapping the taut muscle, warm and yielding, while his hook's cool curve traced a tantalizing path along her skin, sending a shiver through her core. His hand lingered, palm pressing firmly against her inner thigh, savoring the heat radiating from her, while his hook grazed her jaw, the steel trailing along her pulse with a featherlight menace that quickened her heartbeat, drawing a fierce, alive grin across her lips as her gray eyes blazed with unyielding fire.

Her magic pulsed, a gentle current flowing through his hook, tingling up his arm with loving warmth, enticing him closer, her gray eyes glinting with a throaty dare, "You up for a wild ride, Cap?" His roguish grin flashed, "Aye, love, the wilder the better," his voice rough with want as he lifted her, her legs wrapping tight around his hips, her heat searing through the cabin's chill.

They stumbled from the wall, bodies pressed in a fevered dance, collapsing onto the bed in a tangle of limbs, the frame slamming against the wall with a crack, wave-and-star runes on the oak faintly glowing, healing splintered wood. The ship pitched, a monstrous swell tilting the world, waves cresting in rhythm with their gasps.

His hand gripped her thigh, hauling her higher as his hook traced her hip, steel grazing her skin, sparking where her magic hummed. She arched into him, her fingers weaving into his hair, tugging as she whispered, "Tease me, pirate, make me beg." He slowed, lips brushing her throat, tasting her thunderous pulse, his hook gliding along her inner thigh, her soft moan urging him on. Her currents pulsed through his hook again, a warm, electric caress that quickened his blood, drawing a low growl.

He entered her, a slow, searing press, her heat enveloping him, tight and molten. Their gazes locked fierce, her storm-gray eyes flashing with defiance and need. Her breath hitched, a sharp gasp as her body yielded, muscles clenching around him. The ship shuddered as a wave crashed broadside, the runes on the bedframe flaring to mend a creaking joint. Her nails bit his shoulders, anchoring her to him. Her magic spiked a lightning flash that bathed her arched form in stark relief, scars glowing faintly under sweat-slick skin.

"Harder, pirate, ride the storm with me," she urged, her voice a taunt laced with need, heels digging into his lower back. He moved with relentless hunger, thrusts deep and rhythmic, each one stoking her cries, sharp and ragged, slicing through the sea's howl. The lantern swung wildly, casting erratic shadows across her tangled hair, the bed sliding an inch as the ship tilted. Her magic flared, wind howling, waves pounding in sync with their pace, the window trembling as lightning pulsed with her gasps. His hook caressed her side, steel tracing her ribs, while her currents tingled through it, a loving spark that fueled his drive.

She shifted, rolling atop him, thighs straddling as she took control. Her movements grew fierce, hips grinding with a rhythm that matched the storm's surge. Her mark glowed brighter, summoning a gust that rattled the sea chest. Her hands braced his chest, thighs tightening. She pushed down, forcing him deeper, her sigh a heated whisper, "You feel so good. Explore my cave, pirate." He moaned, voice rough, "Aye, I'll go all the way in." He thrust upward as she pressed down. He groaned "Oh, you feel so good. They way you take me in and grip me tight."

Their bodies locking in a fevered rhythm, both moaning. Waves surged outside. Runes pulsed on the bedframe. The cabin spun with the ship's violent rocking. The air thick with ozone, salt, and their mingled musk. In a heated struggle, he rolled them, pinning her beneath him. His weight pressing her into the furs. Her nails raking his back, carving red welts as she arched to meet him. His hand fisted her hair, yanking to expose her throat, lips grazing her pulse. His hook tore a gash in the furs, runes healing the fabric with a faint pulse. "You're mine, storm witch. Every gust. Every spar. Mine," he snarled, voice cutting through the wind's wail. "Prove it, claim me," she shot back, breathless. Her legs tightening like a vice, nails biting deeper.

Her magic whipped the storm into a banshee's scream, waves cresting higher, hull shuddering. She sighed, "Faster. … Break me if you can," her cry sharp. He willingly complied, pumping faster, his hips driving with relentless force. Her body shuddered beneath him. Lightning flashing with each thrust. The bedframe groaning under their frenzied pace. Runes pulsing to keep up.

Her release tore through her, a raw, electric scream twinned with a lightning strike that cracked the window's glass, runes glinting repairing it. Her body convulsed, thighs trembling, muscles pulsing around him in tight, rhythmic waves. Her storm-gray eyes locked on his, wild and unguarded, sweat beading on her scars. Her fingers interlocked with his, her cursed mark blazing blue, sending currents surging through his hook, a searing spark that burned with her love.

The ship quaked, waves flooding the deck in a frothy deluge. The bedframe cracking under their thrashing, runes blazing to mend it.

His release erupted, a primal roar as his hips shuddered, heat surging into her in a powerful, pulsing flow, cords tensing in his neck, his grip bruising her hips, hook gouging the bed, runes healing the wood with a radiant glow. Their bodies trembled together, sweat-slick skin pressed tight, breaths a tangled storm of salt and musk, her magic peaking in a final gust that slammed the hull, timbers groaning as the storm's fury crested and broke

The ship steadied. Her magic ebbing. Waves slowing to a restless churn beyond the hull. They snuggled under the furs, limbs entwined. Her fingers tracing his jaw. Hhis hand rested on her waist, hook gently grazing her arm as her currents pulsed softly through it, a tender spark. The lantern settled, its glow softening across her flushed skin. Her hair a damp halo on the bedding. Their mingled scents settling into a quiet hum as the storm's fury faded into the night.

Crew Quarters

(*Simultaneous with the Cabin Scene)*

The quarters shook with the ship's wild pitching, the air thick with the reek of damp hemp and the sour tang of spilled ale, lanterns swinging to cast jittery light across One-Eyed Jack's scowl as he braced against a wall, dice forgotten. "Bloody hell, they're plowin' hard," he barked, the wind's howl seeping through the planks, creaks from above a raucous chorus.

Black Tom gripped his harpoon, scarred arms taut, a silent nod as the ship lurched, his lips twitching at the racket. Smee clutched a beam, hatless head sweating, stammering, "That bed-bangin's rousin' the whole sea!" Billy, torch flickering, laughed nervously, "Aye, her squall's got the Cap'n's helm steerin' wild!"

The crew winced as lightning flashed, a thunderclap shaking the timbers, and Billy sang, his voice rising over the din.

Billy
Oh, the lass with thunder in her soul,
she rocks the ship from pole to pole,
the waves do crash, the winds do bite,
for Cap'n's fire burns the night!

She rides his mast through storm's fierce grip,
he storms her deeps with every dip,
their heat doth spark the sea's wild roar,
t'wixt bed and beam, they shake the floor!

One-Eyed Jack chuckled, a gravelly rasp, “That’s a verse to make the sirens blush!” Smee’s cheeks reddened, muttering, “Hope they don’t sink us with that thrustin’!” Black Tom’s smirk widened, his harpoon steady as the ship rocked.

(After the Cabin Scene)

The quarters stilled as the storm faded, the air cooling with the scent of rain-washed wood, the ship’s rocking softening to a gentle sway. One-Eyed Jack eased onto a hammock, his eye drooping as he muttered, “They’ve burned it out, can sleep now without the sea swallowin’ us whole.” Black Tom leaned his harpoon against the wall, his scarred arms relaxing, a faint smirk tugging his lips as he settled. Billy doused his torch, the hiss mingling with the crew’s yawns, and said, “Aye Storm’s spent. Cap’n tamed her good.”

The crew bunked down, the dim lantern swaying lazily, the night’s calm a reprieve from the tempest’s fury.

Interlude: A Shanty for the Storm (Day 80)

The Jolly Roger swayed gently under a sky streaked with dusk’s gold and violet, sails furled tight against the masts, their edges resting in the calm. The sea lapped at the hull with a soft, rhythmic sigh, a silver mirror stretching to the horizon where the last light bled into the waves. Desylva had carved her storm-touched presence into the ship’s very grain. She’d fought beside Killian through tempests and terrors, her lightning scorching foes, her rain washing blood from the decks, her gray eyes a beacon in the chaos. The crew had grown to see her as their own, a wild force as vital as the oak and iron that held the Jolly Roger together.

Quarterdeck

Killian stood at the helm, his black leather coat unbuttoned, the salt-crusted fabric swaying with the ship’s subtle rock. His hook rested on the wheel’s grain, its steel glinting faintly in the lantern light swinging overhead, casting shadows across his sharp jaw and piercing blue eyes. Those eyes were distant now, lost in a melody he hummed under his breath. A love song he’d been crafting in secret for weeks, a sea shanty for Desylva.

Killian’s lips twitched as he tested a lyric. “*Your spirit’s wild, a magnet’s draw,*” his voice a low murmur, barely audible over the sea’s whisper. His fingers drummed a shanty’s rhythm on the helm, a bounce that echoed the Roger’s sway, the tune rough and nautical yet tender with a longing he’d rarely let slip past his roguish facade. He’d been at it for weeks, scratching out lines with a quill in the dim glow of their cabin’s lantern, in the dawn hours when the sea was still, and everyone was asleep. Words of the ship that bore his name, the dark years before her, and the tempest lass who’d claimed his heart and soul. He’d tucked the scraps away, hidden beneath charts and rum bottles, convinced his deep-in-thought pauses went unnoticed, masked by the creak of rigging, or the wind’s low moan, thinking he was safe from prying eyes, especially hers.

Desylva, with her sharp wit and sharper gaze, had seen him drift into these reveries too often lately. She’d noticed the way he’d pause mid-order, his blue eyes glazing as if seeing something beyond the horizon, or how he’d linger over a tankard, humming a tune she couldn’t place. Her storm-touched soul stirred with curiosity. Her keen senses attuned to his every shift. She’d held her tongue, trusting his pirate’s whims.

As the dusk deepened, she watched him from the deck below. Her leather cloak swaying in the breeze. Her dark hair catching the fading light like ink spilled across her shoulders. Her cursed mark pulsing faintly beneath her sleeve. A quiet storm brewing as she decided to prod the mystery he carried.

Main Deck

The crew bustled about their evening tasks, a familiar hum beneath the Jolly Roger’s quiet. Smee polished a dented tankard with a rag, as he muttered about the rum running low. One-Eyed Jack whittled a splinter of driftwood into a crude fish, his eye glinting with a smirk as he traded barbs with Billy. Black Tom coiled rope with methodical precision, his harpoon resting nearby like a shadow. Billy tuned his battered lute by the mainmast, his freckled fingers plucking a soft chord that mingled with the sea’s sigh.

They'd caught Killian's odd moments too. Smee had once nudged One-Eyed Jack, whispering, "Cap'n's got them moony looks again," met with a gruff chuckle, "Aye, reckon it's the storm lass," but they left it at that, their loyalty to Killian and Desylva a bond forged in blood and grog.

Tonight, they paid him little mind, their chatter a backdrop.

Quarterdeck

Killian stood at the helm, lost in his song, the parchment scraps in the cabin burning a hole in his thoughts. He'd nearly finished it. A shanty to bare his heart. The thrill of her hearing it set his pulse racing beneath his pirate's swagger.

Desylva climbed the steps of the quarterdeck, her boots thudding softly on the planks, her gray eyes glinting with a mix of amusement and suspicion. She'd seen enough of his distracted stares. … The way his hook tapped out rhythms when he thought her asleep. … The faint smudge of ink on his fingers he'd brush off with a grin. … She'd let it slide. Her own wild heart content to watch him unravel whatever he hid. But tonight's hum was too bold to ignore, its lilt tugging at her storm-touched senses.

She stopped beside him, steady against the ship's sway. Her voice cut through the evening hush like a blade through mist. "Whatcha doin'? … Lost in that head o' yours again?" The dryness in her tone carried a thread of warmth, her head tilting as she studied him.

Killian turned, his blue eyes snapping to hers, a roguish smile curling his lips as he leaned closer, his breath warm with rum and sea air. "A secret, lass, you'll see soon enough," he teased, his grin widening, though his heart thumped with the thrill of what he concealed, his hook tapped the wheel once more, the shanty's rhythm pulsing in his veins, Desylva's storm the muse he'd unveil when the time was right, the Jolly Roger their stage, her gray eyes the spark that drove every note.

A Few Nights Later

The Jolly Roger rocked gently under a canopy of stars, sails furled tight, the sea stretching out as a silver mirror beneath the moon's pale glow. The air carried a crisp salt tang, the deck's planks creaking softly underfoot, the ship a haven after months of relentless storms and battles that had tested their mettle.

Main Deck

The crew had settled below, their snores and muffled laughs drifting up through a hatch. A rare stillness wrapping the ship after days of Killian's secretive humming and Desylva's watchful gaze. She'd kept her curiosity reined in since catching him lost in thought, his roguish "secret" lingering in her mind like a tune she couldn't shake, her storm-touched soul sensing something brewing beneath his pirate's grin.

Desylva, alone on the deck, leaned against the railing near the bow. Her leather cloak was draped loosely over her shoulders, the seaweed stitching glinting faintly in the moonlight. Her gray eyes traced the horizon, a quiet wildness in their depths. Her dark hair spilled over her back like ink against the silvered sea. The night felt alive, a hush that held the promise of something unspoken, her bond with Killian a steady pulse beneath the calm.

Killian emerged from the shadows, his boots thudding softly as he approached, his black coat unbuttoned, the lantern light catching the steel of his hook and the sharp lines of his jaw. His blue eyes, piercing even in the dimness, fixed on her with a warmth that softened his usual swagger; he'd spent the day restless, the shanty's final notes set, the parchment scraps now a neatly folded bundle in the cabin, his secret nearly ready to spill.

He stepped behind her, his arms slipping around her waist with a sailor's ease, drawing her back against the warm, solid press of his chest. His hand settled at her waist, steady and sure, while his hook rested lightly on the rail beside her hand, the metal catching the lanternlight like a sliver of moon-steel. His breath brushed her neck, carrying the familiar scent of rum, salt, and worn leather, the scent of every storm they'd weathered together. "Beautiful night, love," he whispered, voice a low murmur against her ear, intimate, rough-edged, unmistakably him, "almost as fierce as you."

Desylva's lips quirked, a flicker of amusement warming the storm in her gray eyes. "Flatterer," she muttered, dry but softened by the rare warmth she let slip only for him. She eased into his hold, her body relaxing against his, her hands resting over the one he kept at her waist. Her storm hummed at the contact, a quiet, living pulse that answered the steady heat of him behind her, their magics brushing like two tides meeting. A pirate's grit in his hold, a storm's wildness in hers, and a warmth between them that had grown into something fierce, steady, and wholly theirs.

The moment wrapped around them like a calm stolen from chaos, a bond forged through battles, tempests, and every hard-won breath between, as wild as the sea and as certain as any oath sworn on a pirate's deck. The silence stretched, a comfortable cocoon around them. The sea's gentle lap and the distant creak of the Roger's timbers the only sounds.

Killian's arm tightened slightly, his fingers tracing the edge of her cloak, his mind racing with the shanty he'd crafted, the verses he'd poured his heart into over weeks of secret toil. He'd rehearsed with the crew in hushed snatches ... Billy tuning his lute, Black Tom testing his pipe, Smee and One-Eyed Jack grumbling but grinning … planning this night when the stars aligned, and the deck was theirs alone.

Desylva tilted her head, her gray eyes catching the starlight, sensing a shift in him. Those distracted moments she'd noticed, his humming at the helm, the ink smudges he'd brushed off with a grin, all bubbling beneath his touch now. She stayed still, her storm-touched soul content to let him unfold whatever he hid, her trust in him a steady anchor, she murmured, "You're schemin' somethin', I feel it," her voice teasing, a challenge he met with a low chuckle, his lips brushing her ear, "Patience, love. I wager you'll like this scheme," his tone hiding the thrill of what was to come, his heart thudding against her back as the moment neared.

The stillness broke as a soft strum echoed from the shadows. Billy's lute, tentative at first, plucking a familiar rhythm that rose, joined by the low, reedy whistle of Black Tom's pipe. A conspiratorial hum Killian had orchestrated.

Desylva's brow arched, her gray eyes narrowing, but she didn't pull away, her hands tightening over his as the music swelled into a shanty's bounce, rough and bold, the kind that had carried them through the darkest nights. Killian's arms tightened further, his breath warm on her neck as he chuckled again, "Seems the lads have a tune tonight," his voice a playful mask for the secret he'd planned … weeks of humming, scribbling, and stolen glances at her … now cresting into this.

The stars gleamed above, and the sea sighed below. The Roger's deck a stage set for two souls bound by storm and sea.

Killian'd waited for this, his shanty ready to spill forth, and with her in his arms, the night became their own, the music a prelude to the love he'd sing into the dark.

He eased away from Desylva's side, the cool night air brushing his skin as he turned her to face him, moonlight glinting off his hook and sparking in his sharp blue eyes.

He squared his shoulders, a grin tugging at his lips despite a flicker of nerves, then let his voice roll out, launching into the shanty he'd pieced together over restless nights. His tone was gravelly yet warm, each line a surge from his chest, a secret he'd guarded now breaking free in a hearty, sea-born cadence.

Killian
Oh, the Jolly Roger cuts the tide,
her sails catch the wind so wide,

From the shadows, Billy's lute chimed in, a lively strum, while Black Tom's pipe threaded a thin, eerie wail. Boots thudded as the crew emerged from the shadows. Smee with a sloshing mug, One-Eyed Jack flashing a crooked grin, Black Tom puffing solemnly, Billy picking with wiry gusto. Their feet stomping along in time.

Killian
Through storm and gale, she's my pride,
a lass o' oak and steel!

Killian's hook slashed the air like a conductor's baton. Desylva stood still, her gray eyes flaring wide as the tune she'd heard him mutter under his breath took full form, a storm waking in her veins.

Killian (swing, voice booming)
Her cannons roar, her timbers creak,
she's braved the deep, the wild, the bleak,

The lantern light caught the scars on his knuckles.

Killian
A pirate's home, my heart's own beat,
she's freedom's wheel to feel!

The deck thrummed as he darkened his tone, raw with memory.

Killian
From realms o' frost to seas o' flame,
she's sailed with me, my claim to fame,
Her decks have borne my blood and shame,
a ship o' dark renown!

Smee whooped, slapping his knee, One-Eyed Jack nodded with a raspy chuckle, Black Tom's pipe kept its steady drone, Billy's strings pushing the rhythm. Killian gazed at Desylva

Killian
Through beastly grasp and cursed call,
she's held me up when I'd near fall,
My Jolly lass, my all in all,
she wears the sea's own crown!

Yo ho, Desylva, storm o' my soul,
with thunder wild, you make me whole,
unfurl the sails and the rum we'll pour,
your tempest's pull I can't ignore!

Smee/One-Eyed Jack/Billy
Her tempest's pull he can't ignore!

Smee's bellow clashed with One-Eyed Jack's gruff bark, Black Tom's pipe and Billy's lute soaring bright. Desylva's breath hitched, a flush creeping up her neck as Killian's voice dropped low, voice thick with the weight of old wounds.

Killian
Afore you came, I sailed alone,
a heart o' ice, a blade o' stone,
Revenge my wind, my only tone,
through nights o' bitter cheer!

Killian (jaw tightens)(growl)
A lass's ghost was all I'd see,
her blood a chain that tethered me,
A pirate lost to misery,
with naught but rage to steer!

Killian (hook glints as raised)
The seas were dark, my days were grim,
a hook for hand, a soul so dim,
I danced with death on every whim,
a rogue without a care!

Killian (softer) (eyes piercing hers)
No light to guide, no hope to find,
a storm o' hate had warped my mind,
Till fate stepped in, so wild, so kind,
and cast you through the air!

Yo ho, Desylva, flame o' my sea,
your lightning calls and captures me,
heave the lines and the grog we'll share,
your storm's a bond beyond compare!

Smee/One-Eyed Jack/Billy
Her storm's a bond beyond compare!

A wave of sound crashed over the deck. Killian stepped closer, voice flaring, hook slashing as if carving the memory.

Killian
On that grim rock, I saw you cling,
a lass o' fire, the sea's own sting,
Your gray eyes flashed, a wild thing,
and struck me where I stood!

The crew's boots pounded. Smee splashing rum, One-Eyed Jack's grin widening.

Killian (grin wide)
You fought the waves, you cursed the tide,
a storm in flesh, no fear to hide,
From that first glance, my heart complied,
you woke my frozen blood!

Her storm churned, a faint pulse flickering under her sleeve as he crooned,

Killian (lean in)
Your lightning cracked, your rain did pour,
a tempest lass I'd ne'er ignore,
You stole me whole on that grim shore,
my vengeance swept away!

Killian (voice lifting higher)
Now side by side, we sail the sea,
your storm's the flame that burns in me,

Killian (bold and tender)
Desylva, love, eternally,
my heart's your own to stay!

Yo ho, Desylva, heart o' my gale,
your thunder binds where words might fail,
drop the sails and the rum we'll cheer,
your pull's a force that draws me near!

Smee/One-Eyed-Jack/Billy
Her pull's a force that draws him near!

Killian (husky) (hook tracing an arc)
Your spirit's wild, a magnet's draw,
a force o' nature, deep and raw,
I feel your pull through every squall,
a bond I can't deny!

Billy’s lute raced, Black Tom’s pipe wailed hauntingly, Smee’s mug banged the rail, One-Eyed Jack’s stomp shook the planks. Killian edged closer.

Killian
Your gray eyes lock, my soul’s in thrall,
a storm that humbles Hook’s own call,
Together forged through fight and fall,
we’re tethered, you and I!

The crew’s fervor peaked.

Killian (raw)
No sea too rough, no wind too strong,
your tempest drags my heart along,
A pull like tides, it sings our song,
a love that won’t unwind!

Desylva’s gray eyes shimmered.

Killian (softly)
Your lightning’s spark, my guiding star,
your storm’s my home where’er we are,
Desylva, lass, my soul you spar,
our fates forever twined!

Yo ho, Desylva, queen o’ my tide,
your stormy soul’s where I reside,
hoist the red and the grog we’ll sing,
your love’s the pull that reigns me king!

Smee/One-Eyed Jack/Billy
Her love’s the pull the reigns him king!

The last note lingered. Rough and warm. The sea’s murmur a quiet echo as Desylva stood breathless. Her storm meeting his sea in a charged stillness. His muttered tunes, the secret he’d nursed, now a song stitching their tale into the ship’s timbers. Her lips twitched, a faint smile cracking her steel, heart thudding as his voice wove their past into the fire now blazing between them. His chest heaved from the song’s fervor, his blue eyes fierce yet soft, blazing with a mix of triumph and vulnerability, his love laid bare.

Desylva stared at him. The late-night humming. The distracted looks at the helm. The ink stains he'd brushed from his fingers. The scraps of parchment she'd nearly questioned more than once. Weeks.

Her breath caught. "You've been workin' on this for weeks." Killian's grin turned unexpectedly sheepish. "Aye."

Something warm and unguarded flickered across her features. Her storm-mark pulsed softly beneath her sleeve. "You ridiculous pirate."
The crew exploded into cheers. Smee thrusting his mug skyward, “To the storm lass!” One-Eyed Jack slapping Billy’s shoulder, “Proper tune!” Black Tom’s pipe falling silent.

The starlight cast a silver glow over the deck.

Killian stepped closer, his black coat swaying. Her gaze held his, a spark of something unguarded flickering there. His hook brushed her arm as he pulled her in, his lips crashing into hers with a kiss that was fierce and tender, tasting of salt, rum, and the wild sea they’d conquered together. Desylva’s hands gripped his coat, her gray eyes fluttering shut, her storm surging to meet his sea. The world shrank to the heat of his mouth, the thud of his heart against hers. The deck trembling faintly beneath their boots.

The crew's cheers erupted, breaking the spell. Smee raised his tankard, sloshing rum over the rim, his ruddy face split with a grin as he muttered, "Cap'n's gone soft, aye, but she's a storm worth singin' for!" One-Eyed Jack clapped Billy's back, his grizzled laugh booming, "Aye, lad, ye strummed her legend proud, reckon she's worth it!" Black Tom nodded silently, his scarred hands pocketing his pipe, a rare glint of approval in his eye. Billy, freckles aglow in the torchlight, smirked, "Back to me tunes below, but that was a fine one, Cap'n!" Their boots thumped the planks as they shuffled off, their mutters and chuckles fading. Smee's "Told Jack they'd spark somethin' fierce" trailing behind, One-Eyed Jack's "Aye, and a shanty to boot!" lost to the wind.

Killian pulled back from the kiss, his breath coming ragged and hot against her lips. His blue eyes, deep as the midnight sea, locked on Desylva's with a raw, unguarded hunger that made her pulse quicken. Her storm-gray gaze met his, soft yet sharp as lightning, a rare vulnerability flickering in their depths after hearing her name roared in the chorus, the shanty's echo still thrumming through her like a tempest's heartbeat.

The deck was theirs alone now, the crew vanished below, the stars wheeling overhead like a canopy of scattered diamonds, the sea's sigh a quiet, intimate hymn to the love he'd poured into every note of the song he'd crafted in secret. His hook rested lightly on her waist, cool steel a thrilling contrast to the heat of his palm cupping her cheek, thumb tracing her lower lip with deliberate slowness, as if savoring the taste of her lingering on his skin. The song's echo still thrumming in his veins after weeks of crafting it in secret, her presence the muse that had driven every note.

Desylva's lips quirked into a slow, seductive smile, a rare softness breaking through her usual steel armor, her voice low and husky, laced with emotion and a teasing edge that sent a shiver down his spine. "So this is what you've been hidin', pirate—those far-off looks, the sneaky hummin' when you thought I wasn't listenin'?" Her gray eyes searched his, a challenge wrapped in warmth, her cursed mark pulsing faintly against his chest, stirring a gentle breeze that tugged at his coat and carried the salt of the sea mingled with her own wild, ozone scent.

Killian nodded, his grin turned sheepish yet proud, his thumb brushing her cheekbone in a feather-light caress that made her lean into his touch, his voice rough with affection and a flirtatious growl. "Aye, love, every bloody note for you—scribbled in the dark while you slept beside me, your breath on my skin drivin' me mad, hummed under my breath when I stole glances at you on deck, wonderin' if you'd catch me." His blue eyes glinted with the thrill of the secret unveiled, the shanty a vow forged in battles shared and quiet nights stolen, his hook tracing lazy circles on her waist, the cool metal sending sparks through her. "Worth every moment, seein' that fire in your eyes now."

The Jolly Roger swayed gently, her timbers creaking as if in approval, the night wrapping them in a stillness that felt alive with their shared history.

Desylva's smile widened, mischief sparking like lightning in her storm-touched gaze, her body pressing closer, breasts brushing his chest as she kissed him again—deeper this time, fierce and hungry, lips parting to taste him fully, rum and salt and pure pirate fire. Her fingers threaded through his dark hair, tugging just hard enough to draw a low groan from his throat, pulling him impossibly closer as her cursed mark pulsed against his chest, a warm thrum that matched the heat building between them.

She broke the kiss with a gasp, her lips grazing his as she murmured, voice thick with love and seduction, "You're a fool, Killian Jones. … A sentimental, silver-tongued fool who composes shanties for his storm witch when he could've just taken her to bed weeks ago." Her tone teased, but her eyes blazed with raw emotion, her hand sliding down his arm to capture his hook, fingers stroking the cool curve seductively, tracing its edge with deliberate slowness that made him hiss.

He laughed, a low, rumbling sound that vibrated through her, his arm tightening around her waist, pulling her flush against him, the hard evidence of his desire pressing insistently through his breeches. "Sentimental? Aye, guilty. And I'd weave a thousand more verses just to burn with you like this, love. Feel you tremblin' against me. Your storms callin' mine." His voice dropped to a growl of pure devotion, his hook tracing the line of her spine with teasing lightness, raising goosebumps along her skin as his hand tangled in her hair, tilting her head back to expose her throat, lips brushing hot kisses there, tasting the salt and heat of her pulse.

She pulled back, her gray eyes blazing with a fire that matched his own and took his hook fully in her hand. She stroked it with slow, deliberate seduction. Her fingers gliding along the curve, thumb circling the tip in a way that made his breath hitch, her gray eyes locked on his with wicked promise. "Guess I owe you a proper payment for all

that hard work, pirate," she purred, her voice a sultry whisper that sent heat coiling through him, her body arching against his, breasts pressing fuller, nipples hardening through the fabric.

He raised an eyebrow, his grin turning downright sinful. His hand slid to cup her ass, squeezing with possessive flair. "Payment, eh? And what does my tempest think a fair price for a shanty sung from the heart?" His tone dripped with flirtation, his hook teasing the hem of her shirt, cool steel grazing her thigh.

She smiled, slow and dangerous, her fingers trailing down his chest to hook in his belt, tugging him closer, voice pure seduction. "Whatever you deem fair, Captain." Her storm hummed with anticipation as she guided him across the deck toward the companionway, her cloak swaying with each sultry step. Moonlight caught in her dark hair like a storm cloud veiling the sea, promising thunder below.

His heart thudded hard in his chest, and his blue eyes stayed fixed on her with undisguised hunger as the stars winking approval above. The shanty had bared his soul, and now Desylva's storm was leading him home.

Killian & Desylva's Cabin

The cabin door clicked shut, the Jolly Roger lurching as a wave crashed against the hull, lantern light casting golden shadows across walls, the air thick with their rising desire. Desylva kicked off her boots, leather thumping on the planks, and peeled her cloak with a slow flourish, the sodden leather slithering to the floor, her tunic torn free to bare a scarred, tempest-forged body, her pants tugged down with a swift pull, leather sliding over her thighs to join the pile, gray eyes blazing with storm's fire, dark hair spilling like ink over her shoulders, her cursed mark pulsing blue beneath her sleeve.

His boots thudded down, his black leather coat shed with a rustle of fabric, hitting the floor in a dark heap. His shirt ripped off in one swift motion, baring a chest etched with centuries of scars, pale lines crisscrossing taut muscle, glistening with a sheen of sweat in the lantern light. His pants yanked down to join the pooling pile, the leather sliding over his hips with a soft hiss, freeing his thick, hardening length to the steamy air.

Their breaths came sharp and ragged, mingling with the roar of waves crashing outside, the ship rocking as if eager for what came next. His hook glinted wickedly as he moved to unclasp it, but her hand shot out like lightning, gripping his wrist with fierce strength, her nails digging into his skin, her voice low and sultry, dripping with command and hunger. "What do you think you're doing, pirate? That hook stays. You know how much I crave its wicked bite. Cold steel on my skin while you burn me from the inside. Don't you dare remove it." Her storm-gray eyes sparked with daring heat, challenging him, lips parted in a seductive smirk that made his blood surge. He grinned, blue eyes fierce with love honed by weeks humming her shanty at the helm in secret, his voice a rough growl of devotion and desire. "As you command, my tempest. Wouldn't dream of denyin' you that thrill."

The ship rocked, lightning flashing through the window. She stepped in close, the lantern's glow catching her storm-blue pulse beneath her sleeve as she seized his jaw in one firm hand. The ship rolled with a deep groan, timbers shivering as if echoing the tension between them. Her storm-gray eyes held his, steady and commanding, a quiet challenge simmering beneath the surface. Her lips crashing into his with a hunger tasting of rum-soaked nights and their claimed sea, a kiss of teeth and need. Her hands roamed his chest, tracing scars with reverence, his fingers gripping her arms. Their breaths urgent. The sea's roar a counterpoint to the tempest within.

Killian's breath hitched, his grin sharpening. She cut it off with a low murmur, soft, sure, and edged with that familiar authority that always made his pulse jump. "On your back, pirate."

She guided him, a hand at his chest, She took a deliberate step forward, her presence pressing him back as the Jolly Roger rocked beneath them. He yielded with a rough exhale, letting her steer him across the cabin. Lanternlight slid over his scars, over the tension in his shoulders, over the way his eyes never left hers.

The backs of his legs met the edge of the bed. Her mark flared as she gave one final, decisive push, and he dropped onto the furs with a low, breathless laugh, propping himself on his elbows. She stood at the bed's edge storm-lit, sure of herself, the cabin's shadows bending around her like a bowing wind.

She climbed onto the mattress with slow, deliberate grace, knees sinking into the furs on either side of his hips, her dark hair spilling forward like a gathering storm as she leaned over him. The ship rocked again, lantern swaying,

the world narrowing to the quiet command in her eyes as she settled above him. Her cursed mark glowing brighter, a blue flicker pulsing with her storm-touched soul. Her gray eyes bored into his as she reached down, guiding him with deliberate care, positioning him at her core, her breath hitching as she pressed down, hips sinking, enveloping him in molten heat. “Push hard, pirate,” she urged, voice a husky command. He thrust upward, muscles tensing. Their bodies locked as she rode him, her thighs gripping tight.

“Aye, love,” he growled, “You feel so good. … Ride me faster. … Take all of me!” his words rough, his hook caressing her thigh, cool steel sparking against her skin. She leaned forward, fingers stroking his hook, sending loving currents tingling up his arm, exciting him as her mark flared, a gust rattling a windowpane. “You are mine, pirate,” she whispered, breath hot on his neck. He smirked, “All yours. Now, give me your storm.”

Her rhythm grew fierce, the bed creaking, runes stabilizing, lantern swaying with the ship’s pitch, waves surging in sync with their gasps. Their passion danced, honed by trust, her lightning sparking in her touch, his pulse roaring like tides, the cabin humming with their energy, the shanty’s magnetic pull now a union forged in this storm.

Her hands gripped his shoulders, nails biting deep into muscle as she rode him with wild, urgent abandon, her storm-touched power flaring in the scorching heat of her skin, slick with sweat that beaded and rolled down her curves.

He arched beneath her, a primal growl rumbling from his chest, his hand sliding up her back with possessive fire, fingers tracing the sweat-damp curve of her spine, feeling every shiver ripple through her. His hook hovered teasingly over her lower back, the cool steel barely grazing her skin in slow, deliberate circles, denying pressure as she rose and fell, raising goosebumps and sending electric thrills racing to her core, making her grind down harder in frustrated need. "Like that wicked tease, love?" he rasped playfully, voice thick with seduction, blue eyes blazing. "My hook dancin' on your skin, cold bite makin' you burn hotter. … Want more of it, tempest? Beg for my steel to press, and I'll give you what you crave."

She moaned, hips rolling faster, her voice a husky purr laced with challenge. "Aye, pirate. Tease me more, make me ache for that cold bite... I want it pressin' hard, drivin' me wild while I ride you." Her words spurred him, his hook pressing firmer into her back, the steel's edge scraping lightly as she ground down, the thrill making her clench tighter around him.

Passion surged like a rogue wave, and he rolled her beneath him in one fluid, forceful motion, flipping her onto the furs with a hungry snarl, the bedframe groaning deeply as runes glowed, mending a splintered edge with a faint, magical hum. Desylva sighed breathlessly, her voice a husky tease thick with need, “Singin’ me a song don’t mean you own me, pirate... but damn if it don’t feel right—your voice still echoin’ in my blood, makin’ me ache for you, especially that wicked hook of yours teasin' me senseless. Don't hold back. Give me everything."

He lifted her legs to his shoulders, her thighs trembling under his bruising grip, skin hot and slick as he positioned himself, his hook sliding up her calf with deliberate slowness, the cool steel grazing her inner thigh in feather-light circles, hovering near her slick heat without touching, scraping lightly to leave faint red trails that made her gasp and clench in aching anticipation. "Feel that cold tease, tempest?" he murmured seductively, blue eyes blazing. "My hook circlin' where you're drippin' for me. … Want it to press? To bite just enough to make you shatter, love?"

"Yes. Gods, yes," she breathed desperately, hips arching toward the hook, her voice seductive and pleading. "Press it there, pirate. Tease my heat with that steel while you thrust. Make me burn for both." Her affirmation ignited him, his hook pressing firmly against her inner thigh near her core, the cold bite contrasting his scorching entry as he thrust into her with rough, relentless force, deep, punishing strokes that stretched her tight heat, her body rocking against him, breasts bouncing with each powerful surge, her slick walls clenching greedily around his thick length.

His hook pinned one wrist above her head, steel biting just enough to thrill without pain, holding her captive as he drove deeper,

He released her wrist to tease her breast, circling the nipple with the curved tip in slow, denying swirls, the cold metal making it pebble harder as she arched and whimpered. "Yes. That's it, pirate," she gasped, voice desperate and seductive, gray eyes wild with fire. "Take your payment in full. Claim every inch of me. Use that hook to tease me mad while you ruin me. Make me beg for its bite deeper."

The timbers shuddered violently as waves crashed broadside, the ship quaking with their rhythm.

His hook caressed her jaw, cold steel grazing her racing pulse, sending electric shivers through her as he leaned in, voice a dark, seductive growl. "Don't worry, love. Gonna claim it all, every slick, throbbing inch. This is the sort of payment I'm gonna savor... slow and deep until you're screamin' my name again. … Feelin' my hook mark you as mine. … Teasin' till you can't take it."

She stroked his hook, her fingers gliding along the curve with deliberate seduction, currents surging through it from her mark, a warm, tingling spark that fueled his drive, making him harden impossibly deeper inside her, drawing a ragged groan from his throat as the steel vibrated against her skin, her magic dancing along its edge.

“Don’t stop, pirate. Keep going,” she begged, voice raw and desperate, gray eyes wild as she arched into him, pressing closer, her nails raking fiery trails down his back, drawing beads of blood that mingled with sweat. His hook released her breast only to slide down, pinning her thigh wide open, the steel's edge pressing firmly into her flesh with teasing circles, hovering near her clit without full contact, the cold bite contrasting his scorching thrusts, making her clench and moan louder, slickness flooding as denial built her need. "Yes. Tease me with it, Killian. Make me burn for that cold steel while you pound me," she purred desperately, her tone playful yet pleading. "Want it circlin'. Drivin' me over the edge."

"You want my hook teasin' your secrets, makin' you drip even more?" he growled back, voice thick with lust, his hook circling closer to her swollen clit in slow, denying swirls, the cool tip barely grazing, sending jolts through her. "Yes. Do it, pirate, tease me till I shatter," she demanded breathlessly, her body writhing.

He obliged, the hook's curved tip pressing lightly against her clit in rhythmic circles, the cold steel vibrating with her magic's spark, intensifying every thrust as he pounded harder.

He growled her name “Des” his thrusts deepening, relentless. The ship quaked as lightning pulsed with each surge. Her murmured tease turned to a plea, "Killian! Dive deeper. I need you to break this storm. … Faster. Harder. … Make me shatter with that hook teasin' me till I can't breathe."

He pulled her roughly to him, hips slamming as he pressed hard into her, pounding with primal fury, the wet slap of skin echoing, her core soaking him in hot, slick floods, his hook scraping her inner thigh with teasing pressure, circling closer to her clit in slow denial before pressing firmly, the cold bite heightening her frenzy, leaving red lines that burned deliciously.

She screamed his name, "Yes. Oh gods, Killian. My storm is reachin' its peak!" He smiled wickedly, reveling in the sensation of her clenching heat, so tight and wet, soaking him as her walls fluttered and gripped. His hook pressed harder against her clit with a final teasing swirl, the steel's bite intensifying her spasms, as he pounded into her. "You are so slick, love. … Let it go, Des. … Let your storm free. … Come for me. Drench me in it while my hook drives you wild." He pushed into her hard, fast, holding deep as her storm started to break.

Their bodies surged, her lightning crackling across their joined skin, his sea rising in a tidal wave of heat. The Roger’s hull groaning in tune with their rhythm, a ship bearing their love as it had their battles.

The storm peaked as her climax tore through her like a bolt from the heavens. A wild, electric scream erupted from her throat, twinned with a blinding lightning strike that splintered the stern window’s enchanted glass in a sharp, crystalline crack. Shards glinted in the flash, suspended for a breathless instant before the wave-and-star runes flared with radiant silver light, pulsing warmly as they fused the fractures, the glass resealing seamlessly.

Her body convulsed, thighs quaking with uncontrollable tremors, inner walls spasming in tight, rhythmic pulses around his length, milking him desperately as hot juices gushed in a slick, torrid flood down his shaft and balls, coating them in her essence. Sweat beaded on her scarred skin, glistening in the lightning's afterglow. Her storm-gray eyes locking on his, unguarded, vulnerable, blazing with raw love, as her fingers clasped his tightly. Her cursed mark erupting in a brilliant blue blaze that sent searing currents surging through his hook, a burning spark of pure, electric devotion that fueled his own rising fire.

The ship quaked. Waves flooding the deck in a frothy deluge. The bedframe cracked, runes blazing to mend it.

His release tore through him like a broadside. A primal roar erupting as his hips shuddered violently, thick, hot seed spurting in powerful, pulsing ropes deep inside her, filling her to overflowing with each jet, slick warmth spilling out around him. His muscles clenched in waves of ecstasy, cords straining in his neck. His grip bruising her hips, hook gouging her thigh with final, intense pressure, teasing circles turning to a possessive press, before easing.

Their bodies trembled. Sweat-slick skin pressed tight. Their breaths a tangled storm of salt, musk, and ozone. Her magic peaked in a final gust that slammed the hull. Timbers groaning in sympathy, as the storm crested and broke.

They lay tangled in rough sheets. His arms wrapping her tight. His chest heaved against hers. His hook caressed her arm with tender coolness, tracing lazy patterns. As he pulled her down, his lips met hers in a softer, lingering kiss, tasting the remnants of her storm on her tongue. “You’re mine, love. The only harbor I want to dock in,” he murmured, voice rough with raw emotion.

She collapsed against him, head on his chest, gray eyes half-lidded, listening to his heartbeat thunder like waves. Her storm a quiet hum beneath his tide, fingers tracing his scars with loving reverence. “And you’re mine, pirate. My anchor and tether in every gale,” she whispered, voice soft with sated love, nestling closer as the ship settled. Her breath slowed, hand over his heart, fingers tracing a scar.

She murmured, “Forever,” her voice soft, a rare vulnerability in her storm-touched gaze, matching his vow. His hand covered hers, “Forever.” His blue eyes traced her face, memorizing the woman who’d leaned into him at the rail, teased his scheming, stood breathless as he sang her legend.

The lantern dimmed, light pooling in the cabin’s corners, the sea’s sigh a quiet hymn. They stayed entwined, bodies pressed close, the heat of their lovemaking fading into a warmth lingering in their bones. The Roger’s gentle rock a soothing pulse, waves lulling beyond the hull.

Frostwild’s Seal: The Quest for the Icebound Reliquary (Day 100)

The Jolly Roger sliced through a mist-laden sea, her sails taut against a chill wind that carried whispers of frost from distant, unseen shores. The runes carved into her oak hull glowed faintly, shedding the creeping ice that clung to lesser ships. Every plank hummed with Desylva’s storm-touched presence — the ship had known her rain, her fury, her defiance — and the magic woven into her bones answered her even now, a low thrum beneath the deck.

Above, the sky sagged under the weight of bruised gray clouds, their edges tinged with the promise of snow. Dim light filtered through the haze, casting the crew in pale silver as they gathered mid-deck, breath fogging in the cold. The sea around them was a shifting mirror of steel, ripples whispering of lands where winter ruled with a witch’s hand

Main Deck

Smee, bundled in a patched coat that had seen more storms than sense, rubbed his gloved hands together. “Heard tell o’ a treasure in Narnia’s wilds, Cap’n,” he muttered, voice trembling with both fear and excitement. “An Icebound Reliquary, sealed by some frost witch ages back. Locked in a frozen waste.” One-Eyed Jack leaned against a cannon, torch flickering in the wind. “They say it holds magic folks’d kill for,” he growled. “Bound in ice no fire can touch.”

Quarterdeck

Killian stood at the helm, black leather coat swaying, hook resting on the wheel, blue eyes glinting with a pirate’s hunger, two centuries of danger sharpening his gaze.

Main Deck

The crew’s voices rose over the wind’s moan. Black Tom stood near the rail, harpoon gleaming in torchlight, nodding once, a silent, steady agreement. Billy shivered in his thin jacket, freckles bright against the cold. “Folks whisper it’s hidden in a frostwild,” he piped. “Ice cliffs taller’n masts, winds that’ll freeze yer bones, guarded by beasts o’ snow and fang!” Smee’s eyes widened. “Beasts, ye say? Reckon it’s a tale to scare lads, b-but if it’s real, Cap’n… what’s

it hold?" One-Eyed Jack snorted. "Magic, ye dolt. A shard o' power, sealed by that witch to keep it from dark hands — or so the yarn goes."

Quarterdeck

Killian tilted his head, the legend stirring his blood. His lips curled into a roguish grin, hook tapping the wheel as he traced the tale in his mind. A reliquary locked in ice. Magic rumored to bind or break curses. A prize of peril and promise. He'd sailed through worse with this crew. Their scars proof of mettle. And Desylva's storm had turned tides more times than he could count. Her fire whetted his appetite for the chase, her gray eyes were a beacon he'd follow into any freeze.

Desylva leaned against the starboard rail, leather cloak crusted with salt, dark hair whipping across her face. Her cursed mark pulsed faintly, a blue glow flickering with storm magic as the legend sank into her bones. She'd heard tales like this over rum-soaked nights, but this one tugged — its sealed magic echoing her tempest, calling to something deep and wild within her. She glanced at Killian, catching his roguish smile — the one that meant he'd dive into this frostwild without hesitation. And she'd be right there beside him, her storm a match for his sea.

"Frostwild, eh?" she mused, voice dry, arms crossed. "Sounds like a place I'd fit. You sure you're not just chasin' a cold bed?" Smee chuckled, tankard clinking. "She's got ye there, Cap'n!" Killian's laugh rang out, cutting through the wind. "With you along, it'll be warm enough. Reckon you'd thaw any ice afore I freeze!" Her grin flashed, sharp and wild.

Main Deck

The crew's banter swirled, the Jolly Roger trembling with anticipation as Killian's decision brewed.

The deck buzzed with motion. One-Eyed Jack checked his cannon, muttering, "Ice'll crack like bone under this." Black Tom ran a whetstone along his harpoon, the scrape steady. Billy scampered up the rigging, torch casting shadows. "Sails holdin' steady, Cap'n! Wind's with us!" Smee fumbled a faded map. "Narnia's frostwild's a maze. Cliffs and caves. Winds that'll strip yer flesh if ye ain't quick!"

Quarterdeck

Killian's hook tapped faster, mind racing. The Icebound Reliquary. A chest of frost holding a shard of ancient magic. A curse whispered through the ages. Danger singing to his pirate's heart. He'd faced beasts with Desylva's lightning at his back. Her presence was a fire through the darkest nights. He straightened, voice roaring across the deck, "We've danced with death and won, lads. This reliquary's ours! Ready the ship!"

Main Deck

The Jolly Roger shifted course toward Narnia's icy shores, runes pulsing to melt creeping frost.

The crew's cheers rose like a storm. One-Eyed Jack growled from below, "To the frostwild, then!" Black Tom's harpoon gleamed. Billy piped, "Treasure's waitin'!" They moved as one, preparations a flurry, the Jolly Roger trembling with purpose.

Quarterdeck

Killian gripped the wheel, hook glinting, heart pounding with the chase.

The reliquary was more than a prize. It was a test. A blend of danger and magic. Desylva's storm a flame against the frost. Their shared life drove him. The ship surged, the frostwild's legend a call they'd answer with steel and storm.

Narnia (Several Hours Later)

The Jolly Roger anchored off Narnia's frostwild coast, her hull scraping against drifting ice floes that groaned like living things beneath the waves. The runes carved into her oak planks flared brighter than before, shedding frost

that clung stubbornly to the wood, as though the winter itself were trying to claim her. Each pulse of silver light pushed back the creeping freeze, but the cold pressed harder, testing the ship's enchantments with a witch's patience.

The sea around them had transformed into a field of shattered mirrors — jagged floes drifting in slow, ominous patterns, their edges glowing faintly with unnatural blue light. The wind carried a sharp sting, a breath of ancient magic that whispered across the deck and tugged at cloaks and hair. Snow spiraled down from a sky choked with storm-clouds, each flake heavy with the frostwild's power.

Quarterdeck

Desylva stepped to the rail, her gray eyes narrowing as her cursed mark pulsed in answer. The frostwild recognized her storm. The air tightened. The wind shifted. The sea hissed where her magic brushed it. "Feels like it's watchin' us," she murmured. Killian joined her, coat snapping in the gale, hook glinting as he braced against the rail. "Aye," he said, voice low. "And it ain't pleased."

Main Deck

The crew moved with tense purpose. Smee fumbled with the anchor line, muttering prayers under his breath. One-Eyed Jack lit a torch, its flame guttering in the cold. Black Tom tested the harpoon line, jaw set. Billy scampered along the rigging, cheeks flushed, calling down, "Ice's thicker ahead, Cap'n! Like teeth waitin' to bite!"

The frostwild coast loomed before them. A jagged wall of ice cliffs rising higher than the Roger's tallest mast. Their surfaces glinted with trapped lightning, frozen storms caught in the crystal layers. Fissures ran through the cliffs like veins, exhaling gusts of wind so cold they stung the skin from yards away. A distant roar echoed across the ice, low and resonant, shaking the floes beneath the ship.

Smee froze. "W-wargs?" he whispered. Desylva's storm crackled faintly along her arms. "Something big," she said. "And close." Killian's grin sharpened, hunger and thrill mixing in his eyes. "Good. Means the reliquary's real."

The Jolly Roger shuddered as another gust slammed into her hull, runes flaring to keep the frost at bay. The ship felt smaller here, dwarfed by the frostwild's vast, ancient presence, as though they'd sailed into the lungs of a sleeping beast.

Quarterdeck

Killian straightened, voice ringing across the deck. "Ready yourselves! Frostwild's got teeth, and we're sailin' straight into 'em!"

The crew braced.

Killian lingered beside her for a breath, the frostwild wind snapping at his coat as he watched the cliffs pulse with trapped lightning. The sea groaned beneath them, ice shifting in slow, ominous patterns. A fresh gust slammed into the Jolly Roger's bow, tilting the deck just enough to make the rigging creak.

Killian's jaw tightened as he muttered. "Best get back to the helm before she decides to buck." He brushed his fingers along Desylva's arm, a fleeting touch, a promise, then stepped away from the rail. His boots thudded across frost-dusted planks as he moved toward the helm, coat snapping behind him.

He settled at the helm. The ship responding to his presence, runes along the wheel flickering awake as though recognizing the captain's return. The frostwild wind had risen again, rattling the deck with a furnace-breath that made the sails shiver. Killian braced both hands on the helm, eyes narrowed at the jagged frostwild coast. "Which way's the witch hidin' her treasure?" he muttered.

Desylva stepped beside him, storm humming faintly under her skin. Her cursed mark flickered once… then again… then flared in a steady pulse, tugging her gaze toward a narrow break between two towering ice cliffs. "There," she said, voice low. "My storm feels somethin'. A pull. Magic buried deep. That pass leads toward it."

Killian's grin sharpened as he spun the wheel. "Good enough for me."

Main Deck

The Roger groaned as she turned toward the indicated path. The runes along her hull flared silver, melting frost that clawed at her planks. Ice floes scraped along her sides as she pushed forward, the sea narrowing into a corridor of jagged blue walls.

The crew moved with tense purpose. Smee clung to the rail, muttering, "Cold's gettin' meaner, Cap'n…" Black Tom steadied the harpoon line. Billy shouted from the rigging, "Ice thickenin' ahead!"

Quarterdeck

Desylva's mark pulsed brighter, the glow syncing with the frostwild's breath. "Closer," she murmured. "Keep goin'."

Killian steered through the tightening passage, the cliffs rising higher, the wind sharpening into a knife-edge. The sea beneath them darkened, the water thick with frost.

After a few minutes, Desylva's mark flared in a sudden, brilliant surge. "Stop," she said sharply. "Here."

Killian hauled the wheel, the Roger slowing as the runes along her hull pulsed in protest. "Drop anchor!" he roared. Desylva stepped to the rail, storm gathering around her like a living cloak. "The reliquary's close," she said. "I can feel it."

Main Deck

The Jolly Roger settled into the narrow frostwild passage, anchor chains groaning as they locked into the ice-choked seabed. The runes along her hull pulsed steadily now, holding back the creeping frost that clawed at her planks. The ship rocked gently in the frigid water, the cliffs looming on either side like jagged blue sentinels.

The crew gathered, tense and ready. Smee clutched a rope, muttering, "Cold's thick as soup…" Black Tom tested his harpoon line. Billy peered over the rail, freckles stark against the frost. "Shore's close, Cap'n — just a stretch o' ice away!"

Quarterdeck

Killian stepped from the helm joining her at the rail, voice low but certain. "Whatever's callin' you, love… it's close." Desylva leaned over the rail, her breath fogging in the cold. Her cursed mark pulsed again. Brighter this time. Sending a faint ripple of stormlight across her skin. "Aye," she murmured. "This is the place. We go from here. This is where we cross." Killian nodded once. "Right then. Let's make ourselves a path."

Desylva lifted her hands. Her cursed mark blazing, storm magic coiling up her arms like living lightning. Frost gathered in the air, spiraling into a shimmering arc that stretched from the deck to the icy beach beyond. Ice crystals wove themselves into a smooth, sloped bridge, its surface gleaming like polished glass, curving downward in a graceful descent toward the frozen ground.

Along the span, her storm etched subtle footholds, shallow ridges of frost shaped like wind-carved grooves, giving traction without breaking the bridge's elegant sweep. Blue sparks crackled along the edges, jagged frost-spikes forming a protective rail that hummed with her tempest's pulse.

The bridge settled into place with a resonant crackle, frost mist drifting from its surface.

Desylva smirked, gray eyes glinting as she called over her shoulder, "Solid enough for you? Or shall I carve handrails too?" Her voice carried challenge and warmth, stormlight flickering across her cheekbones. Her smirk lingered as the stormlight faded from her cheekbones, the bridge's glow reflecting in her gray eyes.

Killian chuckled under his breath, shaking his head as he stepped back from the quarterdeck rail. “Come on then, love,” he said, voice warm with challenge. “Let’s see your handiwork up close.” Desylva fell into stride beside him, cloak snapping in the frostwild wind.

Main Deck

Together they crossed the deck. Killian slowed as they neared the bridge, the gale tugging at his coat, the frostwild roaring beyond.

Bridge

He approached the bridge first, coat snapping in the gale. The sloped frost-glass span hummed beneath him, storm-etched footholds glowing faintly as if recognizing Desylva’s magic. He tested the first few feet, his boot crunching lightly on the ridges. The bridge held firm, pulsing with a quiet, living energy. He cast her a roguish grin, hook glinting. “Sturdy as your fire, love.”

Desylva stepped beside him, cloak billowing, her cursed mark pulsing in rhythm with the bridge’s glow. The frostwild wind shifted as she set foot on the span. A low groan echoing through the cliffs, as though the land itself felt her storm. “Feels like it knows we’re comin’,” she murmured. Killian’s grin sharpened. “Good. Let it know we’re takin’ what it’s hidin’.”

Behind them, the crew gathered at the rail. Smee clutched a rope, shouting, “Mind them winds, Cap’n! Frostwild’s got teeth!” Black Tom nodded once, harpoon ready. Billy leaned over the rigging, freckles stark against the cold. “Bridge’s holdin’, Cap’n! But the ice ahead’s rumblin’!”

Killian and Desylva crossed together, boots finding easy purchase on the storm-carved ridges. Frost mist curled around their legs like living breath, drifting upward from the bridge’s spine. The air grew colder with each step, the cliffs looming higher, their surfaces glinting with trapped lightning. The gentle slope carrying them smoothly toward the shore.

Halfway down, Desylva’s mark flared again. A bright pulse that lit the frostwild in a brief flash. “Magic’s close,” she said softly. “It’s waitin’.” Killian’s voice dropped to a low growl. “Then let’s meet it.”

They reached the frozen shore, snow crunching beneath their boots as the bridge arced behind them like a gleaming spine of ice. The frostwild stretched ahead. Vast. Jagged. Alive. The reliquary’s pull thrummed through the air like a distant heartbeat.

Shore

Desylva’s gray eyes swept across the frostwild, taking in the jagged ice cliffs rising like serrated teeth under a sky choked with swirling snow. Fissures hissed with howling winds that stung their faces, each gust carrying the cold bite of ancient magic. Her cursed mark pulsed, storm magic stirring in her veins, answering the frostwild’s call.

Killian’s cutlass gleamed, hook catching torchlight as he roared, “Reliquary’s waitin’!” Desylva’s nod was fierce, dagger flashing as she murmured, “Then let’s not keep it waitin’. Magic hates to wait and grows restless when ignored. It’s already callin’ — louder than you do, pirate.”

From the ship: One-Eyed Jack waved a torch, growling, “Don’t dawdle!” Black Tom stood ready with his harpoon, scarred face set. Billy scampered up the rigging, calling, “Cliffs risin’ sharp, Cap’n. Watch yer feet!”

The frostwild stretched ahead. A maze of ice and shadow. Its chill sinking into their bones. Killian’s breath fogged as he glanced at Desylva. “Cold enough for you, lass?” She smirked, storm magic flaring faintly. “Not with you stirrin’ the heat, pirate.”

They pressed deeper into the narrow pass, snow crunching underfoot.

The cliffs parted into a narrow corridor, snow crunching underfoot, shadows thick as pitch. A low growl rumbled through the ice. An ice warg burst from the darkness. Its fur shimmering white, eyes burning like frozen embers, fangs dripping frost. Its snarl shook the air, claws slashing as it lunged.

Killian parried with his cutlass, shouting, “Stay back, ya beast!” Claws raked his arm, Blood freezing instantly, a sharp sting drawing a hiss. Desylva’s thunder cracked, a bolt searing the warg’s flank. Her mark blazed blue as she snarled, “Not his blood, you cur!”

The beast howled, stumbling, frost-coated fur singed.

Killian slashed again, blade biting deep. “That’s it, love — give it hell!”

From the ship: Smee hollered, “Blast it, Cap’n!” as he fumbled a torch, nearly dropping it. One-Eyed Jack’s cannon boomed, the shot echoing across the ice, while Black Tom’s harpoon, thrown with a taut line, sank into the warg’s shoulder, pinning it. Billy shouted from the rigging, “More comin’, Cap’n!”

Two more wargs surged from the snow, eyes glowing, claws churning the frost. Killian felled one with a swift strike, growling, “Not today, you icy curs!”

Desylva’s rain poured, melting frost on his wound. Her gusts scattered the pack as they fled, blood staining the snow. She grabbed his arm, inspecting the cut, gray eyes sharp with concern. “You’ll live. But don’t go makin’ a habit of throwin’ yourself at beasts, love. Gettin’ clawed and bleedin’ all over me won’t earn you any glory, or win you any favors, pirate.” He grinned, breath fogging. “Your storm’s kept me alive through worse, love. I can take a few claws — I’m a survivor, hard to kill. A scratch or two’s nothin’. And if bleedin’ on you wins me no favors, I’ll just earn ’em another way.” Their rhythm held, her magic a shield.

They pressed deeper. The pass widened, cliffs looming as snow swirled thicker. A frost giant emerged from the blizzard — twice their height, skin shimmering blue, eyes like frozen lakes. It swung a jagged ice club, roaring, the ground trembling as cliffs shook, snow cascading.

Killian dove, rolling across the ice. “Move, Des!” The club smashed down, shards exploding. One grazing his cheek with a cold burn that stung like fire. Desylva’s lightning arced, staggering the giant. Her mark glowed fiercely as she yelled, “Down, you brute!” Her wind pinned its arm, ice cracking under the strain. Killian lunged, hook piercing its leg, blue ichor spraying. “Big, but not bright!”

From the ship: Smee helped reload the cannon. One-Eyed Jack’s shot clipped the giant’s shoulder. Black Tom’s second harpoon sank into its chest, the line taut.

The giant fell, snow burying it. Desylva steadied herself, breath fogging. “Big bastard, that.” Killian wiped blood from his cheek, grin fierce. “But we’re bigger.” Her rain doused the frost on his face.

The pass opened into a frozen cave — walls translucent frost, glittering like a thousand stars. The floor was slick as glass, the air sharp with ancient magic. The reliquary’s glow flickered ahead, a faint pulse like a heartbeat buried in ice.

An ice serpent uncoiled from the shadows — scales like diamonds, eyes slits of malice. Its hiss froze the air, stinging their lungs.

Killian slashed. “Down ya go, you slitherin’ frost!” Fangs grazed his thigh — cold searing like a blade. He staggered. Thunder roared. The serpent writhing as Desylva’s mark pulsed. Rain thawed the bite into steaming puddles. “Stay with me!” she snapped. Lightning coiled around the beast, scales shattering. Killian steadied, chuckling through pain. “Can’t leave all the fun to you, love.”

From the ship: One-Eyed Jack torched the air, shouting, “Burn, ye snake!” Black Tom’s third harpoon pinned its coils, the line humming.

Desylva’s lightning split the air, shattering the serpent into ice shards that clattered around them. Her hand gripping Killian’s arm, voice steady, “Got it under control?” He nodded, blue eyes glinting, “Aye, love, thanks to you.”

The reliquary’s blue glow pulsed stronger, a frost chest at the cave’s heart.

A snow harpy swooped from the ceiling. Wings of jagged ice slicing the air, talons like daggers, shriek like breaking glass rattling their ears.

Killian slashed. “Quiet it, ye banshee!” Talons raked his shoulder. Blood dripped onto the ice. Desylva’s gusts pinned its wings. Her thunder felled it. Her mark flaring as she shouted, “Not today, bird!”

The harpy crashed, feathers scattering.

Killian climbed a frozen ledge, ice biting his hand. His breath fogged as he reached the reliquary — a chest of enchanted frost, translucent surface etched with ancient runes. Blue light pulsed from within, steady and strong. Desylva shielded him, rain dousing frost creeping toward his boots. “Grab it, Killian!” her voice urgent.

The reliquary pulsed. Once. Then again. Its blue glow brightened until the cave vanished beneath a wash of frozen light.

Killian stopped. Desylva froze beside him. For a heartbeat, neither stood within the frostwild.

Killian saw the deck of the Jolly Roger. Empty. Silent. No crew. No Desylva. Only the reliquary resting upon the helm. Untouched. Waiting for him. Its glow promised power enough to end every curse that had shadowed his life. Every enemy broken. Every wound avenged.

Desylva’s storm-mark flared. Around her, another vision formed. Endless skies. Unbound seas. No dark curses. No enemies. No battles left to fight. Freedom. Complete and absolute.

The cave whispered through the visions. "Choose." The word echoed from every wall.

Killian's jaw hardened. His gaze searched the empty ship. Then he shook his head. "Not interested."

Across from him, Desylva's gray eyes narrowed. "Neither am I."

The visions shattered. Ice exploded outward in glittering fragments. The cave returned. The reliquary's glow softened. Waiting.

Killian and Desylva exchanged a look. No words passed between them. None were needed. Whatever the reliquary had hoped to find, it had found its answer.

Desylva gave a small nod. "Go on, pirate." Her storm-mark pulsed once. "It's yours." Killian's grin returned, sharp and certain. "Ours." He approached the chest and picked it up, its icy surface burning his palms with a supernatural cold, making him curse, “Bloody hell, it’s colder than a witch’s heart!”

The chest thrummed, reacting to his touch. Frost crawled up his wrists. He gripped it tight, the weight heavy in his arms. Desylva’s storm surged, lightning arcing to melt the chest’s outer frost. The runes flared, clarifying the view of a shard inside. A crystal glowing with sealed magic, its blue light dancing across the cave walls.

Desylva’s mark flared in sync with the shard’s pulse. The cave trembled. Fissures cracking. Ice groaning as the frostwild fought to keep its treasure. Killian met her gaze. “Time to go.”

They bolted, reliquary pulsing in his grip, hands brushing as they ran. The frostwild roared behind them, winds howling, snow blinding, as they retraced their steps through the cave, dodging falling ice shards that crashed like glass. “Keep movin’, love!” Killian shouted, clutching the reliquary, its cold seeping through his coat. Desylva’s storm pushed back the gale. Her gray eyes blazing, “Not losin’ you or that chest!”

They burst from the cave, the narrow pass ahead, cliffs groaning under the blizzard’s weight. “Same way we came!” she panted, lightning illuminating the path, melting snowdrifts that blocked their way. Killian grinned. “You’re lightin’

my way, as ever." She shot back, "Don't get used to it, pirate." Their boots crunched over the frostwild, the reliquary's weight a steady anchor in Killian's arms, storm humming around Desylva.

From the ship: Smee hollered, "Hurry, Cap'n, the ice's crackin'!" One-Eyed Jack fired a cannon shot, "Keep movin'!" Black Tom signaled with a harpoon line, urging haste.

Ahead, the sloped frost-glass bridge shimmered through the snow. Their path home. They ran toward it.

Bridge

The sloped frost-glass bridge shimmered through the blizzard, its storm-etched footholds glowing faintly like scattered stars. Snow whipped across the span, the frostwild wind howling as if furious that its prize had been taken.

Killian and Desylva reached the base of the bridge, boots crunching over the ice-packed shore. The reliquary pulsed in Killian's arms. A steady, ancient heartbeat of blue light. Its glow reflecting off the frostwild cliffs like a beacon.

Desylva's mark flared in answer, stormlight rippling across her skin. "It's reactin' to the shard," she murmured. "It wants out o' this place." Killian cast her a roguish grin, breath fogging in the cold. "Then let's oblige it."

He stepped onto the bridge first, shifting the reliquary under his arm. His boot found easy purchase on the shallow ridges she'd carved, the frost humming faintly beneath him, alive with her magic.

"Reckon this bridge'll hold," he drawled, hook glinting, "or you plannin' to dunk me, lass?" Desylva laughed, her cloak torn at the hem, storm-gray eyes bright despite the cold. "Temptin'," she shot back, "but I'd miss your pretty face… and a few other useful parts… far too much." Killian's answering grin was wickedly pleased. "Good. 'Cause once we're aboard, I'm plannin' to warm you up proper with one or more of those parts." Her smirk sharpened, playful and sure. "Promises, promises. Best be ready to keep them."

They crossed the sloped span together, boots crunching over frost-slick footholds. The bridge arced beneath them like a living thing, storm magic thrumming through its spine. Frost mist curled around their legs, drifting upward in shimmering coils. Their hands brushed now and again, the reliquary's pulse beating between them like a shared heartbeat.

Halfway up, the frostwild reacted. A deep groan rolled through the cliffs. A long, echoing shiver. Cracks spidered across the ice walls. Snow cascaded from above, the blizzard tightening around them like a closing fist.

Desylva's mark flared bright blue. "It's angry," she said softly. "It knows we're leavin' with its magic." Killian tightened his grip on the reliquary. "Let it rage. We've got what we came for."

Behind them, the ice cracked again. Louder this time. A jagged fissure tearing across the shore they'd just crossed. The frostwild was collapsing behind them, trying to swallow the path they'd taken.

Desylva reached out, her hand brushing Killian's arm. "Keep movin', pirate." he nodded, jaw set.

They pressed on, the bridge humming louder as her storm reinforced it against the frostwild's fury.

Above, the Jolly Roger loomed. Runes flaring, sails snapping in the wind. The crew shouting encouragement from the deck. Smee waved frantically. "Cap'n! Ice's breakin' behind ye!" Billy leaned over the rail, freckles stark against the cold. "Bridge's holdin', Cap'n. But the frostwild's throwin' a tantrum!" Black Tom stood ready with his harpoon, steady as ever.

Killian and Desylva reached the top of the span.

Jolly Roger (Main Deck)

Killian and Desylva stepped onto the deck. He exhaled, chest heaving, reliquary pulsing in his arms. "Home," he murmured. Desylva stepped beside him, storm settling into a soft hum. "Aye," she said.

The reliquary pulsed in Killian's arms, casting shifting shadows across the crew's faces. The frostwild wind howled behind them, slamming into the ship's hull as if enraged that its prize had been stolen.

Desylva turned toward the sloped frost-glass bridge, her cloak whipping in the gale. Her cursed mark pulsed bright blue, stormlight rippling across her skin. "Stand back," she said, voice low, storm gathering around her like a living cloak. Killian stepped aside, hook glinting, eyes locked on her.

She raised her hands, her cursed mark pulsing bright blue. A sharp gust burst from her palms, scattering snow across the deck. The bridge shuddered. A long, crystalline groan rolling through its spine. The storm-etched footholds flickered, their ridges dissolving into drifting mist. Frost mist curled upward, swirling around her like a crown. The entire span trembled. Cracks raced along its length like lightning, splitting the frost-glass arch into shimmering fractures.

The frostwild roared. Cliffs groaning. Ice splitting. As if trying to hold the bridge together, trying to keep them from leaving.

Desylva's storm surged. With a final pulse of blue fire, the sloped span collapsed in a sweeping cascade, the frost-glass dissolving into mist and glittering ice-dust that hissed as it hit the sea. The last remnants of the bridge slid from the rail and vanished into frothy waves, leaving only swirling frost-fog drifting over the water.

The frostwild screamed. A distant, echoing roar swallowed by the storm.

Killian steadied the reliquary on the deck, its frost-glazed surface gleaming under torchlight. "Clean work, love," he murmured, admiration threading through his voice. Desylva lowered her hands, breath fogging, mark dimming as her storm settled. "Couldn't let the frostwild keep a path to us," she said softly. "Not with what we're carryin'."

Smee rushed over, clapping his hands. "Blimey, Cap'n, that's a shiny prize!" One-Eyed Jack kicked ice from his boots. "Bloody freeze. Worth it?" Killian's grin widened. "Aye, Jack. Magic's ours." Black Tom hauled in his harpoons, their bloodied tips glinting. Billy cheered from the rigging, freckles bright. "We got it, Cap'n!"

Killian's hand brushed Desylva's, a quiet moment amid the bustle. Her gray eyes met his, breath fogging, stormlight fading into a soft hum. "Cold bed turned hot, eh?" she teased. He chuckled, voice warm. "With you, lass, always."

They headed toward the quarterdeck, reliquary in hand, the sloped bridge now nothing but mist drifting over the sea. Frost-fog curled behind them like the last breath of the frostwild, fading as the Jolly Roger's runes pulsed brighter, reclaiming the ship from winter's grasp.

Quarterdeck

Killian paused at the helm, casting one last look toward the shattered ice cliffs. The frostwild storm clawed at the horizon, furious and distant, but powerless now. He tightened his grip on the reliquary, its pulse steady against his palm.

With a glance at the horizon, Killian bellowed, "Weigh anchor and set sail!" His voice cut through the cold like a blade, echoing across the deck.

Main Deck

One-Eyed Jack roared, "Aye, Cap'n!" already securing the cannons, boots crunching over frost-slick planks. Black Tom led the crew at the capstan, its runes glowing faintly as they hauled the anchor, the chain clanking, the hull stirring beneath them like a waking beast. Billy scrambled up the rigging, unfurling the sails — enchanted canvas snapping taut, runes shimmering to catch the wind.

Smee rang the ship's bell with an eager chime, signaling readiness as the anchor broke free. The crew shouted, "Anchor aweigh!" their voices rising like a victory shanty.

The Jolly Roger pulled free, ice cracking in its wake, runes flaring to keep the hull clear. The ship surged forward, leaving the frostwild's jagged maw behind. Killian steadied the helm, hook glinting, eyes on the crow's nest where Billy signaled the all-clear before descending, cheeks flushed with triumph.

Quarterdeck

Killian stood tall, coat shredded, blood crusted from warg claws and serpent fangs. Desylva's storm hummed beside him, dagger sheathed, her presence a tide rolling through the deck's heartbeat.

The reliquary — a prize of frost and power — pulsed, its magic sealed, the shard inside gleaming blue. The frostwild faded behind them, threats swallowed by drifting snow.

Departure

The Jolly Roger sailed free of Narnia's frostwild, sails billowing under a warming breeze. The runes glowed faintly, shedding the last frost from the oak hull. The sky cleared to a dusky violet, snow-laden clouds dissolving as torchlight bathed the deck in a golden haze

Quarterdeck

Killian gripped the helm, torn leather coat flapping, blood crusted on arm and thigh. His blue eyes blazed with triumph. The Icebound Reliquary rested before him on the map plate, frost-glazed surface glinting — a prize wrested from ice and beast. "We've bound the frost and claimed its heart!" he roared, hefting the chest, his roguish grin catching the crew's cheers.

Desylva leaned beside him, tattered cloak snagged by harpy talons, dark hair tangled with snowmelt. Her gray eyes caught the dusk's glow. Her cursed mark pulsed faintly, dimming as her storm settled, yet her sharp grin held the thrill of thunder unleashed. She'd melted frost with rain, felled giants with lightning — her magic a match for the reliquary's glow. Her gaze met Killian's, a spark flaring.

"You're a flurry worth chasin', lass, still with me after that freeze?" he asked, voice warm with roguish charm. She nodded, voice sharp yet soft. "Aye. Don't get soft on me now — not after I thawed you out."

Smee chuckled, "She's fire, Cap'n!" One-Eyed Jack smirked, "Aye, and he's the fool what runs into it!" Laughter rang across the deck, camaraderie a tide beneath their triumph.

Desylva's hand brushed Killian's as they both reached for the reliquary. Their fingers touched the frost chest's icy surface at the same moment — and the reaction was instant. Her cursed mark flared, a violent, brilliant blue, syncing with the chest's runes. Killian's grip tightened, hook glinting beside her hand. A shock of warmth surged between them. Not gentle, nor subtle. But fierce, alive, a storm colliding with the sea.

The chest responded. Its runes blazed white-blue, then cracked like lightning across the frost. Steam hissed upward in a sudden plume. The enchanted ice didn't simply melt, it evaporated, dissolving into a cascade of sparkling droplets that burst into mist mid-air, swirling around them in a halo of shimmering frost-light.

The crew gasped. Smee stumbled backward, tankard slipping from his hand. Billy froze halfway down the rigging, eyes wide. One-Eyed Jack muttered, "By the devil's teeth…" Black Tom's harpoon lowered, forgotten.

None of them had touched the chest. None of them had cast magic. None of them had done anything at all. It was Killian and Desylva. Their bond. Their warmth. Their storm-sea connection. They melted the witch's ice.

The mist parted. The shard lay revealed, radiant and alive, pulsing with ancient magic. Its glow illuminated their faces, painting Killian in blue fire and Desylva in stormlight.

Killian's voice dropped to a reverent murmur. "Together, aye?" Desylva's grin flashed, fierce and bright. "Always, pirate. Can't wait to see what secrets this spark holds." She lifted the shard, its light dancing in her gray eyes, and

handed it to him. Their fingers brushed again. Another spark. Smaller but still sharp enough to make Billy yelp from the rigging. Killian's breath caught. "Reckon it's got curses to break or bind, love."

Main Deck

The crew stared, awestruck, whispering among themselves. Not about the shard, nor about the reliquary, but about the two of them. About the storm and the sea. About the warmth that melted witch-ice. About the bond that broke ancient magic.

The ship glided through calmer waters, frostwild's chill fading. Smee shuffled toward the hatch, snow dusting his coat. "Frost behind us, warm grog's callin'!" Billy plucked a jaunty tune on his lute. One-Eyed Jack's rare laugh echoed. Black Tom coiled rope with steady hands.

Quarterdeck

Killian secured the shard in his coat, its glow dimming but warm against his chest. A warmth that hadn't existed before the melt, a warmth that felt unmistakably like her. His hook tapped the helm, a steady rhythm grounding him after the shock of what they'd done. "Magic's ours. Secrets and all," he said, though his voice carried a new undercurrent: awe, disbelief, and something fierce and protective.

Desylva leaned closer, gray gaze tracing the shard's faint light. Her mark pulsed in echo, not bright, but steady, as if remembering the moment it had flared with Killian's touch. Her grin held challenge and warmth, but also a flicker of wonder. Her dagger rested at her hip, cleaned of blood, storm quiet but not gone.

Around them, the crew still whispered. Not about the frostwild, nor about the beasts, but about the melt. About the warmth. About the spark. About the two of them.

As torchlight dimmed, Killian's hand lingered on Desylva's. Her fingers entwined with his, cool from frost but warm with life — and now, unmistakably charged. A spark flickered between them, small but real, a reminder of the storm-sea surge that had shattered witch-ice.

He murmured something, voice low for her alone. Her gray eyes softened, stormlight glinting faintly. Her storm-touched soul resonated with the shard's power — and with him — their bond a flame that had burned through ice and left the crew whispering legends already.

The crew drifted off. Billy's tune fading below. Smee's snores beginning. One-Eyed Jack's jests trailing away. Leaving the helm to Killian and Desylva, their love a quiet storm under the stars, ready for what lay beyond the horizon.

Next Day (Night)

The Jolly Roger eased into a sheltered cove, dropping anchor under a sky ablaze with stars. Runes shimmered faintly along the hull, shedding the last traces of frostwild magic. The calm sea cradled the ship, air warming with the promise of a still night after icy peril. Below deck, the shard pulsed faintly in a chest — not cold now, but warm, as though remembering the hands that freed it.

Main Deck

Smee lit a fire in a barrel, its crackle mingling with the sea's sigh. The flames cast a golden glow over the crew, warming One-Eyed Jack as he spun a tale of the frost giant's fall, hands waving. "Smashed it flat!" he growled, though his eye kept drifting toward the quarterdeck where Killian and Desylva stood, as if expecting another miracle. Black Tom whittled a shard of ice into a crude fish, his knife's scrape a steady rhythm, harpoons stowed from their bloodied haul. But even he, silent as stone, kept glancing toward the pair with something like reverence.

Billy hummed a shanty, lute stilled, freckled face aglow in the firelight. His tune wove through Jack's growl, but his voice carried a new awe. "Never seen magic melt like that," he whispered to Smee. "Not from a witch. Not from a storm. From them." Smee nodded, eyes wide. "Aye. Storm and sea, lad. Somethin' old as the world."

The crew's victory hummed beneath the stars, rum easing their bones, but their glances kept drifting toward the quarterdeck, toward the two who had melted witch-ice with a touch.

Killian leaned against the rail, blue eyes softened, Desylva a warmth in his chest. Her storm was quiet now but not gone — a low hum beneath her skin.

Desylva sat by the fire, gray eyes on the constellations, dagger sheathed, hands cradling an empty tankard. Her cursed mark pulsed faintly, remembering the reliquary's melt. Her lightning had matched the ship's sails, her bond with Killian a tide that had unlocked the reliquary's magic.

The crew watched her with a new kind of respect — not fear, not wariness, but awe.

Killian joined her, offering a splash of rum. She smirked, taking it, her grin tugging. He sat closer, voice low. "Reckon that shard's got tales to tell us yet." Her eyes sparked. "Aye. And it'll tell 'em to us first." Their shoulders brushed — a pact sealed in firelight.

Smee muttered, "Thieves, the lot o' us!" One-Eyed Jack winked at Billy, "Aye, and proud." But even their laughter carried a new undercurrent. They had witnessed something mythic. Something rare. Something old.

Desylva laughed, her storm meeting Killian's sea, victory a shared breath. Their love, kindled in the frostwild, surged beneath the night's calm.

The fire's embers glowed, crew's voices softening. Smee sprawled by the barrel. One-Eyed Jack carved beside Black Tom, hands steady with rum-warmed ease. Billy's hum faded, head nodding against the mast.

Killian's arm slipped around Desylva, hook resting on her thigh, blue eyes tracing her profile in starlight. Her storm stirred, a spark in her grin. A breeze whispered across the deck, faint gusts carrying the scent of her magic. Her gray eyes flashed wild as she met his gaze, hair whipping in the wind. They darted for the companionway, his grin all teeth, crew's jests rising behind them.

One-Eyed Jack scratched beneath his patch, smirking. "Cap'n's in for a ride tonight." Black Tom hefted his stowed harpoon, scarred arms glistening with mist, a silent chuckle shaking him. Billy's torch flared, voice cutting through the night. "They'll shake the sea to bits, mark me!" One-Eyed Jack glanced at the darkening sky, wind picking up with Desylva's storm. "Get below," he growled. "This'll be a rough one."

<u>Killian & Desylva's Cabin</u>

The cabin door banged open, splintering against the wall, runes flaring to mend the cracked oak. The ship bucked as a towering wave crashed, shuddering the hull. The air was thick with briny salt-soaked wood, acrid tar, and their searing desire.

Killian and Desylva stormed in, eyes locked with ravenous hunger. Her cursed mark pulsing

She kicked off her boots, leather thumping on planks. Then unhooked her cloak with a flourish, sodden fabric slithering down, unfastened her belt, buckle clinking, and tore off her shirt. She peeled off her pants, revealing taut thighs.

His boots thudded, coat buttons popped like hailstones, shirt ripped to expose his scarred chest. "Strip faster, pirate, I'm no patient storm," she growled, her storm-gray eyes wildfire.

He flashed her a roguish grin and moved faster, belt unbuckling with a snap, pants yanked down to join the pooling pile. Waves surged outside, lightning flashing through the window, hull groaning as their lips crashed, teeth clashing, her bite drawing coppery blood, his growl a primal snarl. He seized her waist, fingers bruising, hook snagging her arm as she shoved him, her strength a gale, pinning him on the bed, frame slamming the wall, runes glowing to heal splintered wood.

Their kiss deepened, lips bruising, tongues warring, her nails raking his chest, carving red welts through dark hair, his hand fisting her tangled hair, pulling to expose her neck. "You tryin' to break me, love," he rasped, breath hot

against her ear, hook grazing her jaw, steel sparking on skin. “You’d snap first, pirate,” she dared, lips searing his jaw, her mark flaring as she positioned herself atop him, straddling his hips, hair cascading like a storm cloud.

The ship pitched starboard, timbers creaking, gusts rattling the window, runes glowing faintly ensuring stability. His hand fondled her breast, thumb teasing her nipple, her moan sharp as she shoved his shoulders. “Ride me then, lass, show me your storm,” he challenged, blue eyes blazing. She caressed his hook, sending loving currents tingling up his arm, exciting him, her fingers stroking his scars, his hook tracing her thigh. Lightning flashed bathing her arched form, a warrior’s map of scars and heat.

Her gray eyes bored into his, her mark glowing brighter, storm magic crackling. She reached down, guiding him to her with deliberate care, positioning him at her core. Her breath hitched as she slid down, enveloping him in molten heat, a throaty moan escaping. “Take it, lass, ride me fierce,” he growled, hand gripping her hip. She rocked with fierce control, pressing down. Her hips sinking, drawing him deeper, till she was fully impaled on him. Each thrust pulling gasps from her lips. His upward surges meeting her, muscles straining, moans tangling.

“Deeper, don’t stop,” she urged, thighs gripping tight, her rhythm relentless. The bed creaked, runes flared to support the frame. The hull shuddered as thunder rumbled, waves crashing broadside. Her fingers clawed his shoulders. His hand fondled her curves, hook grazing her back, currents sparking through it, fueling his drive. The storm outside frenzied. Her magic whipping gusts into a vortex. The stern window rattling, runes to glowing faintly to mend any cracks ensuring the window's stability. The timbers groaned in sync with their desperate sighs.

Killian, withdrawing briefly, surged up, flipping her beneath him. Her gasp sharp as he rolled her onto the furs, runes glowing to mend the bed’s splintered frame. “Please, Killian, give me it all,” she begged, voice a desperate rasp, legs parting. He guided himself with his hand, pressing into her tight heat, filling her with a slow, deliberate thrust, her moan jagged as hips locked, thunder cracking outside. “Take every inch, love,” he snarled, hand tangling in her hair, hook bracing the headboard, splintering wood, runes flaring to heal. Her legs locked around his waist, thighs taut, pulling him deeper, nails carving welts down his back, welts burning with sweat and salt. “Harder, break me, pirate,” she demanded, gray eyes wild, mark blazing as lightning pulsed, waves flooding the deck. His thrusts grew rough, relentless, her body rocking beneath, gasps cutting through the wind’s howl, his growls a primal counterpoint. “I’ll claim you, storm and all,” he rasped, fondling her breast, currents from her touch searing through his hook, heart hammering like a war drum.

Her nails bit deeper, heels digging into his back, her rhythm matching his ferocity, storm-gray eyes daring him. His hand slid to her thigh, bruising grip hauling her closer, hook gouging the headboard, runes mending chips. Her hair clung sweat-slick, plastered across her brow, body a taut bow of desire, writhing under his weight. The storm raged at her command, wind howling, hull quaking as waves slammed like cannon fire, each thrust stoking chaos, lightning illuminating her scars in silver. “Harder, Killian, match me,” she pleaded, voice raw, magic threading the air. His thrusts intensified, hips grinding, skin searing like molten steel, her cries piercing, his snarls echoing, the bed bowing, runes glowing to brace the frame, ship reeling with a monstrous swell.

The rhythm peaked, primal and desperate. Her legs tightened, muscles straining, hands clawing his shoulders, nails biting as she arched, pressing closer. “You are mine, every storm, mine,” he growled against her throat, her laugh fierce, “Prove it!” Her magic surged, mark flaring, lightning bathing them in silver.

Her scream erupted, a thunderclap, body convulsing, thighs quaking, muscles pulsing around him in tight, rhythmic waves, sweat beading on scars, gray eyes locked on his, fingers clasping his hand. The window nearly shattering as runes flared to mend it. Waves flooded the deck, hull quaking. He roared, hips shuddering, heat surging into her in a powerful pulse, muscles tensing, cords straining in his neck, grip bruising her hip, hook splintering the headboard, runes healing wood. Her currents seared through his hook, a loving spark, their breaths a ragged tangle of salt and musk, storm cresting and breaking.

The Jolly Roger steadied, waves softening to a murmuring lull, wind sighing through the mended porthole. Her magic relented, her mark dimming. The air settled with wildflowers and sea’s quiet aftermath. They collapsed together, breathless, bodies entwined, hearts racing, sweat cooling on skin.

He pulled her close, her head on his chest, his arm wrapping her, hook caressing her arm, her fingers tracing his jaw, gasps softening. “Worth every scar, love,” he murmured, voice rough with tenderness. “Aye, pirate,” she

whispered, gray eyes half-lidded, their bond a flame in the storm's wake, snuggling under the furs, the ship rocking gently, a sanctuary for their love.

Crew Quarters
(Simultaneous with the Cabin Scene)

The quarters rocked with the ship's wild thrashing, air thick with damp wool's must and fear-sweat's tang, lanterns swinging, casting jagged shadows. One-Eyed Jack clung to a beam, eye wide, bellowing, "They're rockin' the ship hard!" Smee gripped a hammock, stammering, "They'll sink us one day, mark me, with that storm-lass ragin'!" Black Tom braced his harpoon, scarred arms rigid.

Billy's torch flickered, his shaky laugh cutting through, "She's a hurricane tonight. Cap'n's ridin' the storm! Reckon they're shakin' the sea!" One-Eyed Jack growled, "Pipe down, lad, or I'll toss ye to the waves!"

Thunder rumbled, planks shuddering, lightning flashing as the crew flinched. Billy belted a shanty, voice bold.

Billy
Oh, the lass with gales in her cry,
she rocks the ship 'neath a thunderin' sky,
the waves do break, the timbers sway,
for Cap'n's wild love leads the fray!

Her hips do grind, the bedframe's crack,
his hook's a spark that pulls her back,
the storm's her moan, the sea's their bed,
they'll quake the Roger till we're dead!

(After the Cabin Scene)

The quarters calmed, storm easing, the ship's rocking gentling to a steady breath. One-Eyed Jack slumped onto a crate, wiping sweat, rasping, "the ship survived another of their romps." Smee fussed over a tipped tankard, muttering, "One day the runes might give out and then we're dun for!" Black Tom eased his harpoon, scarred arms slack, nodding, a glint of relief in his eyes. "They've tamed the beast," Billy quipped, dousing his torch, its hiss blending with crew's sighs. One-Eyed Jack smirked, "Quiet now, or ye'll wake 'em for round two!" Smee yelped, "Don't jinx it, Jack!" Black Tom's low chuckle rumbled, rare and brief.

The crew bunked down, dim light swaying, night's peace a hard-won calm after the tempest's rage.

Next day

Dawn slipped over the cove, a delicate wash of gold and rose gilding still waters, casting a soft sheen on the Jolly Roger's hull.

Quarterdeck

Killian and Desylva stood at the helm, his arm encircling her waist, hook tracing her arm, her hand resting on his chest, bodies pressed close in the morning's lingering coolness. Her wild hair glinted in the dawn's rays, gray eyes scanning the horizon where sea kissed sky. "Reckon we've earned this, love, a sunrise all our own," Killian murmured, voice a low rumble. "Aye," Desylva replied, fingers brushing his scars, "but it's a fleeting fire, isn't it?"

He tilted her chin, lips meeting hers in a deep, lingering kiss, warm and slow, her breath mingling with his, her cursed mark pulsing faintly, a flicker of storm in the calm.

Main Deck

The deck lay quiet, timbers groaning, waves slapping the hull, their bond a stolen sanctuary after the reliquary's chill and night's tempest. A hatch's creak broke the hush, footsteps thudding below, then the hatch flew open with a clang, crew bursting onto the deck, shattering solitude like a thunderclap.

Smee stumbled up, rubbing sleep from his eyes, bumping into One-Eyed Jack, whose eye glinted, hands flexing, growling, “Move, ye stout lump!” Black Tom shadowed them, harpoon slung over his shoulder, tip catching rose light, moving with predatory grace, dark eyes flicking to the horizon. Billy bounded up, grin splitting his face, clapping hands, “Dawn’s callin’, lads!”

Quarterdeck

Killian and Desylva shared a glance … hers amused, his keen … before he stepped forward, arm sliding from her waist to seize the wheel. “Weigh anchor and set sail!” he barked, command snapping through the mist. Desylva’s lips quirked, “Step lively, or I’ll summon a squall to jolt ye awake!” Smee yelped, “No squalls, milady, I’m movin’!”

Main Deck

One-Eyed Jack roared, “Aye, Cap’n!” relaying orders, securing cannons. Black Tom led at the capstan, muscles straining, its runes glowing gold in dawn’s light, chain clanking as Billy scrambled up the rigging, nimble as a sprite. Smee’s nervous hands joined him, unfurling sails, their enchanted canvas snapping taut, runes shimmering rose-hued to catch the breeze.

The ship’s bell rang Smee’s eager chime, signaling readiness. “Anchor aweigh!” the crew shouted, anchor breaking free, sails billowing, the Jolly Roger surging, cove’s serene waters churning into a frothy wake, gold and rose glinting on waves. Killian’s hook steadied the helm, eyes on Billy in the crow’s nest, signaling clear waters.

Departure (Main Deck)

The ship sliced through waves, sails swelling like clouds against the brightening sky, crew’s voices weaving into rigging’s creak and sea’s hymn.

One-Eyed Jack’s grunt faded, “Oi, save the sweet talk, wind’s up!” Billy laughed, “Let ‘em spark, Jack, makes the chase livelier!”

Quarterdeck

Killian’s gaze flicked to Desylva, her silhouette stark against the dawn, a lodestar guiding him. “Never a tame morn with you, my storm,” he said, voice softening, hook brushing her back. She turned, gray eyes catching light, “Nor with you, my pirate, we’re fated to keep seas churnin’.” A quiet laugh rippled, heat kindling in their stolen calm.

Their storm and sea entwined, her magic a fierce undertow, his resolve a steadfast keel, their love a flame against fate’s winds. The dawn’s peace lingered in his hand’s press, their pulses synced, facing the horizon as one.

The Jolly Roger pressed on, hull carving waves with elegance, bearing them toward the unknown, united and unbowed.

Quest for the Blood Rose (Day 120)

The Jolly Roger rocked gently under a bruised sky, sails snapping in a humid wind that swept across the deck, heavy with the scent of salt, damp earth, and the faint promise of rain from unseen shores. Time had woven Desylva into the ship’s fabric, her storm-touched presence as vital as the timbers, her rain a balm on bloodied planks.

Main Deck

The crew gathered near the mainmast, shadows swaying in the lantern light that flickered against the wood. Smee, sweating through his patched coat, wiped his ruddy brow with a sleeve, as he spoke in a hushed tone, “Heard a yarn ‘bout the Blood Rose, Cap’n, a gem red as heart’s blood, bloomin’ with magic in some cursed jungle, deep where the sun don’t reach. Worth more’n gold if ye don’t bleed out first.”

One-Eyed Jack, leaning on his cutlass, its blade nicked from use, grunted through a cloud of pipe smoke, “They say it’s guarded fierce, vines that choke a man’s breath, beasts that hunt silent-like.”

Black Tom stood apart, near the rail, his harpoon gleaming as he ran a whetstone along its edge with a steady scrape, nodding once to signal his interest. Billy, his freckled face flushed with heat, leaned forward, eyes wide, “Folks reckon it’s alive, Cap’n, feeds on life, gives power back tenfold, sailors gone missin’ chasin’ it!” Smee’s stout frame hunched, “Reckon that’s a tale to spook us.”

Quarterdeck

Killian held the helm, his black leather coat unbuttoned, the humid air clinging to his scarred chest as his hook rested against the wheel, glinting with each shift of lanternlight. His blue eyes sparked with a pirate’s hunger, the kind that had carried him through centuries of storms. Desylva stood beside him, her wildfire presence stoking his pulse, her gray eyes a spark he’d follow anywhere.

He tilted his head, his hook tapping the wheel in a steady rhythm, as he traced the tale in his mind. The Blood Rose, a living artifact that pulsed with power, its beauty laced with danger, a prize that sang to his pirate’s heart. He’d faced terrors aplenty with this crew, their scars and swagger proof of their grit, and Desylva’s storm had turned the odds time and again. Her presence, fierce and untamed, had guided him through dark seas, sharpening his appetite for a chase like this. The legend settled into his bones, a grin curling his lips as he savored its perilous allure. The gem’s promise a lure he couldn’t resist.

Desylva lounged against the port rail, her leather cloak swaying in the wind, its edges crusted with salt from countless voyages, her dark hair hung tangled, framing her sharp features, her cursed mark pulsing faintly beneath her sleeve, a soft blue glow that flickered as her storm magic stirred with the legend’s weight; she’d swapped tales like this with the crew over rum-soaked nights, stories of treasures and curses that had fueled their restless sails, but the Blood Rose’s whisper of living power tugged at her, its magic a shadow of the tempest she carried within. She caught Killian’s roguish smile, danger was his siren, and she’d follow, her storm a match for his sea.

“Cursed jungle, eh?” she drawled, crossing her arms, her voice dry as the wind turned muggy, “You sure it ain’t just a pretty thorn to prick ya, love, leave you bleedin’ for naught?” Killian’s laugh rang out, bold and unrestrained, “Aye, love, but with you beside me, I’d risk the sting and more, you’d pluck it afore I bleed dry!” Her grin flashed, sharp and wild, a spark flickering in her storm-touched gaze.

Main Deck

The crew’s banter swirled, their voices a familiar hum, the Jolly Roger trembling with the weight of their intent.

One-Eyed Jack turned to his pistol, checking the powder with a mutter, “Vines’ll snap like necks under a good shot, beasts too, if they’re fool enough”; Black Tom’s whetstone scraped louder, his harpoon’s edge gleaming in the lantern light, his silence a steady anchor amidst the chatter;

Billy scampered up the rigging, his torch casting shadows as he called down, “Sails tight and ready, Cap’n, wind’s pushin’ us true!” Smee unfurled a curling map, its ink smudged from damp hands, stammering, “Jungle’s thick as tar, rivers o’ blood, they say, twistin’ to that rose, cursed ground all ‘round!”

Quarterdeck

Killian’s hook tapped faster, his mind racing. The Blood Rose, a gem alive with arcane might, its roots sunk deep in a cursed isle, its guardians a test of steel and storm; he’d danced with death before, Desylva’s lightning and rain at his side, her gray eyes a beacon through the darkest nights, their bond was a strength no curse could break. He straightened, his voice booming over the deck, “We’ve faced worse’n vines and beasts. Set course for that jungle!”

The Jolly Roger groaned as she shifted, her oak hull cutting toward a distant isle shrouded in mist, the crew’s cheers rising like a wave, the Blood Rose’s legend a call to arms they’d answer with blade and thunder.

Killian turned to Desylva, his blue eyes locking with her gray ones, a pact sealed in that glance. Her mark flared as her magic surged with the promise of the quest, a vow of lightning in the humid air.

Main Deck

One-Eyed Jack growled, “To the jungle, then, gimme somethin’ to shoot!” Black Tom’s harpoon gleamed ready. Billy’s voice piped, “Treasure’s callin’ us, Cap’n!”

The crew moved as one, their preparations a flurry of motion, the Jolly Roger trembling with purpose.

Quarterdeck

Killian’s hand gripped the wheel tighter, his hook glinting in the lantern light, his heart pounding with the thrill of the chase. The Blood Rose was more than a gem. It was a test of their mettle, a blend of danger and magic, her storm a flame against the jungle’s curse. The ship surging beneath his boots, the cursed isle’s call a song they’d answer together.

A few hours later

The Jolly Roger sliced through the mist, dropping anchor a few miles off the coast of a veiled isle, her hull humming as she settled in the eerie calm.

Main Deck

Killian stood at the helm, his black leather coat flapping in the humid breeze, ready to order the skiff lowered when Billy’s sharp cry split the air. “Cap’n! The water’s vanishin’—right in front of us!”

The crew rushed to the starboard rail, eyes wide at what they saw.

Before the Roger’s bow, the sea was draining away in a widening corridor, the water receding as though swallowed by the earth itself. The ship remained safely afloat, her anchor still sunk deep in true seawater, but the tide had dropped so violently that only a thin band of brine lapped at the top of her keel far below the usual waterline.

Beyond that narrow margin, the exposed seabed writhed into view—gnarled roots clawing upward like skeletal hands, their twisted lengths glistening with sap. The sand between them was stained a deep, unnatural crimson. The roots writhed faintly, as if tasting the air. The air was thick, the stench of rot rolled across the deck, carried by an arcane hum that set the crew’s teeth on edge.

Quarterdeck

Killian, his blue eyes scanning the tangled jungle, turned to Desylva, her leather cloak fluttering in the humid breeze. “We need a path down, lass,” he said, his voice a low command. Desylva’s gray eyes gleamed, her cursed mark pulsing a faint blue beneath her sleeve. “Aye, Cap,” she replied, stepping to the rail.

Raising her hands, she summoned her storm magic, the air crackling as vines slithered from the shore’s roots, twisting upward with a serpentine groan. Her fingers wove through the mist, coaxing mangrove branches and seaweed strands to braid with the vines, forming a ramp that arched from the deck to the crimson sand. The ramp’s surface, pulsed faintly, its runes, etched by her mark’s blue flare, glowing to steady each step. The creation hummed with arcane life, its stench of salt and rot mingling with the jungle’s decay, a testament to her power.

Ramp

Killian led the descent, his boots gripping the ramp’s slick vines, his cutlass rasping free, its steel glinting dully in the fog. Smee followed, his patched coat snagging on a thorned tendril, yanking him back with a yelp. “Blimey, it’s hotter’n a smithy’s forge ‘ere!” he whined, swatting at the air thick with the reek of rot. “And it stinks o’ death, me nose can’t take it!” One-Eyed Jack strode down, striking flint to spark a torch, its flame hissing in the humidity as he growled, “Quit yer blubberin’ and keep yer eye peeled, ye snivelin’ git!” Black Tom descended silently, his harpoon gripped tight, its honed edge catching the torchlight with a cold shimmer. Billy trailed close, his nimble steps steady on the ramp, his eyes wide as he scanned the jungle.

Desylva stepped onto the ramp last, her cloak snaring on jagged thorns as she landed ashore, tearing with a faint rip. She shook it free with a curse. Her eyes swept the canopy, a twisted snarl of vines dripping red sap that sizzled on the ground, the air heavy with rot and an arcane hum that set her teeth on edge. Her mark pulsed, syncing with the jungle's malevolent rhythm, her storm magic stirring like a roused beast. Billy, gripping a low vine, called out, sharp and eager, "Jungle's thick as pitch, Cap'n, mind them vines, they're twitchin' like snakes!"

Land

Killian's hook slashed through a curtain of vines, parting them like flesh. "Into the green, mates, the Blood Rose calls us!" he barked, his voice cutting through the haze. Desylva drew her dagger, its edge gleaming as she stepped closer, her tone resolute, "Aye, let's carve it loose from this cursed tangle." Smee shuddered, wiping sap from his hands onto his trousers, his voice quivering, "This muck's alive, I swear. Cursed as sin!"

Their boots squelched through the mire, the legend of the Blood Rose drawing them deeper into the jungle's pulsing heart, its magic a thrumming beat in their bones.

The path twisted, the undergrowth rustling with a sinister whisper as a vine wraith lashed out, its blood-red tendrils whip-fast, thorns glinting like dagger tips. It coiled toward them with a hiss, choking the air with rancid stench. Killian met it head-on, his cutlass flashing in a brutal arc. "Back, you overgrown weed!" he roared, steel biting into the wraith's flesh. The vines snapped tight around his arm, thorns piercing deep, blood welling against the humid air as he snarled. Desylva's thunder cracked, a searing bolt ripping through the wraith's core, forcing it to recoil, her mark flaring blue.

Smee dove behind a root, wailing, "It's alive, gonna throttle us all!" One-Eyed Jack fired his pistol, the shot booming as gunpowder smoke mingled with mist, "Blast ye to sodden bits!" Black Tom lunged, his harpoon sinking into the wraith's writhing mass with a wet thunk, pinning it momentarily. He yanked the harpoon free, its tip dripping red, slinging it over his shoulder. Billy swung from a low branch, shouting, "More comin', Cap'n, a whole swarm twistin' 'round us!"

Tendrils surged, lashing with vicious intent. Killian tore his arm free, blood dripping as he cleaved through the vines, "Not today, you cursed creepers!" Desylva's rain erupted, dissolving the sap into hissing puddles, her gusts shredding the wraith into red muck. Her eyes flicked to him, concern cutting through her storm's edge, "You holdin' up, pirate?" He wiped blood from his arm with a feral grin, "Aye, lass, you've got my back, as ever."

Their rhythm pulsed steady, her magic a honed blade slicing through the jungle's grip.

The jungle deepened, vines parting as a jungle chimera roared into view, its lion's head baring jagged fangs, its serpent tail hissing with venomous fury, claws raking the earth in a spray of moss. Smee shrieked, scrambling back, "We're done, meat fer its bloody jaws!"

Killian dodged a slashing paw, claws grazing his side with a hot sting, blood seeping into his shirt as he snapped, "Hold fast, you spineless cur!" Desylva's lightning arced, a jagged lance striking the beast's flank, forcing it to rear, her mark glowing as her wind pinned the serpent tail. "Take it, Killian, now!" she shouted.

He drove his hook into its side, tearing through muscle with a wet rip, blood spraying his coat. One-Eyed Jack bellowed, "Eat this, ye mongrel!" his pistol thundering into the chimera's chest. Black Tom hurled his harpoon, the barbed tip burying into its shoulder, dark blood oozing. He retrieved the harpoon with a swift pull, slinging it over his shoulder. Billy clung to a vine, shouting, "It's mad as a hornet, Cap'n, finish it quick!"

The beast thrashed, but Killian twisted his hook deeper, grinning, "You're mine, you overgrown cat!" Desylva's thunder crashed, sending the chimera sprawling, twitching as life bled into the moss.

The serpent's tail lashed through the undergrowth, its iridescent scales flashing like spilled ink, fangs snapping inches from Killian's chest. Desylva's thunder erupted in a bone-rattling boom, a bolt slamming into the beast, toppling it into a heap of fur and broken scales, the ground quaking. Her rain poured, rinsing blood from Killian's side where a claw had torn his shirt, crimson mingling with mud. He straightened with a grunt, wiping his blade, his grin fierce as he caught her eye. "Hell of a beast, that one," he rasped. Desylva stepped closer, her storm magic

crackling, her gray eyes alight. “Aye, but we’re the sharper fangs, love,” she countered, defiance and relish in her tone.

The Blood Rose’s crimson glow pulsed nearer, its magic thrumming in the vines.

The earth shuddered as a river ran red … sap or blood, impossible to discern … its surface churning as a shadow wyrm erupted, its night-black scales gleaming wet, crimson-slit eyes glowing with malice. Its hiss unleashed a venomous mist, scorching their throats.

Killian surged forward, his blade carving through the haze. “Down ya filthy worm!” he bellowed, steel screeching against scale. Fangs grazed his leg, venom searing his leather, and he bit back a curse, his stance wavering. Desylva’s thunder roared, shaking the trees, her mark flaring as the wyrm convulsed under her strike. Her rain intensified, flushing the venom from his wound into the red current.

Smee stumbled over a root, crashing into the muck. “Me lungs, can’t breathe this poison!” he wheezed. Killian yanked him up, “Get up, you fool, fight or choke!” One-Eyed Jack jabbed a torch at the wyrm’s tail. “Burn, ye slinkin’ bastard!” he growled, flames hissing against scales. Black Tom drove his harpoon into the wyrm’s coils, pinning it to the earth with a thud, then retrieved it, wiping the red sap from its tip. Billy dodged a thrashing limb, hollering, “It’s weakenin’, smash it now, mates!” Desylva’s lightning tore through the sky, a blinding spear striking the wyrm’s core, sinking it back into the river with a gurgling hiss, its eyes fading to ash.

Desylva’s hand steadied Killian as the jungle quieted, her voice calm despite the sweat on her face. “Still got a pulse after that dance?” she asked, a faint worry threading through. He nodded, his blue eyes glinting with fire as he met her stare. “Aye, lass, you keep the fight in me,” he replied, his grin softening.

The Blood Rose shimmered ahead, a crimson gem cradled in roots, its glow pulsing red, its magic a siren’s call. The canopy shrieked alive. A thorn banshee, its spectral form weaving through branches, thorned claws slashing with vicious intent. Its wail stabbed their skulls, a sound gnawing at their minds.

Smee clapped his hands over his ears. “Me head, shut that screechin’ devil up!” he cried. Killian swung upward, blade slicing through mist, “Quiet, ya banshee bitch!” Thorns raked his chest, blood welling beneath his shirt, but he pressed on. Desylva’s gusts howled, pinning the banshee mid-lunge, her thunder shattering it into fading wisps, its wail dying.

One-Eyed Jack reloaded his pistol, “It’s dust, road’s ours now!” Black Tom hauled Smee back, his harpoon dripping red, retrieved and slung over his shoulder. Billy waved ahead, “Rose’s in reach, Cap’n, snag it quick!”

Killian lunged for the root cradle, thorns piercing his hand as he seized the gem. Desylva pressed beside him, her rain soothing the sting, her voice urgent, “Now, rip that beauty out!” He wrenched the Blood Rose free with a shout, its crimson glow flaring, casting their faces in hellish light.

Blood splashed across the Rose's crimson petals. For a heartbeat the jungle fell still. The Blood Rose pulsed. Once. Then again. The droplets vanished into its surface. Absorbed. The crimson glow deepened. Almost content.

Killian stared. "Did that just..." Desylva's storm-mark flickered. Her gray eyes narrowed on the gem. "It drank it."

The jungle quaked, vines slithering back.

They bolted toward the ramp. Smee splashed through the crimson muck, his voice shrill, “Leg it, mates. The ground’s turnin’!” Desylva’s hand grazed Killian’s, a flicker of heat sparking through the chaos.

The isle rebelled. Vines lashed, the red river swelled. Killian clutched the gem, its heat pulsing against his palm as Desylva matched his stride, her shredded cloak snapping in the wind, her storm battering the green back with raw force.

Smee panted as he ran, his voice trembling, “What’s it do, Cap’n, blessing or doom?” One-Eyed Jack fired into the brush, “Power, ye twit, keep yer legs pumpin’!”

Ramp (a few moments later)

They ascended the ramp, its vines creaking under their boots, the glowing runes steadying their frantic steps. Killian led, the Blood Rose in hand, followed by Desylva, her storm magic flaring to fend off lashing vines. Smee stumbled, his coat catching on thorns, but Black Tom hauled him up, his harpoon secure. One-Eyed Jack fired a final shot into the jungle, his torch sputtering, while Billy scrambled behind, his voice high, “The shore’s wakin’, Cap’n!”

The Jolly Roger (Quarterdeck)

Once all were aboard, Desylva stood at the rail, her mark flaring blue as she raised her hands. With a sharp gesture, she unraveled the ramp, its vines and branches collapsing into the crimson sand with a wet crunch, seaweed dissolving into hissing foam, the runes fading as the shore reclaimed its tangle, leaving no trace of their path.

Killian set the Blood Rose on a crate, its crimson glow painting the planks in shifting shadows, Desylva leaning close, her breath warm against his neck, her mark dimming as her storm eased. One-Eyed Jack kicked sap from his boots, growling, “Bloody jungle, was it worth the slog?” Killian’s grin sharpened, “Aye, Jack, power’s ours to wield now.” Smee rubbed his hands, eyes gleaming, “Better not turn on us, that thing!” Black Tom moved silently to the rigging, his harpoon, slung over his shoulder, a quiet anchor in the fray. Billy clapped Killian’s shoulder, beaming, “We nabbed it clean, Cap’n!”

Killian’s hand brushed Desylva’s, a quiet jolt passing between them as her gray eyes locked with his. “Hotter’n a thorn pit, eh?” she teased, voice low and rich. He chuckled, deep and rough, “With you, lass, it’s a wildfire.”

As Killian and Desylva headed to the quarterdeck, he addressed the crew with a fierce shout, “Anchor up! Sails out!” his voice a thunderclap spurring them to action.

One-Eyed Jack roared, “Aye, Cap’n!” relaying orders as he checked the cannon lashings, his boots thudding on the deck. Black Tom, muscles taut, led the crew at the capstan, runes glowing faintly as they hauled the anchor, the chain clanking into the chain locker with a resonant thud, the hull quivering with life. Billy, nimble as a sprite, scrambled up the rigging to the mainmast, joined by Smee, whose trembling hands unfurled the sails, their enchanted canvas snapping taut, runes shimmering to seize the wind.

The ship’s bell rang with Smee’s eager chime, signaling readiness. As the anchor broke free, the crew bellowed, “Anchor aweigh!” the sails billowed, and the Jolly Roger surged forward, hull slicing the waves. Killian’s hook steadied the helm, his eyes flicking to the crow’s nest, where Billy signaled clear waters ahead.

Departure

The Jolly Roger broke free of the cursed isle’s grip, her sails snapping taut in a fresh wind that banished the jungle’s humid grip, dawn’s golden streaks painting the horizon as mist dissolved into a shimmering haze. The hull, enchanted oak scarred by red sap and scratched by snapping vines, groaned with pride, its runes flaring softly to mend gouges from chimera claws and wyrm fangs, the silvery veins of the wood sealing scratches into smooth timber once more. The ship stood as a testament to the trials carved through to claim their prize, her magical heart pulsing beneath the crew’s triumph.

Quarterdeck

Killian stood at the helm, his black leather coat slashed across chest and arm, blood crusted from vine thorns and banshee claws, his blue eyes blazing with a pirate’s fire. Desylva’s storm hummed low, her dagger sheathed, her presence a steady tide at his side.

The crew rallied. One-Eyed Jack reloaded with a smirk, “Next beast’s mine to carve!” Smee mopped his brow. Black Tom nodded once, a flicker of grim approval on his scarred face, his harpoon secure, while Billy strung his lute, plucking a jaunty note, “A song fer the rose, gonna ring it loud!”

On the map plate, the Blood Rose pulsed, its crimson glow a living heartbeat, its arcane magic alive and restless, a prize of beauty and might claimed through steel and thunder.

Desylva paused. Her storm-mark pulsed beneath her sleeve. The Blood Rose answered. A faint crimson shimmer moved through its petals. Once. Then again. Matching the rhythm of her mark. The connection lasted only a heartbeat. Then both lights settled. Quiet. Waiting.

Desylva frowned. Killian glanced between the Rose and her wrist. His grin faded slightly. His fingers drummed once on the table. "Interesting."

The Blood Rose settled once more, its crimson pulse slowing to a steady beat. Whatever connection had flared between the gem and Desylva had vanished as quickly as it had come. For now.

He turned to address the crew. His voice rang out, loud, firm, and proud, “We’ve plucked the rose and lived to tell it!” A grin split his face as he picked up the gem and raised it high, its light dancing across the enchanted oak of the quarterdeck, where runes shimmered, healing faint cracks from the jungle’s wrath. He turned to Desylva. She flashed a grin, sharp and sly.

Main Deck

Smee cheered, “Made it out, worth me sweatin’!” his coat sticky with sap, his hands wiping the ship’s bell, its runes glowing to mend a dent from a stray vine. One-Eyed Jack cleaned red sap from his cutlass, growling, “Next beast’s gettin’ a bullet afore it moves!” his eye scanning the cannons, their oak carriages healing vine scratches.

Black Tom nodded, his harpoon flecked with wyrm blood, a rare pride flickering in his scarred features as he leaned against the capstan, its oak mending a claw’s gouge. Billy scampered to the rail, shouting, “We’re tales for the taverns now, Cap’n!” his lute slung across his back, the deck’s runes faintly glowing to erase sap stains.

Quarterdeck

Desylva stood beside Killian, her leather cloak torn from chimera claws, her dark hair matted with sweat and sap, her gray eyes catching dawn’s glow as she leaned against the helm. Her cursed mark pulsed faintly, its blue glow dimming as her storm settled, though the thrill of their battles lingered in her sharp grin. She’d seared wraiths with lightning, washed venom with rain, her magic a match for the Blood Rose’s power after cutting through the jungle’s fury together. She met Killian’s gaze, a spark flashing between them.

“You’re a storm worth bleedin’ for, lass,” Killian said, his roguish smile warm with charm. “Still with me after that tangle?” Her nod was swift, her voice sharp yet soft, “Aye, don’t wilt on me now, not after I cut you loose.”

Main Deck

Smee chuckled, “She’s the thorn, Cap’n, pricked ye good!” One-Eyed Jack smirked, “Aye, and he loves the sting!” Black Tom coiled rope with methodical calm, his harpoon stowed, its edge gleaming clean beside the capstan, its runes healed.

The crew’s laughter rolled across the deck, their camaraderie a tide beneath the triumph.

Quarterdeck

Killian tested the Blood Rose’s weight, his hook tapping its smooth surface. His blue eyes flicking to Desylva, who leaned closer, her gray gaze tracing the gem’s crimson pulse. Her cursed mark pulsed once, a faint echo of the storm she’d unleashed. Her grin matching his, a challenge laced with shared victory. Her dagger, wiped clean of blood and sap, rested at her hip, her storm a quiet hum beside his sea.

The Jolly Roger steadied on calmer seas, her enchanted oak humming as the runes sealed the last of the vine scratches, restoring the blackened planks’ gleam. The Blood Rose’s magic shimmered, its glow reflecting off the hull’s mending runes — a prize of beauty and power hinting at dangers yet to bloom. For now, it was theirs.

Killian’s hand brushed Desylva’s, a quiet moment amidst the crew’s bustle. Her touch lingered, her fingers warm from the jungle’s heat but steady with life, a spark flickering in danger’s wake. Her gray eyes softened, her storm-touched soul resonating with the gem’s power.

The ship sailed on in steady rhythm, her crew a family forged in peril, the deck settling into a softer glow beneath the rising sun. Cutting through the morning, her sails a banner of triumph, her glowing runes traced their path forward, carrying them toward the next horizon.

A few hours later

The Jolly Roger dropped anchor in a quiet bay, her hull cradled by a calm sea under a sky warming to noon, the cursed isle's oppressive heat now a fading memory. The runes having fully mended the red sap stains and claw gouges, gleamed black and gold, reflecting the promise of a still day after the jungle's chaos. The Blood Rose, stashed safely below, its magic a quiet song beneath the noon sun, the crew's victory a warm echo in their bones.

Main Deck

Killian's voice carried a rare gentleness as he ordered, "Rest, lads," his blue eyes tracing the crew scattering across the main deck, its oak planks smooth, their runes having healed the last of the jungle's scars. Smee sparked a fire in a barrel, its crackle mingling with the waves' sigh, the barrel's oak staves glowing faintly as runes mended a char mark from the flame. Rum poured into tankards, and One-Eyed Jack spun a yarn of the chimera's fall, his hands slashing the air. "Clawed me good, but we gutted it!" he growled, his cutlass resting on the rail, its oak mending a vine's scratch. Black Tom whittled a splinter of vine into a crude rose, his silence a steady rhythm, his harpoon by the capstan, its runes healed. Billy hummed a shanty, his lute stilled, his freckled face aglow with the fire's light, the deck's enchanted oak beneath him shimmering as it sealed a sap stain.

The crew's laughter and tales wove a tapestry of triumph, their tankards raised to the Jolly Roger's resilience, her hull and deck now pristine, their runes a silent guardian. The calm bay offered a moment to breathe, the ship's enchanted heart steadying them for the next tale, the Blood Rose's glow a promise of more to come

Later that night (Main Deck)

As night fell, the bay's calm deepened, the Jolly Roger's hull rocking gently, runes casting a faint glow against the sea's dark mirror. Killian leaned against the rail, his blue eyes softened, Desylva a warmth in his chest, her storm a melody he'd chased from the jungle's depths. She sat near the fire, her gray eyes fixed on the horizon, her dagger sheathed, her hands cradling an empty tankard. Her cursed mark pulsed faintly, her storm settling into a low hum, time aboard carving her into this ship, her thunder a match for sails. Killian joined her, offering a splash of rum, a grin tugging her lips as she took it. He sat beside her, their shoulders brushing, a quiet pact sealed in the firelight, her storm meeting his sea, their victory a shared breath after the jungle's trials.

The fire dimmed. Killian's arm slipped around Desylva, his hook resting on the fire barrel's edge, its oak runes healing a char mark from the embers, his blue eyes tracing her profile in the starlight. Her gray eyes glinted, her storm stirred faintly, a spark in her grin.

One-Eyed Jack squinted through the haze, catching Killian and Desylva heading to the companionway, her storm-gray eyes burning with a fevered gleam, her hair a wild cascade. His laugh barked, "Cap'n's got a hunger tonight, sea's gonna boil!" Black Tom hefted his harpoon, his scarred arms gleaming, a silent smirk as he felt the wind shift, the deck's runes glowing to mend a scuff. Billy's torch flared, his voice rising, "They'll dance the deep wild, lads, brace yerselves!" One-Eyed Jack sniffed the air, a storm's edge brewing, and growled, "Get below deck afore those two whip up a frenzy."

The Jolly Roger's hull hummed, her enchanted oak and runes steady, a living ship cradling her crew's fire and her captain's storm, ready for the next adventure under her sails.

Killian & Desylva's Cabin

The cabin door thudded shut with a resonant groan, runes flaring briefly to mend a scuff from the slam. A monstrous wave crashed against the hull, the ship lurching as timbers creaked, their runes glowing to heal gouges from the sea's fury, the blackened oak shuddering under the strain. The air hung thick with the briny tang of sea-soaked oak, sharp musk of pitch, and the raw, electric heat of Killian and Desylva's longing, a storm within mirroring the tempest without.

He caught her mid-step, his hand snagging her wrist, his hook brushing her hip, its cold edge igniting a shiver as she crashed against his chest. Her storm-gray eyes blazed with feral hunger, mirroring the gale's roar beyond the stern window, where rain lashed the enchanted glass, its runes flickering to mend a crack from the wind's assault. Her wild hair tangled in his fist as he dragged her close, lips claiming hers in a bruising, ravenous clash, a pirate's fire sparking her storm magic. The wind outside wailed, a shrill banshee rattling the glass, the lantern rocking violently, its amber glow fracturing into jagged shadows across the planks, their runes healing faint scratches from the cabin's sway.

The ship pitched hard, waves battering the hull with a thunderous roar, its runes pulsing to seal splintered seams. Her fingers clawed at his black leather coat, slick with salt spray, tearing it open to reveal his scarred chest, the garment sliding off his shoulders to pool on the floor, its buttons pinging against the sea chest. She yanked at his linen shirt, ripping it free, the fabric catching on his hook as he shrugged it off, exposing taut muscle glistening with sweat. His boots, crusted with jungle sap, were kicked off with a thud against the tarred floor, its runes mending a scuff. Her hands fumbled at his belt, leather creaking as she unbuckled it, the buckle clattering to the planks. She tugged down his tight breeches, the fabric snagging on his thighs before he stepped free, his arousal stark against the lantern's glow, the air electric with their need.

Desylva's own leather cloak, torn from chimera claws, was shed with a flick of her shoulders, falling to the rug as he tore at her linen shirt, the wet fabric ripping with a snap, buttons skittering to ping against the iron-banded trunk. Her boots, laced and salt-stained, were unlaced with trembling fingers, kicked off to thump against the wall, its oak runes healing a dent. Her belt slithered free, its buckle glinting as it hit the floor. His fingers hooked her breeches, peeling the damp leather down her thighs, her skin fever-hot beneath his touch as she stepped out, bare and radiant, her cursed mark pulsing blue on her wrist, a beacon in the storm's chaos.

The Jolly Roger groaned, a massive swell rocking the hull, its runes flaring to mend a claw's gouge from the cursed isle. He pinned her to the wall, the rough oak biting her back, its runes glowing to heal a splintered nick. His hook traced her ribs, cold steel grazing her fevered skin, sending shivers as her hands roamed his chest, nails raking his shoulders, drawing crescent welts. Her lips seared his throat, tasting salt and stubble, her storm magic crackling, static snapping as lightning split the sky, bathing the cabin in stark silver.

She shoved him back with wild strength, her tongue tracing his collarbone, her fingers fondling his taut flanks, sending loving currents, electric pulses of her magic, that surged through his veins, stoking his desire. His hook grazed her thigh, its curve enticing her further, a teasing glint in his blue eyes as he guided her toward the bed, its runes ready to mend any strain.

They collided with the bed, the frame creaking under their weight, its runes flaring to heal a splinter from their impact. The ship tilted sharply, wolf pelts and wool furs sliding to the floor, the air a heady storm of musk, ozone, and gunpowder's faint bite clinging to their discarded clothes. He caressed her hips, fingers digging into her flesh, his hook anchoring against the bed's edge, its oak mending a gouge as she straddled him, her storm-gray eyes daring him to match her fire. Her hair fell like a dark curtain, brushing his chest as she leaned down, her lips grazing his jaw, her hands fondling his shoulders, her magic sending loving currents that sparked through his core, his hook tracing her spine, enticing a gasp as she arched into his touch.

The Jolly Roger shuddered, waves pounding against the hull, runes glowing to seal a seam split by the gale's fury.

He surged up, flipping her beneath him, the bed protesting with a sharp crack, its runes healing the strain. Her back arched against the crimson linens, her nails raking his back, drawing blood as he caressed her thighs, rough skin against her heat. His hook pressed into the mattress, its curve catching the lantern's glow, the bed's runes mending a tear in the hemp. He parted her thighs, his gaze locking with hers, blue eyes burning into storm-gray. With a slow, deliberate thrust, he entered her, his length filling her with a searing heat, her walls clenching around him, a gasp tearing from her throat as her magic flared, static crackling in the air.

The Jolly Roger bucked, the stern window rattling, the enchanted glass runes healing a crack from a wave's debris, the sea's roar syncing with their rhythm.

They moved in a fierce, untamed dance, each thrust stoking the tempest outside, the Jolly Roger trembling as waves slammed like cannon fire. Her hands roamed his chest, fondling his scars, her fingers tracing his hook's

curve, sending loving currents that pulsed through him, her storm-gray eyes wild with desire. His lips claimed her neck, teeth grazing her pulse, his hand cupping her breast, thumb teasing her peak, eliciting ragged moans. Her legs locked around his waist, pulling him deeper, her nails biting his shoulders, marking him with welts as thunder rolled through the cabin, the hull groaning, its runes flaring to mend a splintered plank. The lantern flickered, shadows leaping across her taut, sweat-slick form, her hair clinging to her brow as lightning flashed, bathing her in silver, her body a taut bow strung with need.

The cabin spun, the Jolly Roger tilting as waves crashed with relentless fury, the bed's frame bowing, its runes glowing to heal a crack. His thrusts quickened, his growl rumbling against her gasps, his hook grazing her thigh, enticing a cry as her magic whipped the wind into a howling beast, the door's iron latch rattling, its runes sealing a nick. Her scent, wildflowers crushed under salt, sharp and alive, filled the air, her power lashing the storm higher, waves pounding like a god's wrath.

They lingered in each caress, his hand fondling her curves, her fingers tracing his spine, their bodies entwined in a fevered rhythm, the Jolly Roger's hull shuddering as if pleading for mercy, its runes a constant glow against the sea's assault.

The air thickened, charged with her storm's raw edge. Her scream cleaved the cabin's din, a primal bolt reverberating through the timbers, her body convulsing beneath him, her walls pulsing around his length, a flood of heat that seared his core. Her nails clawed his back, drawing blood, her storm-gray eyes blazing as lightning cracked, illuminating her arched neck, her form trembling with release.

His groan tore free, a guttural, primal roar, his release surging within her, a white-hot flood that shook his frame, his hand tightening on her hip, his hook gouging the bed's frame, its runes flaring to mend the deep scar. He collapsed into her, chest heaving against hers, their breaths a tangled storm of salt, sweat, and musk, the Jolly Roger steadying as the waves softened to a low, rolling growl, hull humming with mended runes.

The storm relented, the wind easing to a mournful sigh, the stern window's runes glowing softly, their healing complete. The lantern settled, its amber glow bathing her flushed skin, her hair splayed across the crimson linens, her storm-gray eyes half-lidded.

He rolled to her side, their bodies slick and breathless, his arm drawing her close, her head nestling against his chest, her fingers tracing his jaw with trembling warmth. Her cursed mark pulsed faintly, a quiet hum of her storm, her breath hot against his skin as they snuggled together, breathless, their heartbeats syncing with the Jolly Roger's gentle rock.

The cabin's air softened, oak and pitch mingling with their mingled scents, the bed's runes glowing faintly, its oak healed, a silent witness to their tempest's fading echo, the ship cradling their love as the sea whispered beyond.

Crew Quarters
(Simultaneous with the Cabin Scene)

The quarters shuddered with the ship's wild rocking, the walls groaning as runes flared to mend splintered seams strained by monstrous waves. The air was thick with the tang of pitch, the sharp sting of storm-sweat, and the musky bite of rum-soaked hemp, lanterns swinging to cast frantic light across the room.

One-Eyed Jack clung to a beam, his eye wide as thunder crashed through the planks, shaking the ceiling beams, their runes mending a crack from the storm's fury. "They're shakin' the bloody ship to bits!" he roared, voice raw. "Cap'n's poundin' her real hard. Ruttin' her wild, makin' the storm dance to their bed's crackin'!"

Black Tom braced his harpoon against the port wall, its oak runes healing a nick from his tight grip, his scarred arms tense, a silent wince crossing his face as creaks above pulsed like a war drum, reverberating through the ship's frame.

Smee, perched on a hammock, his coat sticky with sap, clutched a knotted-rope charm, his eyes darting as the lantern's enchanted glass rattled, its runes mending a dent. "Oh, mercy, they're rousin' the sea gods!" he squeaked, wiping sweat from his brow. "Her storm's sparkin' lightnin'. Cap'n's hook's stirrin' her deep!"

Billy, his torch flickering in the storm's gusts through a hatch, grinned shakily, his freckled face lit with awe. "She's got the storm dancin' fever-hot, Cap'n's ridin' her wild!" he crowed, his voice explicit, "Plungin' into her. Makin' her scream like the gale! Her cries shakin' the beams!"

The crew flinched as lightning flashed, illuminating the quarters in stark silver, the hull shuddering, its runes glowing to seal a gouge from a wave's debris. Billy slung his lute over his shoulder, strumming a shanty, raw and vivid.

Billy
Oh, the lass with lightning in her vein,
She rocks the ship through storm and strain,
The waves do leap, the thunder calls,
For Cap'n's hunger shakes the walls!

Her cries do pierce the tempest's din,
His hook drives deep, her storm within,
Their fire burns the sea to steam,
The Roger quakes with every scream!

Smee's nervous chuckle cut through the crew's laughter, his hands trembling around his charm. "Aye, Billy, sing it true. Cap'n's hook's got her writhin'!" he stammered, glancing at the bunk's runes as they healed a splinter from Jack's grip. One-Eyed Jack smirked, "Bloody hell, they're humpin' somethin' fierce, we'll be cleanin'' the ship come morn!"

The Jolly Roger lurched, the deck above creaking, its runes flaring to mend a scuff, the crew's voices a rough chorus to the tempest and passion shaking their world, Black Tom's silent nod a steady anchor amidst the chaos.

(After the Cabin Scene)

The quarters settled as the storm faded, the ship rocking easing to a gentle sway, the hull's enchanted oak humming as runes sealed the last of the wave-splintered planks, their silvery veins glowing faintly in the dim light. The air tinged with salt and the faint sweetness of spilled rum, the lanterns swaying lazily, their enchanted glass runes mending a final crack from the storm's rattle.

One-Eyed Jack slumped onto a hammock, his cutlass rested against the wall, its oak panel healing a nick from his blade. "Cap'n screwed her storm to silence. Rutted the gale to a whisper," he added, his voice gruff but relieved, a smirk tugging his lips. Black Tom propped his harpoon against the starboard wall, its runes mending a dent from his grip, his scarred arms relaxing, a faint nod of relief crossing his mute features, his eyes glinting with quiet amusement at the crew's banter. Smee, sprawled in his hammock, tucked his knotted-rope charm into his pocket, fanning himself with his hat. "Thank the stars, they're done bangin'!" he said, his voice trembling but lighter. "Her storm magic near cracked the hull, but Cap'n's hook tamed her, runes saved us! Bet they're spent, pantin' like dogs now!" He glanced at the ceiling, its oak runes glowing to heal a faint crack from the cabin's fervor above.

Billy doused his torch, the hiss mingling with the crew's yawns, the quarters sinking into calm. "Aye, storm's cooled, Cap'n burned her down," he said, his grin wide "Plowed her till the sea begged mercy!" He strummed his lute softly, humming the shanty's tune, the crew nodding in weary agreement. Smee muttered, "Hope they sleep it off. Don't need another storm from their bed!" prompting a low chuckle from One-Eyed Jack growled, pulling a blanket over his head.

The Jolly Roger swayed gently, her enchanted heart steady, the crew bunking down, their voices fading into the quiet hum of the sea, Black Tom's silent presence a calm anchor as he settled into his bunk, his harpoon gleaming in the dim light.

<u>Quarterdeck (Next Day)</u>

The Jolly Roger departed the bay, the morning light glinting off the restless waves. Desylva stood at the helm, her hands steady on the wheel's spokes, her leather cloak fluttering faintly in the early breeze, her gray eyes fixed on the horizon where the sea yawned wide and untamed.

Killian pressed close behind her, his chest brushing her back, his hand resting lightly on her hip while his hook gleamed at his side, catching the sun's tentative rays. The ship creaked beneath them, a living thing stirring awake.

Main Deck

As the crew hauled lines and secured rigging on the main deck, their eyes kept drifting toward the helm, their hands busy but their attention snagged by the pair standing so close. Smee paused mid-pull, peering over his shoulder as Killian nuzzled Desylva again, his voice dropping low as he muttered to One-Eyed Jack, "She's worked 'erself deep into 'im, ain't she? Look at 'em. Cap'n's heart beats fer her like a drum, sees 'er as his equal in every brawl and breeze."

One-Eyed Jack, coiling a rope with rough tugs, flicked his eye toward them, watching Desylva swat Killian's hand playfully as he grinned. "Aye, she ain't just some lass. He's fallen harder fer her than I've ever seen," he grunted, his tone gruff but edged with grudging fondness. "Heart and soul bonded, them two. Like they're carved from the same damned storm. … I like 'er. Fights fierce. Keeps 'im on his toes. … But they're inseparable, and that's got me edgy. Too tight a knot can snag us all if it frays."

Billy, perched on a barrel as he tightened a knot, kept staring at the helm, his grin widening as Killian whispered something that made Desylva laugh again. "She's perfect fer 'im. Two halves o' the same gale! … Look how he dotes on 'er. … Cap'n's sharper with 'er, happier too. … Ye remember their first kiss? … True love's kiss, sky blazin', sea roarin'. … Like the world knew they were meant fer each other. … I'm all fer it. … And the Jolly Roger rocks like a cradle when they get physical below deck! … Ship's taken all their tusslin' and lovin', creaks and sways but never breaks. Runes mendin' every splinter. … She's his equal, and the old girl knows it. Accepts 'er like she's part o' the timbers!"

Smee glanced back, wiping sweat from his brow as he tugged a line, watching Killian steal another kiss, his voice softening, "That kiss near tipped us over. Magic shook us silly. … She's a good wind fer 'im. Steadies 'im better'n anyone. … But I don't want 'im divin' down that hole he did with Milah."

One-Eyed Jack shot another look, catching Desylva lean back into Killian as he rested his hook lightly on the wheel beside her hand, his jaw tightening. "Ye didn't know Milah," he growled, his eye narrowing as he coiled the rope tighter, the deck's runes healing a scuff from his boots. Smee interrupted, "I saw Rumpelstiltskin rip her heart out, I saw what it did to 'im."

One-Eyed Jack continued, "She ain't nothin' like Milah. … Don't ye muddle 'em. … Milah was soft, broke 'im slow. … Desylva's a tempest. Matches 'im blow fer blow. … He's in deeper with 'er, aye, and it's a fiercer tie, heart and soul, like ye said." he paused, his voice dropping to a rough murmur, a rare glint of memory in his eye. "I sailed with 'im long afore Milah. Back when Liam's death broke 'im first. Turn'n our navy ship pirate. All fire and vengeance. But still a man with honor. … Milah's loss broke 'im again, forged 'im into Cap'n Hook. All sharp edges and cold rage. … Desylva's brought back that first Killian, the one I knew. Passionate, bold. Not the Hook who'd gut a man fer lookin' at him wrong. … That kiss Billy prattles on about? Lit the sea like a beacon, stronger than anythin' with Milah, 'cause it's rooted in a fire Milah never had. … I've seen 'im shatter twice. Liam, then Milah. … If somethin' took Desylva, that Hook'd come roarin' back, darker'n ever, and we'd all pay the price."

Smee nodded, his hands fidgeting with a knotted-rope charm, his brow creased. "'Tis true I only knew Milah a short spell, Jack, joined just after she was lost. Didn't see 'em much, but I saw 'im after. Cap'n was a ghost, ragin' at the world, his heart torn raw. That Hook o' his cuttin' through anyone in his path. Desylva's got a storm in 'er that fights alongside 'im, not just fer 'im. … She's pulled 'im back to a man I never knew. …One who laughs, who hopes. But love that fierce could sink 'im again if it's ripped away, drag 'im back to that cold Hook."

One-Eyed Jack grunted, his eye narrowing as he glanced at the helm, where Desylva's laugh rang out. "Her storm's tied to the ship's heart now, runes flarin' when she's near, like the Roger's sworn to 'er. But that strength's a double blade. Her magic's keepin' us steady, but if it's lost, the crew'll face a Cap'n who'd burn the seas to ash. We gotta keep 'er fightin', Smee, or we'll be dodgin' his blade in a storm o' his makin'."

Billy nodded eagerly, his eyes still on them as he hauled a rope, "Ye saw that kiss light the night, and every time they're at it, the ship rocks like she's dancin'! The Roger's held fast through all their fire, runes mendin' every crack, takes 'er as Cap'n's match, no doubt. I'd wager it's a boon fer us all!"

Black Tom, silent as he secured a line, tilted his head toward them. His harpoon tapping the deck once, oak runes healing a nick from his grip. His scarred face unreadable but his gaze lingering on their closeness … Killian's arm around her, her head tipping back to laugh … as if the ship itself echoed their unity.

Smee muttered, stealing another glance as Desylva playfully elbowed Killian, "Fated or cursed, them two, with a spark that could light or sink us."

Quarterdeck

Killian's gaze rested on Desylva, her form cutting a striking silhouette against the dawn's golden haze, her wild hair lashing like dark flames in the rising wind. She was his lodestone, her storm the guiding light that pierced the tumult of their endless pursuits. "Never a dull moment with you, my tempest," he murmured, his voice softening from its usual rough edge, a rare tenderness weaving through the gravel as he edged closer, his hand grazing her shoulder in a gentle sweep. She tilted her head just enough to catch his stare, her gray eyes sparking with mischief, a playful glint dancing in their depths. "Nor with you, my pirate, we're cursed to churn the seas together, ain't we?" she teased, her tone light but laced with a knowing warmth. A low chuckle rolled between them, deep and resonant, a flicker of heat blooming in the fragile stillness as he pressed closer, his chest brushing her back again.

Black Tom's harpoon struck the deck with a single, crisp tap, a quiet thud that pulsed like the ship's heartbeat, his silent readiness a shadow to their moment. The crew's eyes, Smee's wide and curious, One-Eyed Jack's narrowed and sharp, Billy's bright with delight, kept darting toward them, stealing glances as they worked, their hands on ropes but their focus snared by the pair at the helm.

Killian tilted his head, his lips quirking into a sly grin as he caught the crew's furtive looks out of the corner of his eye. He leaned in closer to Desylva, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper, rough with amusement, "What d'ye reckon they're mutterin' about over there, love? They're chatterin' like gulls, but too quiet fer me to catch."

She shifted against him, her shoulder nudging his chest as she cast a quick, sidelong glance at the crew … Smee peering over a coil of rope, One-Eyed Jack flicking his eye their way mid-knot, Billy grinning as he hauled a line, even Black Tom tilting his head ever so slightly.

Her smirk widened, sharp and knowing, as she turned her gaze back to the sea, her hands steady on the wheel. "Based on how they keep oglin' us over 'ere, it's plain as day, love," she replied, her voice low and laced with dry humor. "They're dissectin' us. How we're tangled up tighter'n a sailor's knot, and they can't look away." She gave a soft snort, her gray eyes glinting with a mix of amusement and pride. "Reckon they're jealous o' the show we're givin' 'em, or maybe just wonderin' how the ship's still floatin' with us at the helm." Killian laughed, a rough, hearty sound that rumbled against her back, his hand sliding to rest over hers on the wheel as he murmured, "Let 'em stare, lass, they'll never know the half of it."

The Jolly Roger carved a path through the waves, sails billowing like thunderheads against the brightening sky. The crew's shouts blending with the creak of rigging and the sea's ceaseless roar. Their storm and sea wove around them, an unbreakable tether, her magic a fierce current surging beneath her skin, his will a steady anchor grounding her chaos.

Their love a fire that flickered defiantly against the winds of fate. The peace they'd snatched at dawn was already fading, a fragile breath before the next plunge into the unknown, yet it lingered in the press of his chest against her back, the synced rhythm of their hearts as they faced the horizon as one. Killian's focus held on her, his storm-wrought guide, her strength his harbor.

Full deck

One-Eyed Jack called from the rigging, his voice gruff as his eye flicked toward them again, "Wind's holdin'. Where's we headin' Cap'n?" Desylva's reply came sharp and sure, her head tilting playfully against Killian's as she answered, "Wherever the winds lead us. And if it's trouble, we'll meet it head-on, storm and steel."

The ship pressed onward, hull slicing through the swelling waves with relentless grace, bearing them toward the vast unknown, united and unyielding. The bay shrank astern and the sea sprawled endless before them.

Killian's hand tightened over hers, his hook gleaming in the sun. Desylva leaned back into him, her storm simmering just beneath the surface, ready to rise. Together, they were a force as enduring as the ship beneath them.

Billy's voice rang out from the bow, his grin flashing as he stole another look at them, "Sails full, Cap'n'!" and the crew roared in answer. The crew's gazes still flickering toward the helm, caught by the pair who led them. Two souls bound tighter than the toughest knot, equal and inseparable, their playful spark a rhythm the ship itself seemed to dance to.

The Song of the Whispering Chalice (Multi-Realm) (Day 140)

The Jolly Roger rocked gently beneath a setting sun in the Enchanted Forest, her hull nestled between ancient oaks whose towering branches arched overhead like cathedral vaults. Leaves shimmered with an emerald glow, catching the dying light and scattering it across the deck in fractured jewels.

The air was thick with the rich scent of moss, damp earth, and the faint sweetness of blooming night-flowers — a scent that clung to the sails and whispered of old magic. Every gust through the canopy carried a pulse, a subtle thrum that threaded through the ship's timbers like a heartbeat. The realm was awake, listening.

Quarterdeck

Desylva felt it first. Her storm-touched presence had long woven itself into the Roger's bones, and the ship answered her even now — a low hum beneath her boots, as if the enchanted oak recognized her as kin. Her gray eyes swept the forest's twilight glow, stormlight flickering faintly beneath her skin. "Forest's restless," she murmured, voice low. "Feels like it's breathin' on us."

Killian stood at the helm, coat dusted with golden pollen from the forest's blooms, hook catching the last rays of the sinking sun. His blue eyes reflected the firelight flickering below, sharp and hungry, tempered by centuries of danger and desire. He traced the wheel's grain with a practiced touch, feeling the Roger's pulse sync with the forest's. "Aye," he said softly. "Magic's thick enough to choke a man."

Main Deck

The crew gathered around a crackling blaze on the main deck. Sparks spiraled upward, vanishing into the emerald dusk.

Smee poked at the logs, sending embers dancing. His voice trembled with excitement. "The Whisperin' Chalice," he began. "A silver goblet what hums with voices o' lost realms. Its pieces scattered. Hidden deep in these woods and beyond. Cursed, they say. Its power worth a king's ransom." The words hung in the air, stirring the night with promise and peril.

One-Eyed Jack lounged against a barrel. His hands nursing a dented pipe that puffed acrid smoke into the chill air. "Cursed means trouble," he growled. "Every shiny trinket's got claws waitin' to sink in." His eye glinted with suspicion, firelight carving deep shadows into his weathered face, a testament to centuries of hard-won survival.

Black Tom sat cross-legged near the blaze, his harpoon balanced across his knees, sharpening its tip with a whetstone, the rhythmic scrape steady counterpoint to the crew's chatter. His nod was slow, deliberate, a silent agreement laced with readiness. His dark eyes fixed on the blade as if it could pierce the legend's truth. His silence held weight. A quiet readiness forged through storms and blood. Billy perched on a coil of rope. He leaned forward, elbows on his knees, his voice bright with youthful daring, "Voices o' realms," he breathed. "Could take us anywhere. Think o' the places we'd see! … The gold we'd nab!" His enthusiasm crackled like the fire, infectious despite the warnings.

Quarterdeck

Killian's lips curved into a roguish smile. His gaze drifted to Desylva beside him. Her leather cloak rustled softly as she stepped closer. Her gray eyes alight with a storm's quiet intrigue. "Sounds like a storm worth chasin'," she

murmured, meant only for him. Her words stirred something deep, a familiar thrill after years of her wildness at his side.

Main Deck

The crew's voices rose as Desylva stepped closer to the fire. She knelt, the glow sharpening her features, her dark hair catching glints of amber. From her cloak she drew an object she'd found while scouting that morning, half-buried in a mossy hollow near a stream. An orb. Silver and etched with swirling runes that shifted under the firelight. Warm to the touch. Alive. A faint chorus drifted from its core, ethereal and haunting, threading through the crackle of flames like whispers from forgotten shores.

Smee's eyes widened, hands pausing mid-poke, "That's it! … The guide to the Chalice's pieces!" he learned in, "Look at it! Listen to it sing!" One-Eyed Jack's pipe froze halfway to his lips, his grunt sharp, "Brings trouble, mark me. Cursed things always do." Black Tom's whetstone stilled, his nod grave, his scarred fingers tightening on the harpoon. Billy's grin widened as he leaned forward, breath held, "Reckon it's a map, Cap'n? To treasure? Maybe realms o' gold and glory!"

Desylva tilted the orb. Her cursed mark pulsed faintly beneath her sleeve, storm magic stirring as the hum sharpened into a beckoning note. She met Killian's gaze. "It's callin' somewhere," she said. "Feels alive."

Killian stepped down from the helm, boots thudding softly. The crew parted instinctively, their eyes following him.

He approached the fire and reached for the orb, its glow reflecting in his eyes. Desylva handed it to him, their fingers brushing — a fleeting touch, a spark. The orb vibrated through him, a chorus of longing and danger that sang to his pirate's soul. He raised the orb high. Its silver catching the fire's glow as the runes shimmered and the chorus swelled, a melody tugging at his bones. "This orb's our guide. … We'll hunt across realms if we must, power like this'll shift the tides," his voice rang with command, the thrill of the unknown igniting his blood like rum in his veins.

Smee scratched his grizzled chin, "Three realms, the tales say. Forest, shadow, and stars. Each a trial. Ye reckon it's true, Cap'n?" his question trembled with both fear and hope. One-Eyed Jack growled, "Hope it's worth the blood, cursed or not, I'll blast what comes." Black Tom nodded, his harpoon a silent vow. Billy's eyes shone, "Adventure, Cap'n! Realms we ain't dreamed o'!" Their voices wove a tapestry of doubt, grit, and daring, the crew's spirit rising like the smoke.

Smee piped up again, his voice quick with nervous energy, "Legends say it leads to realms o' peril and power." The fire snapped, casting shadows that danced across his stout frame. One-Eyed Jack exhaled a plume of smoke, "Magic's a slippery bastard, hope ye know what ye're stirrin', Cap'n," his tone carried a grudging respect. Black Tom's silence held weight, his harpoon gleaming. Billy's hands fidgeted, "Realms o' peril's just more tales for us, aye?"

Killian's grin widened, a flash of teeth in the firelight. He turned the orb in his hand, feeling its warmth, its weight. The runes hummed louder, as though recognizing him. "Peril's our old friend," Killian said, voice low and sure. "Power's the prize." His blue eyes locked with Desylva's, a flicker of something deeper passing between them — trust, fire, storm.

The forest responded. Leaves rustled without wind. Roots shifted beneath the soil. A distant pulse echoed through the glade — a heartbeat not their own.

Desylva rose beside him, leather cloak rustling, gray eyes locking with his, "We've faced worse," she said her voice a steady storm, her storm magic humming in sync with the orb's call, "Let's hear where it sings us." Killian's hook grazed her jaw — a fleeting touch, intimate and sure, that spoke volumes, "Aye, lass. Together," he murmured.

Rumpelstiltskin and Regina's shadows loomed in Killian's mind. Time hadn't dulled his thirst for revenge, nor their greed for power like this. He could feel their fingers itching for the Chalice, their curses a threat he'd thwart with every breath. His crew was more than muscle. They were his family, Desylva his anchor, her presence at his side a constant, a tempest to his sea.

Smee shuffled closer, “What if it’s a trap, Cap’n? Bards don’t live to tell tales for nothin’.” One-Eyed Jack’s eye narrowed, “Trap or no, we’ve cannons and steel.” Black Tom’s grip tightened. Billy clapped, “We’ll outrun it, Cap’n!”

Killian’s gaze swept them, his grin turning fierce. “Traps, beasts, magic. Let ‘em come. Trouble’s our trade, and this song’s our map,” his voice roared, a captain’s fire. Desylva’s hand brushed his arm, storm a spark beside his flame. “Let’s drink its tune,” she said, her smile a dare. He nodded, raising the orb higher, “Sails up, lads,” Killian roared. “Course by the orb’s song!”

Killian turned toward the quarterdeck, boots thudding with purpose as he mounted the steps. Desylva followed at his side, her cloak snapping in the rising wind, stormlight flickering faintly beneath her skin. Together they took their place at the helm — captain and storm, sea and sky — the orb’s glow pulsing between them like a living compass.

The forest wind shifted, swirling around the ship in a tightening spiral. Leaves shivered as though whispering warnings. The Jolly Roger creaked awake, timbers groaning as if eager to chase the call. Ropes snapped taut, sails rustling with restless anticipation.

Smee barked orders, scrambling across the deck. One-Eyed Jack primed the cannons, smoke curling from his pipe as he muttered curses at whatever waited beyond the trees. Black Tom and Billy hauled lines, muscles straining as the ship responded to the orb’s rising hum.

The orb’s chorus swelled. A melody threading through the glade, tugging at their bones, urging them forward. The forest seemed to lean in, shadows stretching long across the deck, the dying sun casting molten gold through the branches.

The realm around them held its breath. Alive. Watching. Waiting.

A few hours later (Twilight) - Realm 1: Enchanted Forest

Twilight draped the Enchanted Forest in a shroud of deepening shadows as the Jolly Roger settled onto a moss-laden knoll, her hull cradled by the earth as though the realm itself had reached up to seize her. The ship’s enchanted oak planks creaked in protest, unused to land’s grip, their runes flickering with soft blue light as they adjusted to the forest’s strange pulse. The sails furled beneath the towering canopy, their canvas catching flecks of drifting pollen that glowed like embers in the fading light.

The forest breathed around them.

Ancient oaks, bathed in an emerald glow that dimmed with the fading light, rose like titans. Their trunks twisted with age, bark etched with runes older than any realm Killian had ever sailed. Their leaves shimmered with emerald fire, shedding motes of light that drifted lazily through the air like falling stars. Vines coiled along the branches, pulsing faintly with sap that glowed gold, as though veins of magic ran through every living thing. Long, twisted shadows clawed across the loamy soil, their edges writhing like talons under the wavering flicker of torchlight.

The orb’s hum sliced through the stillness, a silver blade of sound that vibrated through the knoll, through the ship, through bone. Its song reverberated off the trees, echoing in the hollows between roots, threading through the moss like a whispered summons.

The knoll shifted beneath the ship, not enough to steady her, but enough to remind her she was a creature of the sea forced onto foreign ground. The Jolly Roger’s timbers groaned, runes flickering in uneven pulses as the forest’s magic pressed against her hull — curious, testing, never fully claiming. The earth’s grip held her only loosely, like a hand hovering near a shoulder, unsure whether to guide or restrain.

Above, the canopy tightened, branches knitting together as though the forest wished to dim the last traces of twilight. Shadows pooled between the roots, thickening into shapes that seemed almost to watch. The air grew heavier, saturated with sap and old enchantments, each breath tasting faintly of ancient storms long buried beneath the soil.

The orb’s hum sharpened again, vibrating through the moss-laden knoll in a rising tremor. Leaves quivered. Vines shivered. The forest leaned closer, listening — its silence no longer passive, but expectant, as though the realm itself recognized the arrival of something it had waited centuries to test.

Quarterdeck

The forest's expectant silence lingered as the Jolly Roger groaned against the moss-laden knoll, her hull shifting uneasily in the realm's loose, testing grip. The orb's hum still vibrated through the planks, a silver tremor threading through the deck like a pulse urging them onward.

Desylva stepped from Killian's side on the quarterdeck, cloak brushing his arm as she moved toward the port rail. Her gray eyes swept the uneven ground below, stormlight flickering faintly beneath her skin.

The ship's tilt was subtle but insistent. A reminder that she was a creature of the sea forced onto foreign soil.

"This knoll's no dock," Desylva murmured, voice low but edged with command. Her cursed mark pulsed blue beneath her sleeve, answering the forest's breath. "Let's give her a proper cradle."

She raised her hands. Her storm magic surged. Wind curled around her fingers, weaving with the forest's sap-rich air. Rain shimmered into existence, droplets forming tendrils of mist that slithered downward like living ropes. The storm-woven vines thickened as they descended, drawing strength from the realm itself — sap, dew, and stormlight merging into emerald cables that glistened beneath the canopy's dim glow.

They slipped beneath the hull, coiling and knotting with deliberate purpose. The vines wove themselves into a cradle — sturdy, pulsing, alive — lifting the Jolly Roger into a stable perch without binding her too tightly. Thorns glinted like polished jade, anchoring the ship against the knoll's slope while ensuring her timbers remained unmarred. The forest groaned in response, as though acknowledging her magic but refusing to fully yield.

Killian watched from the quarterdeck, blue eyes glinting with admiration. The ship steadied beneath them, runes along her hull flickering in relief. "Fine work, lass," he said, voice warm. "Solid as the Roger herself."

Desylva's smirk was quick, sharp. "Aye. Now she'll stand." She turned her attention to the descent. "No leapin' like fools," she said, tracing runes in the air with storm-sure fingers. "We'll walk to the fight."

Wind spiraled downward from her hands, shaping itself into a gleaming arc. Ice formed along the gust's spine, crystallizing into steps that curved gracefully from the main deck to the mossy earth below. Each tread gleamed like polished quartz, etched with swirling runes that shimmered faintly with her magic. The railing, woven from condensed mist, sparkled with frost — sturdy yet ethereal — curling like a serpent's spine to guide the crew's descent.

At the staircase's base, roots curled around the lowest step, welcoming and steadying it without claiming it. The structure hummed with stormlight, a bridge between ship and soil, forged from Desylva's tempest and the forest's breath.

Killian lingered beside Desylva at the quarterdeck rail, the forest's dim glow flickering across their faces as the storm-forged staircase spiraled downward from the main deck in a gleaming arc. The Jolly Roger stood steadier now, cradled by Desylva's emerald vines, but the knoll beneath her still shifted faintly, a reminder that the realm's grip was curious, not welcoming.

The orb's hum pulsed through the planks again, sharper this time, urging them forward.

Killian's grin sharpened. "Right then, love. Let's see what this forest's hidin'." He stepped from the quarterdeck, boots thudding across the planks as he moved toward the staircase's head. Desylva fell into stride beside him, cloak snapping in the forest's breath, her storm magic humming faintly under her skin.

The forest waited.

Main Deck/Staircase

The crew gathered, tense and eager, shadows twisting across their faces in the wavering torchlight.

Killian reached the rail at the staircase's top and vaulted over it with a practiced ease, boots landing solidly on the first step. The storm-etched ridges held firm beneath him, glowing faintly as if recognizing his presence. His cutlass rasped free with a metallic hiss, the blade catching the emerald glow of the canopy.

Desylva descended after him, her dagger flashing like moonlight in her hand. Her cloak brushed his arm as she stepped onto the second tread, stormlight flickering along the runes beneath her boots. Killian cast her a roguish grin over his shoulder. "Fine work, lass." he said, his blue eyes glinting with approval. "Solid as the Roger herself."

Smee stumbled after them, wobbling on the frosted steps. "Blimey, Cap'n, these stairs're slicker'n an eel!" He clutched his rusty pistol with both hands, nearly dropping it as his foot slipped on a mist-slick ridge. One-Eyed Jack descended with a grunt, flintlock leveled, his eye scanning the gloom. "Better'n breakin' me neck jumpin'," he muttered, boots crunching on the storm-forged ice.

Black Tom followed silently, harpoon balanced across his shoulder, its tip catching the torchlight in a cold gleam. His steady grip never wavered, each step measured and sure. Billy bounded down last, torch clutched high, its flame casting wild shadows across the staircase's mist-woven rail. "Look at them shadows, Cap'n!" he shouted, waving the torch toward the trees. "Twistin' like they're alive!"

The forest breathed around them. The orb's hum sharpened. The shadows shifted.

Ground

The staircase delivered them into the forest's breath. Thick, humid, saturated with sap and decay. The mossy earth squelched beneath their boots, releasing the scent of old roots and buried storms. Shadows twisted between the oaks, writhing like living things beneath Billy's torchlight. The orb's hum sharpened in Desylva's cloak, vibrating against her ribs like a heartbeat urging haste.

A low groan rippled through the glade. The forest answered.

A thorned dryad tore itself free from the nearest oak, its grotesque form a tangle of writhing vines and blood-red roses. Amber eyes blazed from a face shaped of bark and briar, its limbs creaking as it unfurled. Sap dripped from its thorns like venom.

Killian's grin flashed, fierce and hungry. "Here's our welcome. Let's greet it proper!" Desylva's storm flared along her arms, her voice slicing through the thick air. "It's guardin' the Chalice's piece. Feel that song!" The orb's hum rose, a silver thread weaving through the glade, guiding her senses toward something buried deeper within the forest.

The dryad lunged. Vine-whips snapped through the air, thorns glinting like jagged emeralds. Rumpelstiltskin's binding curse struck with brutal force — thorny tendrils coiling around Desylva's legs, sinking deep enough to draw blood. Her storm faltered, lightning stuttering as pain lanced up her calves.

Killian roared, cutlass flashing. "You'll not have her, you weed!" His hook slashed through the vines, sap spraying in thick, sticky arcs. The dryad shrieked, its voice a grinding rasp of wood and fury.

One-Eyed Jack's flintlock boomed, the shot shredding a cluster of roses. "Eat lead, shrub!" Petals burst into drifting ash.

Desylva's rain surged in a sudden deluge, loosening the thorns' grip. Her thunder cracked, charring vines black and brittle. She tore herself free with a snarl, stormlight blazing along her mark.

Billy's torch flared as he swung it wide. "It's bleedin' sap, Cap'n! Look at it drip!" The sap hissed where it hit the moss, burning small holes into the earth.

Black Tom moved with silent precision. His harpoon plunged into the dryad's core with a wet crunch, sap flooding out in a thick, amber stream. The creature wailed, its limbs collapsing inward as the harpoon's line tightened. Black Tom yanked the weapon free, its line coiled at his belt, sap dripping from the tip in viscous ropes.

Smee yelped from behind a tree, clutching his hat. “Don’t let it splash me! That muck’ll ruin me coat!”

The dryad shuddered once more, then crumpled into a heap of wilted vines and shattered bark. The forest exhaled.

Killian steadied Desylva, his hand firm on her arm. Her breath came ragged, blood trickling down her calf where the thorns had bitten deep. “First sip’s a brawl, lass,” he murmured, eyes soft despite the danger. She grinned through the pain, stormlight flickering across her cheekbones. “Worth every drop.”

The orb’s hum swelled, vibrating through the glade with a rising urgency.

Smee pointed toward a narrow path between the oaks. “It’s pullin’ us, Cap’n. Hear them voices?” One-Eyed Jack growled, reloading. “Better be gold at the end, or I’m shootin’ it.” Billy waved his torch, eyes wide. “Trees’re closin’ in!”

The oaks’ roots tightened, twisting like serpents. Branches rustled overhead, shedding motes of emerald light that drifted downward like falling sparks.

The orb guided them into a clearing ringed by gnarled oaks. At its center lay a moss-slicked stone slab, runes pulsing faintly across its surface. The air around it vibrated with the orb’s song.

Desylva knelt, the orb trembling in her hands. “It’s here,” she whispered. “Beneath.”

The slab split with a grinding crack, revealing a silver shard. The left side of the Chalice’s cup portion. Its surface etched with runes that glowed in perfect sync with the orb’s hum.

Killian lifted it, its warmth pulsing through his palm. “First piece!” Smee cheered, “Blimey, it’s real!” One-Eyed Jack grunted, “Worth the blood, maybe.” Black Tom nodded once, harpoon ready.

The forest reacted.

A portal erupted high above the treetops in the direction of the staircase — green and shadow swirling together, its roar bending the air as it tore open the sky.

Killian’s voice cut through the chaos. “Back to the ship, now!” he barked.

They sprinted toward the staircase’s direction, boots pounding over moss and root.

Regina’s venom curse spat poison thorns from the shadows. One grazed Killian’s arm, blood seeping in a thin line. “Bloody witchery!” he snarled. Desylva’s gusts scattered the thorns, her rain purging the venom before it could sink deeper. Lightning flickered along her mark as she ran.

One-Eyed Jack fired into the dark. “Take that, hag!” Black Tom hauled Smee by the collar as the stout man tripped over a root. Billy shouted, “Portal’s fadin’, Cap’n!”

Killian’s head snapped toward the sky, eyes narrowing at the flickering vortex. “Move!” he barked, voice sharp as a cutlass. “Portals fade fast. Miss it, and the orb might not open another path. Our quest ends here!” His command cracked through the glade, igniting the crew into a full sprint.

The forest groaned behind them, shadows twisting, roots shifting. They neared the staircase, its mist-woven rail glinting faintly through the trees. The orb’s hum pulsed like a heartbeat urging them onward.

Staircase

They burst through the last line of twisting roots, the orb’s hum pulsing like a heartbeat urging them onward. The storm-forged staircase shimmered ahead, its mist-woven rail glinting faintly through the trees, a beacon of frost and stormlight rising toward the Jolly Roger’s deck.

“Cap’n. There!” Billy shouted, torch flaring as he pointed toward the gleaming arc.

Killian tightened his grip on the Chalice shard, blood still seeping from Regina's venom-thorn graze. "Move!" he barked, voice slicing through the forest's closing shadows.

They reached the base of the staircase just as the portal behind them shrieked, collapsing inward with a violent twist of green and shadow. The forest's breath surged, branches clawing toward them as if trying to drag them back.

Desylva's storm flared in answer. Her gusts shoved the shadows aside.

Killian vaulted onto the first step, boots striking the storm-etched ridges with a force born of urgency rather than ease. The staircase shuddered under the forest's wrath, mist curling around his ankles as the runes flared in recognition of the shard he carried. His cutlass blade gleaming with the last scraps of emerald light bleeding through the canopy, its blade ready should the forest try one last strike.

Desylva was right behind him, her dagger flashing like a shard of moonlit steel. Her cloak snapped in the rising wind as she ascended, stormlight sparking beneath her boots with each step. "Forest's furious," she muttered, breath sharp. "It knows we've stolen the piece." Killian growled as he climbed. "Aye. Let it rage. We've got what we came for. We're done here."

Smee scrambled up after them, wobbling as the mist-slick ridges trembled under the forest's groan. "Cap'n, these cursed steps're tryin' to toss me off! Slick as a storm-soaked deck!" He clutched his pistol with both hands, nearly losing it as the staircase lurched.

One-Eyed Jack ascended with a grunt, flintlock leveled, his eye cutting through the gloom. "Keep yer feet under ye," he muttered, boots crunching on storm-forged ice. "Forest's lookin' to snap a neck tonight."

Black Tom followed silently, harpoon balanced across his shoulder, its tip catching the torchlight in a cold, steady gleam. His grip never wavered, each step deliberate despite the trembling structure.

Billy bounded up last, torch held high, flame whipping in the wind. "Cap'n, shadows're clawin' at the rail!" he shouted. "Forest ain't lettin' us slip away easy!"

The staircase hummed beneath them, stormlight pulsing stronger as Desylva's magic reinforced it against the forest's fury. Frost mist curled around their legs, drifting upward in shimmering coils. The air grew colder with each step, the forest's breath clawing at their backs as if trying to drag them down.

Killian glanced over his shoulder. The clearing behind them writhed. Roots twisting. Branches snapping. Shadows coiling like serpents. "Don't look back!" he roared. "Up, lads!"

Desylva's storm surged, her mark blazing bright blue. Lightning flickered along the staircase's spine, strengthening each step as they climbed. "Almost there!" she called, voice sharp with command.

The Jolly Roger loomed above them, hull glowing faintly with runes, sails stirring in the forest's breath. The orb's hum rose in a triumphant swell, vibrating through the staircase as though urging them to safety.

Killian and Desylva reached the final steps.

Jolly Roger – Main Deck

Killian stepped onto the deck, boots thudding against the enchanted oak planks as the forest's breath clawed at their backs. Desylva stepped beside him, storm settling into a low hum.

The orb's hum vibrated through the ship, rising in a sharp, urgent tremor.

One by one, the crew scrambled up behind them. Smee wheezing, One-Eyed Jack grumbling, Billy waving his torch wildly, Black Tom steady as ever with his harpoon slung across his shoulder.

The Jolly Roger rocked faintly in her storm-woven cradle, vines pulsing beneath her hull like living ropes. The forest groaned around them, shadows twisting between the oaks as if reluctant to let them go.

Killian cast Desylva a pointed look, a silent command, sharp and unmistakable. Desylva's smirk was quick, knowing. "Aye, Cap'n."

She strode to the port rail. Stormlight flickering along her arms as she raised them, "Time to shed this finery." With a sweep of her hands, the staircase shuddered. Frost cracked along its spine. The mist-woven rail dissolved into drifting vapor. Runes fading as the storm-forged steps melted into shimmering droplets that cascaded downward like falling stars, sinking into the mossy earth below.

Killian was already moving toward the quarterdeck, cutlass sheathed, hook tapping the wheel as he took his place at the helm. The orb's hum pulsed in his pocket, guiding his senses toward the portal's distant roar.

Quarterdeck

Desylva joined him, cloak snapping in the forest's breath. Before taking her place at his side, she knelt briefly at the rune-carved chest beside the helm. Opening the lid, she placed the Chalice piece inside. Its silver glow pulsed once, echoing through the wood as the runes along the chest flickered in recognition. The hum settled into a steady thrum as she shut the lid. "Safe for now," she murmured.

Killian nodded toward the vines beneath the hull. "Cradle next, love."

Desylva stepped to the starboard rail, her storm rising in a low, electric hum. She traced runes in the air, her cursed mark blazing bright blue. The emerald vines shivered, their thorns retracting as though obeying her command. One by one, they unwound from beneath the hull, slithering back into the moss like serpents retreating into the earth. Dew evaporated into a glittering haze, leaving the Jolly Roger free, perched precariously on the knoll's uneven slope.

The forest groaned, branches rustling overhead.

Desylva lifted both hands, storm magic surging. "Up, girl," she murmured. "Let's fly."

A powerful gust erupted beneath the hull, lifting the ship from the knoll in a smooth, rising arc. The Jolly Roger hovered above the mossy earth, runes along her planks flaring bright blue as they synced with Desylva's storm. The sails snapped taut, catching the conjured wind.

Killian grinned, spinning the wheel. "That's it, lass. Give her some lift."

Desylva's storm strengthened, wind swirling around the hull in a spiraling gale. The ship tilted forward, gliding above the forest floor like a predator slipping through the shadows. Killian steered her toward the portal's distant glow, the orb's hum guiding his hands.

Main Deck

The forest convulsed in fury — earth buckling, oaks shuddering as if trying to tear themselves free. A surge of dark magic rippled through the glade, warping the air and sending shockwaves through the roots beneath the ship.

Smee clung to the rail, hat askew. "Blimey, she's flyin'!" One-Eyed Jack braced a cannon. "Let the forest try somethin'. I'll blast it." Black Tom stood mid-deck, harpoon ready, eyes fixed on the swirling green maw ahead. Billy shouted from the rigging, "Portal's destabilizin', Cap'n! We got seconds before she snaps shut!"

Desylva's storm flared in answer. A sudden, violent gust bursting from her mark, whipping the sails into a taut, roaring arc. The Jolly Roger lurched forward, storm-wind doubling her speed as the portal's crackling edges flickered dangerously. Killian braced the helm, teeth bared in a fierce grin. "Give her all ye've got, lass!"

The Jolly Roger shot forward, storm-wind roaring in her sails as the vortex's glow swelled ahead.

Enter Portal

The portal loomed before the Jolly Roger, a swirling maw of green and shadow that bent the forest's breath around it. Its edges crackled with ancient magic, warping the air into shimmering waves that rippled across the deck. The orb's hum rose in a sharp, urgent tremor, vibrating through the planks like a heartbeat urging them forward.

Killian tightened his grip on the wheel, blue eyes reflecting the vortex's glow. "Hold her steady, lass," he murmured, voice low but sure.

Desylva's storm surged in answer, wind spiraling around the hull in a rising gale. Her mark blazed bright blue, stormlight threading through the sails as they snapped taut. The ship tilted forward, cutting through the air in a sharp, rising arc, storm-wind driving her straight toward the vortex.

Billy shouted from the rigging, "She's pullin' us in, Cap'n!"

Killian and Desylva stood shoulder-to-shoulder at the helm, storm and sea entwined. The portal's glow washed over them, casting their faces in shifting green light. The air hummed with power — old, dangerous, alive. Desylva's stormlight flickered across her cheekbones. Killian grinned, spinning the wheel. The Jolly Roger surged forward.

The portal roared, as though recognizing the Chalice shard's presence. The vortex's pull seized the hull, dragging the ship toward its spiraling heart. Wind howled across the deck, whipping cloaks and rattling rigging.

They reached the portal's threshold just as its glow flared blinding-bright, washing the deck in molten green and silver. The hum rose into a piercing chorus that vibrated through the ship's bones.

The Jolly Roger plunged through, storm-wind carrying her into the swirling maw. The bow crossed the threshold.

Light exploded around them — green, silver, shadow-white — twisting into spiraling ribbons that wrapped the ship in a cocoon of magic. The deck shuddered beneath their boots as the forest vanished behind them, swallowed by the vortex's swirling dark. The stern entered an instant before the vortex convulsed and snapped shut behind them with a thunderous crack, sealing the forest away in a burst of collapsing light.

Inside the portal, sound warped into echoing hums. Colors bled into one another, forming shifting corridors of light that stretched into impossible distances. The ship drifted through the spiraling void, storm-wind and sea-magic entwined, guided by the orb's rising song.

Desylva's storm flickered along the sails, stabilizing the hull against the vortex's pull. Killian's hands held the wheel steady, his jaw set with fierce resolve.

The crew huddled close, silhouettes framed by the swirling glow. Billy whispered, "Cap'n… feels like the realm's singin'." Smee trembled. "Or screamin'…" One-Eyed Jack growled, "Either way, we're goin'."

The vortex tightened around them, its hum rising into a crystalline note. The Jolly Roger plunged deeper into the spiraling dark.

Exit Portal - Realm 2: Twilight Hollows

The Jolly Roger burst from the portal with a bone-deep shudder, her hull lurching as the vortex spat her into a realm of twisting gloom and bioluminescent decay. The storm-wind that had carried her through the spiraling dark dissipated in a single breath, leaving the ship suspended for a heartbeat before gravity seized her. She dropped hard.

Her keel struck a sprawling web of gnarled roots, thick as serpents and slick with glowing fungi. The impact rattled the deck, sending lanterns swinging and rigging creaking as the ship settled unevenly into the tangled mass. Runes along her hull flickered in protest, adjusting to the realm's strange pulse.

The air was heavy, damp, musky, saturated with the scent of rot and old magic. Mist coiled around the ship's sides like spectral fingers, drifting upward in slow, deliberate spirals. The sky above was bruised with streaks of purple and crimson, as though twilight had been stretched thin and pinned overhead like torn fabric.

Bioluminescent fungi pulsed beneath the roots, casting sickly green and blue light across the hull. The glow rose and fell like a heartbeat, illuminating the forest floor in eerie waves. Shadows shifted between the roots, moving with a rhythm that felt almost alive.

The realm breathed. But not like the Enchanted Forest. This breath was shallow, strained, as though the land itself labored under a curse. The Twilight Hollows had claimed them.

Full Deck

The orb's hum vibrated through the deck, rising into a low, mournful wail that threaded through the mist. Its silver glow seeped through Desylva's cloak, reacting to the realm's oppressive magic.

The Jolly Roger groaned where she lay tangled in the Hollows' root-web, her timbers adjusting as the hull sank unevenly into the gnarled mass. The deck tilted, forcing the crew to brace themselves. The sails hung limp, catching only the faintest whisper of the realm's stagnant air.

Killian gripped the helm, blue eyes narrowing as he surveyed the alien landscape. Desylva's storm flickered faintly beneath her skin, responding to the realm's pulse. The crew stared out across the Hollows, faces lit by the fungi's eerie glow.

Desylva moved to the quarterdeck rail, her cloak snapping in the damp air, gray eyes narrowing as she felt the ship's weight settle wrong. The realm's pulse throbbed beneath her feet. Uneven. Strained. As though the land itself resented their presence. "She's caught fast, lads," she called, voice sharp with command. "Let's cradle her proper."

Her cursed mark flared blue as she raised her hands, summoning storm-magic that wove with the Hollows' roots. Wind curled around her fingers. Rain shimmered into existence, droplets merging with phosphorescent sap. Glimmering vines, thick as hawsers and slick with glowing lichen, coiled beneath the hull. Their surfaces pulsed in rhythm with the fungi below, forming a verdant lattice that tightened around the ship like a shimmering net of captured stars, securing her against the roots' grasp.

The Jolly Roger steadied, her timbers groaning in relief. The deck leveled beneath their boots, the sudden steadiness drawing a collective exhale from the crew. Even the mist seemed to pause, as though the realm itself begrudged her control.

Killian flashed a roguish grin. "Fine work, lass. But this old girl's oak could nestle these roots without your fancy vines," he teased, patting the wheel. Desylva smirked. "Aye, but I'd rather not chance her timbers."

The crew nodded, their boots firm on the deck. Mist coiled around the sails like spectral tendrils. The air thickened with damp earth and festering rot.

Killian steadied the helm, black coat slick with lingering spray. His hook clamped the wheel with a steely grip. "She's no sea to sail here, lads. Keep her steady!" he barked.

Smee shivered violently, hunching as mist dripped from his hat, his voice a quivering rasp, "Ghosts, Cap'n… I swear I feel 'em clawin' at me bones!" One-Eyed Jack snapped his flintlock's hammer back, his grizzled growl cutting through, "Let 'em show their faces, I'll blast 'em to bits." Black Tom stood poised mid-deck, harpoon tip glinting sickly green in the fungi's light, his silence a steady counterpoint to the crew's unease. Billy clung to a rope, torch casting wild shadows across the deck, "'em roots're slitherin' 'round the hull, Cap'n. They look alive!"

The deck shuddered.

A shadow stag burst from the mist. Its antlers wreathed in swirling smoke, eyes abyssal voids. Its hooves thundered as it leapt onto the main deck.

Killian's grin flashed, fierce and feral, "Time fer a dance, lads!" Desylva's voice honed to a razor's edge. "It's bound to the Chalice shard. The orb's callin' it!"

The orb's hum deepened, a mournful wail threading through the chaos.

The stag reared, smoky antlers slashing like scythes across the deck. Rumpelstiltskin's collapse curse struck Killian with crushing force, slamming into his chest, buckling his knees. His cutlass clattered to the quarterdeck. "Bloody hell — damn that trickster!" he grunted as he clutched the helm.

Desylva's thunder roared. "Up, pirate. On your feet!" Her rain surged, a frigid deluge crashing over him, breaking the curse's hold with a hiss of evaporating shadow. Lightning flared from her hands, searing the stag's flank. Black ichor smoked with an acrid tang.

Killian dropped to one knee, fingers curling around the fallen cutlass. He dragged it up in a sharp arc, the blade catching Desylva's stormlight flaring beside him as her storm burned the curse from his chest.

He surged upright, blade slashing in a silver arc, sinking into the stag's murky flesh, "Ya won't drop me, you shadow-spawned git!"

One-Eyed Jack fired from mid-deck, the flintlock's boom reverberating, "Chew on that, ye horned bastard!" The shot grazed its smoky hide, tendrils curling upward. Smee ducked behind a barrel, his trembling pistol rattling, "Save me from this bloody beast. Shoot it again!" Billy thrust his torch forward, its flame licking the air, "It's bleedin' shadows again, Cap'n!" Black Tom lunged, harpoon plunging into the stag's chest with a wet crunch. Ichor sprayed across the deck in sizzling arcs. He yanked the harpoon's line, retrieving the weapon, ichor hissing on the planks.

The stag staggered, collapsing into dissipating mist with a hollow bellow.

The orb's hum steadied, low and resonant — no longer calling in warning, but in recognition.

Desylva steadied Killian with a firm grip on his arm, her gray eyes blazing with fierce pride. "Well fought, pirate," she said, her voice steady but warm. He grinned, breathless, "Aye, lass. Your storm's the wind in my sails." Their breaths synced. A quiet fire sparking amid the crew's ragged cheers.

Smee peeked out. "Is it dead fer good?" One-Eyed Jack snorted. "Dead enough to quit movin'." Billy shouted, "Roots're crawlin' up her sides, Cap'n — like they're tryin' to drag her under!"

The Jolly Roger creaked, roots snaking up the sides like grasping fingers. "Cut 'em loose. Now!" Killian ordered, his voice slicing through the din.

The mist parted reluctantly as the crew hacked at the roots. Black Tom's harpoon cleaved through thick coils with brutal precision, sap dripping dark and viscous. Billy's torch scorched others, flames hissing against the damp wood. One-Eyed Jack reloaded, growling, "Cursed bloody place." Smee muttered, slashing feebly with a dagger, "Ghosts and roots."

The fungi pulsed faster, bathing the deck in an unearthly sheen. A root-wrapped stone emerged at the deck's center, etched with faint runes — as if deposited by the Hollows' magic. The orb pulsed sharply, rising to a keening pitch.

"It's here, lads," Desylva said, storm magic flaring as she sensed the realm's dark core, "The next piece." Killian sheathed his cutlass with a sharp clink, "Let's claim it."

Regina's despair curse slithered through the mist, a whisper of loss weaving visions. Killian glimpsed a woman's face, fleeting and sorrowful. Desylva saw a tower crumbling into dust, her mark dimming as the weight dragged her to one knee with a sharp gasp, "No!"

For a heartbeat, Killian felt the curse claw at his own memories — a flicker of loss he refused to name. He shoved it down, jaw tightening as he dropped beside her, his hook clamping her shoulder, "Stay with me, lass. Don't you fade!" Her thunder cracked, a defiant boom shattering the curse. Rain lashed down, purging the vision. Her gray eyes cleared, locking with his as she rasped. "You too. Stay sharp."

Smee pointed at the stone, trembling, “It’s in there, Cap’n. Listen to that wail!” Billy hacked at a root, “She’s still tangled. But we’re close!” One-Eyed Jack fired into the mist, “Clear the bloody way!” Black Tom’s silence held like an anchor, his harpoon dripping ichor as he braced for the next fight.

A wraith hound leapt from the mist. Its form rippled like torn smoke, each movement leaving streaks of shadow that clung to the air. Its jaws a gaping shadow, eyes glowing feral red. Its howl piercing the air, amplifying Regina’s curse with a skull-splitting shriek.

Killian’s vision blurred, dizziness rocking him as he slashed wildly, hook tearing through vaporous flesh. “Not us, you mangy cur. Not today!” Desylva’s hands shook as her gusts roared pinning the hound mid-leap. “Hold it steady! Right there!”

Lightning split the air with a blinding flash, shadows scattering like ash on the wind.

One-Eyed Jack’s shot boomed, “Clear, ye spectral mutt!” Black Tom speared its flank, the harpoon sinking deep as ichor hissed and bubbled on the deck. He pulled the line, retrieving the harpoon, its tip slick. The hound wailed, dissolving into nothingness, its remnants scattering like spores in the mist.

Desylva’s storm blasted the root-wrapped stone, shattering it to reveal the right side of the Chalice’s cup portion, silver and runed, humming in sync with the orb. Killian lifted it, its warmth pulsing, “Second piece!”

Smee cheered, “Blimey, we’re legends!” One-Eyed Jack grunted, “Keep ‘em comin’, more loot!” Black Tom nodded, coiling his harpoon’s line, a rare flicker of satisfaction in his gaze. Billy whooped, waving his torch.

Quarterdeck

The orb hummed louder, the rune-carved chest by the helm rattling violently.

Desylva strode to the quarterdeck, cloak billowing. She opened the chest. The left cup piece rose, hovering beside the right in a flash of silver light. Their edges fused seamlessly, forming the complete cup portion of the Chalice. “Together,” Desylva said softly, “like us.”

She placed the joined cup inside the chest. The hum echoed as the lid shut.

A portal erupted before the ship, crimson and gold spiraling together, threaded with the Hollows’ sickly green glow, as though the realm tried to cling to them even as it opened the way out. The vortex throbbed with the orb’s mournful melody.

Desylva raised her hands, her mark flaring blue. “Time to shake loose, old girl,” she murmured, her storm surging. A tempest of wind and lightning roared, snapping the roots clutching the hull, their fragments dissolving into glowing ash. Killian spun the wheel, his voice a rallying cry, “Brace for the jump, lads. Ready the Roger for the next realm!”

Main Deck

The crew scrambled, hauling ropes and securing the deck. The Jolly Roger shuddered, lifting from the Hollows’ grasp, propelled by Desylva’s gusts.

Quarterdeck

“Full speed, Cap!” Desylva called, gray eyes locking with his, a spark flaring. Killian grinned. “Aye, lass!”

The ship surged toward the portal.

Enter Portal

The Jolly Roger soared toward the vortex, storm-wind roaring in her sails. The portal towered before them. Not a clean spiral of magic, but a living rupture in the air. Crimson and gold churned with veins of sickly green, pulsing like

bioluminescent roots torn open to the sky. Mist streamed toward it in long, grasping tendrils, as though the Hollows itself were being sucked into the breach.

The orb's hum sharpened into a trembling wail, vibrating through the planks like a warning heartbeat.

Killian held the helm firm, jaw set. "Steady, lass," he growled, voice low but fierce.

Desylva's storm surged in answer. Wind spiraled around the hull, kicking up spores in glittering clouds. Her mark blazed bright blue, stormlight threading through the sails as they snapped taut. The ship tilted forward, cutting through the thick, fungal air as though slicing through rot.

The crew braced themselves.

Billy clung to the rigging, torch guttering in the vortex's pull. Smee flattened his hat with both hands, eyes wide. One-Eyed Jack steadied a cannon, muttering curses at the stench. Black Tom planted his harpoon, gaze locked on the pulsing maw ahead.

The portal reacted. Its edges split open wider, like a wound tearing under pressure. Crimson light bled outward. Green veins throbbed. Mist peeled away from the Hollows, sucked into the spiraling heart.

The pull seized the hull. The Jolly Roger lurched forward, dragged toward the breach with brutal force. Wind howled across the deck, whipping cloaks and rattling rigging. Spores burst in shimmering clouds as the ship cut through the last stretch of the Hollows' air.

Killian and Desylva stood shoulder-to-shoulder at the helm, storm and sea entwined. "Together," Desylva murmured, stormlight flickering across her cheekbones. Killian grinned, spinning the wheel. "Aye, love. Let's tear through."

The bow struck the threshold. Light ruptured around them, cracking outward in jagged fractures of crimson, gold, and sickly green. The ship shuddered violently as the Hollows vanished behind them, swallowed by the collapsing tear of magic.

Inside the portal, the world changed. Sound warped into echoing wails, like distant voices calling through water. Colors smeared like wet paint, bleeding into shifting corridors of mist-veins and glowing spores. The air pulsed with bioluminescent currents, drifting in slow, hypnotic waves.

The Jolly Roger drifted through the spiraling void, storm-wind and sea-magic entwined, guided by the orb's rising song.

Desylva's storm flickered along the sails, stabilizing the hull against the vortex's uneven pull. Killian's hands held the wheel steady, his expression carved with fierce resolve.

The crew huddled close, silhouettes framed by the swirling glow. Billy whispered, "Cap'n… feels like the realm's still breathin' in here." Smee trembled. "Or dyin'…" One-Eyed Jack growled, "Either way, we're movin'." Black Tom's silence held like an anchor, harpoon gleaming in the shifting light.

The vortex tightened around them, its hum rising into a crystalline note. The ship plunged deeper into the spiraling dark.

Exit Portal - Realm 3: Celestial Reach

The Jolly Roger burst from the portal in a flare of gold and crimson light, her hull shuddering as the vortex spat her into open ether. For a heartbeat she hung weightless, suspended in a vast expanse where gravity felt optional and the air tasted of starlight. Then the cosmic currents caught her — gentle, shimmering streams of force that lifted her bow and carried her forward as though she were gliding across a sea made of light.

The Celestial Reach unfurled around her. A boundless expanse stretched in every direction. Neither sky nor sea, but something between. A luminous void threaded with drifting nebulae and rivers of pale silver mist. Stars hung close enough to touch, suspended like lanterns in the ether, their glow casting soft halos across the ship's enchanted

oak planks. Nebulae drifted overhead in slow, luminous waves, their colors bleeding across the sails in prismatic hues. Some stars pulsed in steady rhythms, others shimmered like distant fireflies, their light refracting across the sails in shifting, iridescent bands.

The sky was a deep indigo void streaked with luminous trails. Comet paths frozen in time, glowing arcs that curved across the heavens like celestial brushstrokes. Wisps of radiant vapor drifted through the air, brushing the sails with faint sparks that danced across the runes etched into the canvas.

The air hummed. Not with wind, nor with magic alone, but with the resonance of the realm itself. A soft, harmonic vibration threaded through the deck, through the masts, through the hull, vibrating like a distant celestial choir. It felt ancient, patient, impossibly vast, as though the Celestial Reach were a living consciousness observing their arrival.

Below the ship, no water waited, only a vast, swirling tapestry of cosmic dust. It moved like a living ocean, currents shifting in slow, deliberate tides. Each wave of stardust rolled beneath the hull, lifting her gently, cradling her weight as though the realm itself welcomed her arrival.

The Jolly Roger glided forward across the star-woven expanse, her timbers glowing faintly in the starlight. Cosmic currents rippled beneath her keel like tides of living starlight, buoying her in the ether and guiding her across the shimmering void. Behind her, the portal's fading glow dimmed and was swallowed by the endless expanse.

Ahead, the realm stretched into infinity, a star-woven sea waiting to be crossed.

Full Deck

Desylva stood at the stern, cloak whipping in the cosmic wind, her storm-gray eyes blazing with fierce purpose. She placed her hand on the rail, whispering to the ship, "Okay girl… let's dance through this void together. Take my strength."

Her storm magic surged. A crackling pulse erupted from her mark, whipping the ethereal streams into a tempest's gale. Wind spiraled around the hull, lightning threading through the runes carved into the planks. The runes flared bright blue, syncing with her storm in perfect harmony, propelling and steadying the ship in a seamless union of her power and its enchantments.

Killian clamped the helm, coat billowing behind him, blue eyes glinting with wild delight. "A sky worth a tankard, lads!" he bellowed, voice echoing across the cosmic sea. Desylva stepped beside him, cloak snapping like a banner. "Deadly as a storm in glass," she said, her mark flaring again, syncing with the realm's pulse. The air around her crackled, responding to her storm-magic like a living thing.

Smee clung to the railing, eyes wide. "Stars're fallin'!" One-Eyed Jack braced a cannon. "I'll blast 'em to stardust!" Black Tom's harpoon glinted silver in the nebula's glow. Billy scrambled up the rigging, shouting, "She's climbin'!"

The cosmic currents shifted. Without warning the river of starlight beneath the hull split into three separate streams, each flowing in a different direction.

The Jolly Roger lurched. Her bow swung sharply to port as one current seized the keel while another tugged the stern starboard. The hull groaned. The stars around them blurred into long streaks of silver fire.

"Cap'n!" Billy shouted from the rigging. "The sea's dividin'!" Smee squeaked, clutching the rail. "That ain't sea. … It's bloody sky!"

The orb's hum rose into a sharp warning note. Desylva's eyes narrowed. "Currents." Her storm-mark pulsed blue.

Ahead, three celestial rivers twisted through the void. One glowed gold. One shimmered silver. One burned with pale violet light. Each route vanished into a different stretch of the Reach.

Killian tightened his grip on the wheel. "Which path?"

The orb vibrated. Once. Twice. Three times. Then angled toward the silver stream.

Desylva thrust out both hands. Wind exploded from beneath the sails. The Jolly Roger tilted hard, cutting across the competing currents. Cosmic dust erupted around the hull as the ship crossed from one river of stars into another. The silver current accepted them. The pull eased. The ship steadied.

Ahead, the stars shivered. Something was waiting.

A ripple tore through the ether.

A star wraith descended, a luminous specter woven from fractured starlight, its tendrils trailing cosmic fire. Regina's blaze curse ignited flames along its form, turning its glow into searing gold.

Killian slashed upward, cutlass catching the wraith's light. "Not us, fiery bastard!" Desylva's voice rang across the deck. "It guards the final piece!"

The orb's hum soared, vibrating through the planks in a rising crescendo.

The wraith's tendrils lashed, flames streaking across the deck. Killian's hook deflected the fire, sparks scattering across the quarterdeck. Desylva's rain surged in a sudden deluge, dousing the blaze curse with a hiss of evaporating flame. Lightning split the wraith's torso, its wail ringing like fracturing crystal.

One-Eyed Jack's cannon boomed. "Take that, git!" Billy waved from the rigging. "She's buckin'!" Black Tom's harpoon pierced the wraith's core, retrieved via line, ichor sparking in cosmic arcs.

The wraith dissolved into drifting stardust.

The orb's hum guided them forward, pulling the ship toward a crystalline island suspended in the ether. Jagged peaks cradling a symphony of glowing crystals that chimed in harmonic resonance.

"There's our prize!" Killian shouted, spinning the helm. Desylva gripped the orb, its song peaking in her hands. "Song's peakin'. … Singing to the stem!"

Rumpelstiltskin's vertigo curse spun the air, a dizzying spiral that warped the horizon. Killian staggered, snarling, "Damn imp!"

Desylva's gusts roared, anchoring the ship against the curse's pull. Lightning shattered the vertigo spell in a crackling burst. She steadied Killian with a hand on his arm. "Got ya, pirate," she said, eyes locking with his.

A lunar wyrm uncoiled from the crystalline island. Its scales shimmering like moonlit glass, eyes glowing pale silver. Its wings unfurled in a sweeping arc, scattering stardust across the deck.

Smee screamed. Killian's hook slashed. "Meet your end!" Desylva's rain battered its hide, thunder booming across the ether. Black Tom speared its flank, retrieving his harpoon as ichor sprayed in shimmering droplets. One-Eyed Jack's cannon cracked scales. "Blast ye!" Billy shouted, "Keep at it!"

Desylva's lightning cleaved the wyrm's skull, splitting it in a blinding flash. The creature crashed into crystalline dust, scattering across the cosmic currents.

The orb glowed, its light sharpening into a focused beam that pierced the crystalline island's core. The Chalice's stem revealed itself in the radiance. Silver, runed, humming in perfect sync with the realm, as though the ether itself had been waiting for this moment. The stem pulsed once, a heartbeat of light.

Killian seized it, lifting it high. "Final piece. Ours!" The declaration echoed across the void, stirring the nebulae overhead.

Smee yelped, stumbling back in awe. One-Eyed Jack's grin split wide. Black Tom nodded, harpoon coiled at his side. Billy cheered from the rigging, the sails catching the vibration of the stem's hum like a tuning fork struck by starlight.

The orb answered with a rising tremor, its hum swelling until the rune-carved chest rattled violently, runes flickering like frantic fireflies. The deck vibrated beneath their boots — not in warning, but in anticipation.

Desylva strode to the helm, cloak billowing in the cosmic wind. She opened the chest. The cup portion rose in a column of silver fire, hovering beside the stem. The air warped around them, bending like heated glass. The two pieces drew together, edges aligning with impossible precision.

A flash, bright enough to cast shadows across the ether.

The stem and cup fused seamlessly, forming the complete Whispering Chalice. The orb flared, its essence unraveling into threads of light that spiraled into the Chalice, merging with the runes until they blazed with cosmic fire.

The realm responded. Stars pulsed, nebulae rippled, the void itself seemed to inhale.

The completed Whispering Chalice rang with a single clear note.

The sound rolled across the deck. Across the stars. Across the realms it had passed through. Forest. Hollows. Reach. The runes blazed brighter. Voices whispered from within its silver depths. Not words. Memories. Thorned roots. Shadow and despair. Cosmic fire. Every trial they had crossed to claim it.

The light swept over the deck. Past Smee. Past Billy. Past One-Eyed Jack. Past Black Tom. Then settled upon Killian and Desylva.

The glow lingered. Measuring. Listening. The realm fell silent.

For a heartbeat, the Chalice seemed to search them. Sea. Storm. Pirate. Tempest.

Then the runes softened. The silver fire steadied. Acceptance. The hum deepened into a warm, resonant chorus.

The Chalice hovered in the air, spinning slowly, its runes blazing with cosmic fire. The light around it tightened, spiraling inward as though the artifact were drawing breath. Then — with a soft, resonant chime — it tipped forward, drifting toward Killian in a deliberate, graceful descent.

The void seemed to hold still.

Killian stepped beneath it, raising his hand. The Chalice settled into his palm with surprising weight, its warmth blooming up his arm like a pulse of recognition. The runes dimmed to a steady glow, as if acknowledging its bearer.

Killian held it aloft, its hum a chorus of realms, layered and ancient. “Look at her, lads. Power itself,” he said, eyes gleaming with reverence and hunger. Desylva’s hand brushed his, the Chalice’s glow reflecting in her storm-gray eyes.

The glow haloed them both, silver fire catching in her storm-gray eyes and reflecting in his. For a moment the cosmic wind fell still, the hum of the Chalice threading between them like a living pulse. Killian’s breath hitched — not from fear, but from the weight of the moment — and Desylva’s fingers lingered against his wrist, steadying him, claiming the moment with him. The realm’s light framed them in a fierce, united blaze.

Smee gawked, breath hitching. “Blimey… it sings.” One-Eyed Jack’s grin faltered into something almost reverent. “Better sing gold,” he muttered, though even he couldn’t tear his gaze away. Black Tom’s grip tightened on his harpoon, the weapon trembling as the Chalice’s glow washed over him. Billy clung to the rigging, eyes wide, voice cracking with wonder. “She’s a beauty… Cap’n, she’s alive!”

The Chalice’s light rolled across the deck in shimmering waves, lifting the air, making the planks feel weightless, as though the Jolly Roger herself bowed to the artifact’s awakening. For a heartbeat, the entire crew stood suspended in the glow, caught between awe and fear, listening to the hum of realms braided into a single, ancient song.

A tremor rippled through the void — subtle, then rising, resonant — as though the realms themselves were aligning in answer to the Chalice's awakening. Its glow intensified. Silver fire spilled from the artifact in sweeping arcs, bending the air, warping the ether.

Then the portal tore open.

Gold and emerald spiraled outward in a radiant bloom, unfurling like a celestial flower forced into existence. Its roar rolled across the cosmic sea, deep and commanding, a summons older than any realm. Light bent around the Jolly Roger's hull, stretching long, wavering shadows across the deck like grasping hands.

The cosmic currents shifted. The sails snapped taut. The ship lurched as though caught in the breath of a giant.

Killian's grin sharpened. He raised the Chalice high, its silver blaze flaring in answer to the portal's call. "Into the breach!" he roared from the helm, the words ringing like a battle cry carved into the stars.

The Jolly Roger banked sharply, sails snapping, hull catching the rising wind of converging realms. The portal's pull tugged at the rigging, the planks, the very air around them.

Killian braced, blue eyes flashing with a pirate's hunger for glory. "Folks say it's cursed," he bellowed over the portal's hum, "but its power's worth a king's ransom!"

Desylva's storm surged, her magic threading through the sails and rigging, anchoring the ship against the portal's rising drag. Her gray eyes locked with his — fierce, unspoken fire blazing between them.

For a heartbeat, the crew stood frozen — suspended between awe and terror — listening to the Chalice's hum braid itself into the fabric of the void. Then instinct took over. They leapt into motion, hauling ropes, bracing lines, shouting orders as the ship plunged toward the swirling maw.

One-Eyed Jack fired a parting shot into the void. "Clear off, ye starry hell!" Black Tom hauled Smee by the scruff as the deck tilted. Billy waved from the rigging, voice ringing bright. "She's steady, Cap'n. Full speed!"

The Jolly Roger surged toward the portal, her hull singing with the wind of converging realms as the cosmic maw widened to swallow her whole.

Enter Portal

The portal swelled before the Jolly Roger — a spiraling vortex of gold and emerald light that bent the Celestial Reach around it. Its edges rippled like molten glass, warping the cosmic currents into shimmering arcs that curled toward the ship. The air hummed with ancient resonance, vibrating through the masts and rigging like a celestial drumbeat.

Killian held the helm firm, blue eyes reflecting the vortex's glow. "Hold her true," he said, voice low but steady. Desylva's storm rose beside him, wind spiraling around the hull in a tightening gyre. Her mark blazed bright blue, stormlight threading through the sails as they snapped taut. The runes carved into the planks flared in response, syncing with her magic in a pulse of electric blue.

The crew braced themselves.

Smee hunched low, hat flattened against his head. One-Eyed Jack planted his boots, cannon aimed but steady. Billy clung to the rigging, lantern flickering in the vortex's pull. Black Tom anchored himself at the rail, harpoon grounded like a pike.

Cosmic currents shifted beneath the hull, lifting the ship in a smooth, rising arc. Nebulae drifted overhead, their colors bleeding into the vortex's glow. The Celestial Reach dimmed around them — stars softening, ether rippling — as though the realm itself were withdrawing its light in solemn farewell.

The portal's pull seized the Jolly Roger. Wind roared across the deck, whipping cloaks and rattling rigging. The sails caught Desylva's storm-wind, the ship tilting forward as the vortex drew them in. The air tasted of starlight and cold metal.

Killian and Desylva stood shoulder-to-shoulder at the helm, storm and sea entwined. "Together," Desylva murmured, stormlight flickering across her cheekbones. Killian's grin sharpened. "Aye. Let's cut through the stars."

The bow touched the threshold.

Light erupted. Not in a blast, but in a silent, sweeping bloom. It spiraled around the ship in ribbons of gold and emerald. The deck shuddered beneath their boots as the Celestial Reach fell away, swallowed by the vortex's spiraling dark.

Inside the portal, sound warped into echoing chimes. Colors folded into one another, forming drifting corridors of light that curved like living constellations. Cosmic dust drifted like falling embers, each particle glowing faintly before dissolving into the void.

The ship drifted deeper, storm-wind and sea-magic entwined, guided by the Chalice's rising song.

Desylva's storm flickered along the sails, stabilizing the hull against the vortex's shifting pull. Killian's hook and hand held the wheel steady, jaw set with fierce resolve. The crew huddled close, silhouettes framed by the swirling glow.

Billy whispered, "Cap'n… feels like the sky's breathing." Smee swallowed hard. "Or watching…" One-Eyed Jack muttered, "Doesn't matter. Portal's got us. She's pullin' us through." Black Tom's silence held like a keel.

The vortex tightened around them, its hum rising into a crystalline note. The Jolly Roger plunged deeper into the spiraling dark. And then — with a final, resonant pulse — the ship crossed fully into the portal

Exit Portal (Sundering Expanse)

The Jolly Roger tore free of the Celestial Reach's portal with a final, bone-rattling shudder — a sound like the cracking of distant stars — and plunged into a world of twilight and water. The vortex behind her collapsed into a whirlpool of gold and emerald light, its spiraling mouth flattening into a horizontal disc that hovered just above the sea's surface. The ship glided out of it cleanly, as though slipping through a curtain of shimmering glass, her bow cutting into the gentle waves with a soft hiss.

A gentle twilight breeze swept across the deck.

It carried the briny tang of open water — warm, familiar, grounding — washing away the last traces of celestial ozone that clung to the sails. The scent rolled over the enchanted oak hull like a balm, soothing the timbers after the Reach's frigid shimmer. The runes carved deep into the planks glowed a soft, steady blue, their magic pulsing in slow waves as they smoothed away the dents left by the Twilight Hollows' roots and the scorch marks from the Reach's star-fire. The hull brightened beneath the glow, pristine and unmarred, as though reborn into this realm.

The sea stretched out in every direction — vast, glassy, and tinted with the colors of dying day. The water was a deep sapphire, shot through with veins of molten gold that drifted beneath the surface like slow-moving currents of light. Each swell caught the twilight glow, cresting in soft indigo and fading amber, reflecting the sky in shimmering ribbons.

The sky itself was a masterpiece of fading brilliance.

Bands of gold clung to the horizon, melting upward into deepening indigo. Wisps of violet cloud drifted across the heavens, their edges glowing faintly as though lit from within. High above, a scattering of early stars pierced the dusk — sharp, silver points that shimmered against the darkening canvas. The air hummed with quiet warmth, a gentle contrast to the cold void they had just escaped.

Far off, the horizon rippled. Not with waves, but with something deeper — a subtle distortion, like heat rising from desert sand. The Sundering Expanse breathed in long, slow pulses, its magic threading through the sea in faint glimmers. The water responded, glowing brighter in places, dimmer in others, as though the realm itself were alive and shifting beneath the ship's keel. The realm welcomed them with open water and endless horizon.

The Jolly Roger creaked proudly.

Her masts straightened, sails unfurling with a soft snap as they caught the twilight breeze. The rigging chimed faintly, metal ringing against metal in gentle notes that echoed across the calm water. The ship's silhouette stood tall against the fading sky — a dark, defiant shape gliding across the twilight sea with the grace of a creature born to the water.

Main Deck

The crew gathered on the main deck, their silhouettes rising like shadows against the dusk. Their cheers rose like a tide against the twilight air — triumph, relief, and fierce unity woven into a single roar.

Quarterdeck

Killian stood tall at the helm, the twilight breeze tugging at his torn black leather coat. The shoulder seam was ripped wide from the dryad's thorns, crusted with dried blood and streaks of silver ichor from the star wraith's blaze. His hook glinted like a crescent moon as he steadied the wheel with a practiced hand, the metal catching the fading gold of the sky. His piercing blue eyes blazed with a pirate's fire — undimmed by the trials of the Enchanted Forest, the Hollows, and the Reach.

The sea wind brushed across his face, carrying the briny tang of open water, a welcome balm after the starlit void's cold bite. "Three realms behind us, lads. And the Chalice in our hold!!" he roared, his voice a thunderclap across the quarterdeck. It rolled across the deck like a wave, resonating with the pride of a captain who'd led his crew through shadow, storm, and starlight.

Below deck, the Whispering Chalice rested whole — its cup and stem fused into a single radiant vessel. Its silver runes burned bright in Killian's mind, their hum a chorus of power earned through blood and storm.

Main Deck

Smee slumped against a coil of rope, trembling with relief. A shaky grin split his face as he wiped sweat from his brow. "Blimey, what a scrap! Wyrms, wraiths!" he crowed, voice cracking with exhausted triumph. One-Eyed Jack leaned against a cannon, black powder smudging his grizzled face. His eye glinted as he cleaned his flintlock with slow, deliberate strokes. "Next time, I'll blast 'em cleaner, cursed or not," he growled, though a smirk tugged at his lips. "But that Chalice better sing gold for all this trouble."

Black Tom stood at the rail, harpoon wiped clean of ichor, its tip catching the twilight's glow. His scarred features held a quiet satisfaction — a nod, subtle but sure, sealing their victory and binding the crew's triumph in his silence. Billy perched on a barrel, freckled face flushed, waving a rum bottle. "Rum first, lads, then I'll sing 'til the sea echoes!" he declared, voice bright and wild. Laughter rolled across the deck like gentle surf.

Quarterdeck

Desylva stood beside Killian, her leather cloak tattered from the dryad's thorns and the wraith's flames. Her gray eyes reflected the twilight's fleeting gold, softening the storm-sharp edges of her gaze. Her cursed mark pulsed faintly blue beneath her sleeve — her storm magic ebbing like a tide after the Reach's cosmic fury, yet a spark of wild energy lingered in her stance. She brushed a damp strand of hair from her face, her dagger sheathed at her hip, its blade still streaked with the wyrm's silver blood.

Killian's gaze softened as it met hers — a rare vulnerability threading through his swagger. "You're my storm, lass," he murmured, voice warm against the sea's chill. "Kept me sailin' through that chaos." Her nod was firm, a smile tugging at her lips, voice steady but rich with feeling, "Don't ya dare drink that victory without me. Earned it together, we did." Her hand hovered near his, their fingers brushing, igniting a spark that warmed the twilight air.

Main Deck

The crew's cheers swelled. A rough symphony of grit and relief.

The Jolly Roger carved through gentle waves. The hull thrummed with the runes' soft glow, responding to the realm's magic with a steady pulse. Lanterns flickered along the rigging, casting warm halos across the deck.

Smee clapped Billy on the back, hand unsteady but proud, eyes gleaming. "Whip us up a tune, lad. Somethin' to match that Chalice's song!" Billy grinned, taking a swig. "Aye, Smee." He settled the lute into his lap. "A shanty for the realms we bled through!"

He struck a chord. Low, resonant, warm. The crew quieted. One-Eyed Jack leaned forward, pipe ember glowing. Smee hugged his bottle like a lifeline. Black Tom rested his harpoon against his shoulder, eyes steady.

Killian and Desylva stood shoulder-to-shoulder, the twilight breeze brushing past them like a listening spirit.

The notes carried over the sea, blending with the creak of timbers and the runes' faint hum. The Expanse answered with soft ripples of gold beneath the waves, as though the realm itself listened.

Full Deck

Billy's voice lifted, rough, earnest, carrying the weight of every realm they'd crossed as he tapped his boot in rhythm. His freckled face glowed with pride. His voice carried a rough edge of triumph. Smee clapped along off-beat.

Billy (gritty, warm, a little breathless)
Through thorn-choked glades we carved our way,
Roots grabbin' boots where shadows lay,
Dryads screamin' for blood that day—
But we held fast and pushed on through.

Their claws scraped deep, their curses flew,
Bark-skin beasts in a forest skew,
Yet storm and steel made their ranks unglue—
And the Chalice called us true.

One-Eyed Jack grunted in approval, tapping his pipe against the rail. Black Tom nodded once, slow and solemn, his hand tightening on the harpoon shaft.

Billy (tone soft, eyes half-closed)
The glades were dark, the air was old,
The roots sang secrets never told,
The forest watched with hunger cold—
Yet we walked its ancient breath.

The dryads rose with eyes of bark,
Their voices echoing through the dark,
But stormlight carved a silver mark—
And led us past their wrath.

Smee wiped his eyes, overwhelmed by memory.

Billy (grin)(tone rowdy and bright.)
Hoist yer rum for the thorny fight!
We brawled through branches left and right!
Dryads shrieked at our bold might—
But we laughed and swung again!

A cheer for roots we hacked apart,
For Billy's tune and Smee's faint heart,
For Killian's grin, a pirate's art—
We owned that forest den!

Killian chuckled, shaking his head at the memory. Desylva's lips curved, stormlight flickering beneath her sleeve.

Billy (voice drops to a somber hush.)
The forest whispered as we passed,
Its shadows clingin' long and fast,
A realm of memories, deep and vast—
And danger in each breath.

Yet through its gloom we found our way,
Storm guiding night, steel guiding day,
And though its ghosts still whisper gray—
We walked beyond its death.

The crew hummed low. Twilight dimmed slightly, a soft, eerie pulse, as Billy shifted tone. His voice thinned into a haunting melody. Desylva's mark flickered faintly.

Billy
In Hollows deep where twilight bled,
Roots curled tight like ropes of dread,
Curses clawed at heart and head—
But we fought on through the mire.

The shadows bit with venom's sting,
The air itself a choking ring,
Yet Killian's hook made curses fling—
And Desylva sparked with fire.

Smee shivered. Killian smirked, proud, and stepped subtly closer to Desylva, instinctive protection. She brushed his arm, steadying him with a quiet touch.

Billy (voice lyrical, eyes distant.)
The Hollows hummed with ancient ache,
Their twilight soft as dreams that break,
The roots rose up like coils of snake—
Yet stormlight split their hold.

The curses whispered from the gloom,
A realm of half-forgotten doom,
But we carved a path through twilight's womb—
And claimed its hidden gold.

One-Eyed Jack tapped his boot in rhythm. Black Tom's grip tightened on the rail.

Billy (grin sharpens, voice rowdy and bold.)
Raise yer voice for the twilight fight!
Roots grabbed ankles left and right!
Curses tried to steal our sight—
But we kicked 'em back with flair!

A cheer for Jack who blasted true,
For Tom who speared the shadows blue,
For Billy's tune that carried through—
We owned that twilight lair!

The crew stomped once in unison. Lanterns swaying gently.

Billy (soft)
The Hollows breathed a mournful sigh,
A realm where twilight never dies,
Where curses drift like lullabies—
And roots remember pain.

Yet through its hush we carved a seam,
A fragile path, a silver gleam,
And though its ghosts still haunt our dream—
We walked beyond its chain.

A faint ripple of dim violet shimmered across the deck. Starlight rippling across the sails.

Billy (voice rises. Bright, fierce, cosmic)
In star-lit void where cold winds bite,
We faced the wraith of burning light,
Its tendrils clawed with cosmic spite—
But we cut through its flame.

The lunar wyrm rose pale and vast,
Its wings a storm of silver glass,
Yet lightning split its skull at last—
And we claimed the Chalice's name.

Desylva's storm flickered along the sails. Killian's jaw tightened with remembered fire — and his eyes met hers, a shared memory of cosmic peril.

Billy (soft)
The Reach was wide, a cosmic sea,
Where stars sang low in harmony,
The void itself a memory—
Of realms that came before.

The wraith burned gold with cursed fire,
The wyrm rose high in moonlit ire,
Yet storm and steel climbed ever higher—
And opened heaven's door.

One-Eyed Jack stomped once. The sea glowed faintly gold beneath the hull. Billy's grin sharpened.

Billy
Sing it loud for the starry fight!
We brawled 'gainst beasts of cosmic might!
Wraiths and wyrms in blazing light—
But we smashed 'em all aside!

A cheer for Killian's fearless grin,
For Desylva's storm that roared within,
For every lad who fought to win—
We owned that star-fire tide!

Killian laughed under his breath. Desylva's stormlight pulsed warmly.

Billy (tone falls to a somber hush)
The Reach was cold, a realm of night,
Where stars remember ancient fright,
Where void and silence share their plight—
And shadows never fade.

Yet through its dark we carved a flame,
A silver path, a whispered name,
And though its ghosts still call the same—
We walked beyond its shade.

The crew swayed. Black Tom rested a hand on the rail. Gold veins beneath the water pulsed gently in time with Billy's rhythm.

Billy (soft, warm, twilight-gentle)
Now twilight's sea rolls soft and wide,
Gold veins drift beneath the tide,
The Expanse hums low, a realm of pride—
And welcomes battered souls.

We crossed the void, we braved the fight,
Through storm and curse and star-lit night,
Now twilight wraps us warm and bright—
And lets our story roll.

Killian's shoulder brushed Desylva's. Twilight gold reflected in both their eyes.

Billy (lyrical)
The Expanse breathed gold beneath our keel,
A twilight realm that felt unreal,
Its waves a hymn, its sky a seal—
Of journeys yet to come.

The horizon shimmered soft and far,
A fading glow, a newborn star,
A realm that heals each travel scar—
And hums a gentle drum.

The crew swayed gently. Smee sniffled, wiping his eyes.

Billy (grin brightens, tone rowdy and bright.)
Raise yer rum for the twilight sea!
She's calm and warm as a realm can be!
We fought through hell to sail her free—
So cheer 'til lanterns shake!

A shout for storms we left behind,
For curses snapped and wraiths declined,
For every lad who dared the grind—
We own this twilight lake!

One-Eyed Jack barked a laugh. Black Tom tapped the rail once.

Billy (voice a final, somber hush.)
The Expanse whispers soft and low,
A realm where twilight's embers glow,
A place to breathe, a place to slow—
Before the next unknown.

Yet even peace holds shadows near,
And Killian's heart still stirs with fear,
But storm and sea stand ever clear—
And guide him where he's grown.

Billy ended on a soft chord, eyes shining. The crew exhaled as one. A release of tension held since the Reach.

Billy strummed gently, letting the shanty settle into the twilight air. Smee wiped his eyes. One-Eyed Jack let out a gravelly chuckle, softening his grizzled edge, lighting his pipe. Its ember glowed as he puffed, a ring of smoke curling into the dusk. “Damn fine tune, lad.” Black Tom tapped the rail once, then his dark eyes flicked to the horizon. harpoon resting at his side.

Killian’s grin softened. Desylva’s hand brushed his again.

Main Deck

The deck thrummed with chatter, a chorus of hard-won camaraderie. Salt air soothed battered spirits, washing away the last echoes of curses and cosmic fire.

Smee shuffled, muttering, “Peril’s astern now, aye? Need a dram to scrub them ghosts from me head!” He vanished below, the hatch banging shut — only to re-emerge a few moments later with a second bottle swinging in his hand. “To ye, Cap’n!” he called, raising the rum in a toast.

One-Eyed Jack puffed another smoke ring, smirk broadening. “Damn fine fight. Worth the blood. Barely,” he said, his words lighter than usual. Black Tom’s nod sealed their victory, his steady presence anchoring the revelry.

Quarterdeck

Killian’s heart thudded. Desylva’s nearness a steady pulse after their shared peril. He leaned closer, his voice a murmur, “That Chalice’s song’s still ringin’ in me head. Power like that… we’ve claimed somethin’ fierce.” Her gray eyes traced the horizon, her smile sharp with pride. “Aye. Its hum’s with us still.”

Storm and steal hummed in unison. A duet honed through the Chalice’s call. Their trust glowed between them, a beacon in the twilight. The shadows of Rumpelstiltskin’s curses and Regina’s venom lingered in Killian’s mind, their greed a specter he’d outpaced — for now. His thirst for revenge simmered, tempered by Desylva’s presence, a ballast to his fire.

Main Deck

Night deepened into a star-pricked expanse. The sky winking awake as the Jolly Roger sailed steady into an uncharted sea. Lanterns swayed gently, casting warm light across the deck. Killian’s gaze swept the crew, their faces lit by the rigging’s glow.

Smee, swaying slightly, raised his bottle again. “Here’s to more realms, Cap’n! … If ye dare lead us!” he slurred, prompting laughs. One-Eyed Jack’s pipe ember flared. “Let ’em come. I’ll blast the next lot proper.” Black Tom leaned against the rail, harpoon a silent sentinel, eyes reflecting the stars, a quiet vow to face what lay ahead.

The night wrapped them in fleeting peace, the sea whispering beneath the hull. The Jolly Roger sailed on. Steady, proud, whole, carrying a crew forged in storm and starlight into the calm before whatever dawn waited next.

A few hours later

The Jolly Roger dropped anchor in a secluded cove, her hull settling with a gentle sigh as the chain rattled through the hawsepipe. The sails hung furled beneath a star-washed sky, constellations unfurling overhead like a tapestry woven from ancient fire. The sea lapped softly against the enchanted oak hull, each wave a soothing murmur that hushed the lingering echoes of the realms’ chaos. Moonlight silvered the water, casting a ghostly glow across the main deck and turning the cove into a cradle of quiet magic.

Runes etched into the timbers shimmered faintly, their blue glow weaving a slow, steady dance as they eased the ship’s strain — thorns from the Forest, roots from the Hollows, fire from the Reach. The hull brightened beneath their touch, pristine as the day she was forged, her resilience a mirror to the crew’s own.

The crew settled across the deck — some sprawled on barrels, others slumped against coils of rope — their bodies sinking into the calm. The air was thick with salt, driftwood, and the faint sweetness of distant kelp beds. Lanterns swayed gently from the rigging, casting warm halos across the planks.

Quarterdeck

Killian leaned against the helm, his hook resting on the wheel, catching the moonlight in a soft crescent gleam. His voice, softer than the battle cries of realms past, drifted across the deck. “Rest easy, lads.” His blue eyes traced the starfield above, a rare stillness settling over him — the kind that only comes after surviving storms no mortal ship was meant to weather.

Main Deck

The crew’s murmurs rose, a low hum of relief and pride. Smee struck a flint mid-deck, coaxing a fire to life in a brazier. Its crackle mingled with the sea’s song, casting flickering shadows that danced across the planks. He hefted a rum bottle, stout hands steady despite his fatigue, and grinned broadly. “A round fer all, aye? Earned it twice over!” He passed the amber liquid along, its warm glint brightening the night.

One-Eyed Jack took a deep swig, settling on a crate as his grizzled voice spun a tale. “Them stars were a sight. Blasted ’em all to glitter. That Chalice… worth more’n all the gold in all the realms.” His eye gleamed with greed and awe, pipe tucked behind his ear.

Black Tom sat cross-legged near the rail, methodically cleaning his harpoon. Moonlight flashed along the blade. His scarred face remained impassive, but his steady movements were a silent hymn to their survival — each stroke a quiet acknowledgment of battles won. Billy plucked at his lute, rough tune weaving through the air, its notes bright against the cove’s quiet. The sound drifted across the water, echoing faintly against the rocks. Laughter rippled across the deck.

Quarterdeck

Killian’s gaze settled on Desylva. She sat nearby on a barrel, her gray eyes meeting his with a spark that stirred his heart. Her rhythm pulsed with his — storm woven into sea, a bond forged through fire and song. Her scarred hands cradled a rum bottle, her mark pulsing faintly beneath her sleeve, a quiet echo of the tempests she’d unleashed. Firelight danced across her features, highlighting the wild edge in her smile — a promise of battles yet to come.

Main Deck

Smee’s snores soon rumbled as he slumped against a crate, rum bottle cradled in his lap, hat tipping over his eyes. One-Eyed Jack carved a notch into his pipe’s stem, gravelly laugh fading into the night. Black Tom stared out at the sea, silence washing over the crew’s chatter, harpoon propped beside him, its gleam a quiet vow. Billy’s tune slowed, his head nodding. “G’night, Cap’n.” The lute fell silent as he curled beside a coil of rope.

The fire dimmed to glowing embers, casting long shadows across the deck.

Killian shifted closer to Desylva, voice low — a murmur meant for her alone. “You’re quiet tonight, lass. What’s brewin’ in that head o’ yours? Thinkin’ o’ that Chalice?” His hook rested near her on the barrel, its curve catching the moonlight.

Desylva’s smile flickered, soft and edged with a wild spark. Her voice hushed as the sea’s whisper. “Aye… them realms. Mad, wild places we tore through.” Her mark pulsed faintly as she passed him the rum bottle, warmth seeping into her hands.

Killian took a sip, grin sharpening. “Not gone soft yet. … Still my partner in the rough, aye?” Her tease drew a deep chuckle. “Never soft. Partners through the muck and the stars.”

Their shoulders brushed. Storm meeting sea in a quiet collision. The cove held them in a rare pause, twilight and tide cradling the calm after chaos.

Later

The night deepened further. Lanterns dimmed, their flames shrinking to soft amber glows. The tide whispered against the hull in slow, rhythmic breaths. The stars wheeled overhead, drifting across the sky like ancient travelers. The Jolly Roger rested — proud, whole, wrapped in the hush of victory. Her crew drifted into sleep one by one beneath the moonlit veil. Dawn would soon begin its slow creep across the horizon. But for now, the night held them close.

A warm twilight breeze drifted through the air, carrying the faint scent of kelp and gold-veined water — the cove breathing in slow, steady pulses.

Smee sprawled with his bottle, snoring louder, a faint smile on his face as though still dreaming of wyrms and wraiths. His hat had slipped sideways, casting a crooked shadow across his cheek. The rum bottle rested in the crook of his arm like a cherished relic. One-Eyed Jack whittled another notch into his pipe's stem, the blade scraping softly in the quiet. His eye glinted with a promise as he muttered, "Next realm's mine to blast, mark it." The words drifted over the waves, half threat, half boast, fading into the night like smoke.

Black Tom watched the horizon, his silhouette stark against the starlight. His steady gaze remained fixed on the dark water, harpoon propped beside him. His scarred face was impassive but alert — a silent sentinel guarding the cove, the ship, the crew. Billy slept soundly near the mast, lute tucked beneath his arm. His dreams were filled with songs of their triumph, his fingers twitching faintly as though still plucking chords in sleep.

Killian caught Desylva's fierce glint — her hair snapping like a flag in a rising wind, her posture sharp with restless energy. He grinned, a feral edge to it, and headed for the companionway. She snagged his sleeve, matching his stride, their fire reigniting in a spark that needed no words.

One-Eyed Jack tilted his head, watching them vanish below. His growl morphed into a rough laugh. "Cap'n's in fer a brawl tonight. Sea's gonna feel the bruises o' that storm!" Black Tom's silhouette stood carved from shadow, his harpoon gleaming like a shard of moonlight — a quiet vow etched in steel.

The cove's calm trembled. The gold veins beneath the water flickered out, twilight collapsing into deep indigo as the realm recoiled from the rising storm.

Billy's torch sputtered in the gusts, flame dancing wildly. His voice rose in a shout over the growing roar of waves. "They'll tear the deep apart! Roger's seen it afore — and held fast!" One-Eyed Jack glared at the roiling sky as clouds gathered, the cove's stillness shattering. Waves crashed louder against the hull, slapping the planks with rising force. "Get below deck afore this weather turns savage!" he barked. "Brace yerselves fer a wild one!"

The crew scrambled. Smee stumbled over a coil of rope, hat flying. Billy shielded his lute with both arms. Black Tom braced the rail, muscles taut as he secured the harpoon lines. One-Eyed Jack cursed as he shoved his pipe and flintlock into his belt.

Lanterns swung wildly as the wind surged, casting frantic shadows across the deck. The Jolly Roger endured. Runes glowed steady, blue light pulsing like a heartbeat. The cove darkened. The wind rose. The sea stirred.

Killian & Desylva's Cabin

The cabin door burst open with a splintering crash, the Jolly Roger lurching as a monstrous wave slammed the hull, the timbers trembling under the sea's wrath. Runes carved into the wood flared a brilliant blue, their magic weaving a shimmering veil that fused the door's splinters, restoring its polished oak to pristine glory. Salt spray and raw, primal desire flooded the air, a searing blend of musk, ozone, and wildflower-salt stinging the lungs, the cabin alive with the storm's ferocity and their unbridled hunger.

Killian seized Desylva, his hand clamping her wrist with a possessive grip, his hook flashing in the dim lantern light, its cold curve grazing her elbow, a sharp chill against her fevered skin. Her storm-gray eyes blazed with feral intensity, silver and smoke swirling in their depths like a tempest unleashed, as she shoved him against the cabin wall, her palms slamming his chest with a force that rocked him back, a snarl curling her lips. "You'll have to earn me, pirate!" she taunted, her voice a low, fiery challenge that ignited his blood, echoing the defiance of their realm-

conquering battles. He grinned, roguish and wild, his blue eyes glinting with hunger. “Oh, lass, I’ll make ya roar before this night’s done,” he growled, his tone laced with the swagger of a captain claiming his prize.

Their boots hit the planks with heavy thuds, kicked aside in a frenzy, the wood gleaming as runes pulsed to mend a scuff mark. Her hair whipped like a lash, snapping in gusts tearing through the open window, framing her face in a halo of fury, the storm outside mirroring her magic’s wrath.

She tore at his coat, fingers clawing the leather with savage intent, ripping it free to crash against the floor, buttons scattering like shrapnel, runes flaring to smooth the planks’ scratches. Her hands yanked his shirt, tearing it open to expose his scarred chest, the fabric fluttering to the floor as she unbuckled his belt with a deft flick, tossing it aside with a clatter, his trousers sliding to his ankles in a heap.

Killian’s fingers ripped her cloak, casting it to the planks, then peeled her tunic, revealing sweat-slick skin that glowed in the lantern’s amber light. Her trousers followed, unfastened with a fierce tug, pooling at her feet as she stepped free, her movements fluid and defiant. Naked, their bodies collided, skin flushed with heat and rebellion, lips crashing in a brutal kiss, teeth clashed, tongues waged a fierce duel, ragged breaths hissing as blood and sweat mingled in a primal dance.

The lantern swung wildly from its hook, its amber flame casting leaping shadows across the cabin’s walls, where charts tore free, fluttering like storm-tossed gulls, only to settle as runes glowed, smoothing their creases. A dagger skittered across the desk, lodging in the oak with a thunk, but runes shimmered, healing the gouge to flawless wood. The window trembled, rain and foam streaking its glass, a spiderweb crack vanishing as runes pulsed, restoring its clarity. Outside, the seas roared, waves pounding with savage fury, shaking the ship to its core, the rigging shrieking like a beast born of their clash. Her storm magic crackled, lightning splitting the dark beyond, its jagged flash illuminating their tangled forms, their silhouettes stark against the cabin’s chaos. Shelves rattled, a pewter tankard toppling with a dented clang, but runes flared blue, mending its form to gleaming metal.

He surged forward, shoving her toward the bed, pinning her with a growl that rumbled deep in his chest, his strength a match for her wildness. His hook slammed the wall, splintering oak, but runes glowed, smoothing the scar in a pulse of blue light. Her nails raked his chest, carving red welts that drew a hiss, her defiant grin baring teeth as she twisted beneath him, her storm-fueled strength surging as she flipped him onto his back with a fierce heave, the bed shuddering against the wall, runes flaring to heal its creaking frame. Straddling him, her knees sank into the furs, her hair a tangled whip lashing his face, her storm-gray eyes burning with command. She guided him to her, her voice raw and daring, “Take me, Killian, drive it deep, make me feel the sea in you!” He grinned, his roguish charm undimmed, “Trust me, love, I’ll have your storm breakin’ afore I’m through.” She slid down on him, a moan escaping as he slid into her, their bodies joining in a fierce rhythm. He thrust upward, a low moan rumbling as he pushed deeper, her hips rocking with relentless precision, back and forth, up and down, each press drawing him further, her nails carving fiery trails across his chest, lightning flashing with each collision. Her fingers grazed his hook, sending a thrilling electric wave coursing through its steel, a delicious jolt that flooded his nerves with a pirate’s rush, as if plundering a forbidden treasure, his pulse hammering with exhilaration, craving more of her wild magic.

He roared, surging up, his hand tangling in her hair, yanking her head back to expose the pale curve of her throat. His teeth grazed her pulse, bruising the skin, his voice a primal snarl, “Wilder, lass, take it all in.” His hook clamped her hip, its cold edge biting, anchoring her to him. She met his gaze, her eyes blazing with hunger, “You swore I’d feel it, pirate. Drive that sword o’ yours deeper. Break me!”

He growled again, flipping her with a swift, powerful twist, the bed shuddering under their weight, runes pulsing to mend its stresses. She parted her legs, her voice a husky dare, “My channel’s open, Killian, sail into me,” her storm-gray eyes blazing with a silent plea for him to re-enter. He gazed at her inviting warmth, a ravenous grin curling his lips, his hunger a smoldering inferno. Kneeling between her parted thighs, he lifted them with reverent strength, his hand seizing one leg while his hook gently scooped the other, its cool steel a tender caress against her skin. He draped them over his shoulders, her body arching with a fluid, yearning curve as she spread her legs sideways, granting him deeper, unbridled access. His hand and hook slid to her back, carefully pulling her closer, his hook angled to graze her skin without piercing, his control a tether to their passion.

“You want to feel me, Des?” he growled, his voice seductive and commanding. She pleaded, her voice raw, “Aye, love, all o’ you!” He thrust hard, a searing stroke that drew a moan from her throat, her walls tightening around him. “Every,” he snarled, pushing deeper, “Bloody,” another deliberate thrust, “Inch,” a final, powerful surge, their rhythm

a savage dance of storm and sea. Her hips bucked, meeting each thrust, a gasp tearing free as he carefully drew her closer, his hook steady, ensuring no harm. “Gods, you feel like fire, love,” he moaned, his voice thick with pleasure. She sighed, desperate, “Harder, faster, claim me, pirate!” her voice guttural, stoking his inferno. Her nails dug deeper, hips arching, her legs locking around his hips, heels digging into his back, drawing him closer. Her hand grazed his hook again, sending a molten jolt rippling through its steel, a primal ecstasy that shuddered through his core like a ship cresting a storm’s peak, his body thrumming with delight, urging him deeper into her tempest.

The Jolly Roger rocked with a monstrous swell, timbers groaning as waves smashed like cannonades, frothy crests breaching the deck, the hull pristine as runes glowed to heal its stresses. Desylva’s magic whipped the storm into a frenzy, the air thick with ozone, sweat, and her wildflower-salt scent, a heady maelstrom that enveloped them. Killian’s lips bruised hers, their tongues clashing in a defiant duel, lightning flaring to illuminate her fierce form in stark whites and shadows, the gale’s wail rattling the window, its glass gleaming as runes ensured its strength.

He leaned forward, lowering her gently to the bed, her legs sliding from his shoulders, his body hovering over hers, still joined in their searing union. Her hands gripped his shoulders, pulling him down, her storm-gray eyes daring him, pupils blown with lust. His hand caressed her breast, fingers tracing her curves, while his hook rested on her hip, a cool anchor against her heat. She wrapped her legs around his thighs, pulling him closer, her voice a daring challenge, “If you mean to break my storm, pirate, you’d best not falter now.” Her fingers caressed his hook, sending a vibrant pulse crackling through its steel, a sea-born thrill that surged through his veins like a wave’s crest sparking with lightning, his heart racing with euphoric delight, every fiber of him reveling in the electric bliss of her touch. He growled, positioning himself, his length pressing against her warmth, and with a slow, deliberate thrust, entered her again, a deep union that drew a sharp gasp, her walls clenching around him in a tight, pulsing embrace. Their bodies moved in sync, hips arching to meet each thrust, her breath hitching as he filled her, their connection a tempest of flesh and fire, the bed steady as runes mended its groans.

She begged again, her voice a desperate plea, “Faster, love, harder. Don’t hold back!” He quickened his pace, thrusts deepening, relentless, her cries piercing the sea’s howl, sharp and wild as her magic shook the Jolly Roger. “Gods, you’re perfect,” she sighed, “Don’t stop, Killian, please!” His hook raked the bed’s edge, its steel biting into the wood to tilt her hips for a deeper, more searing connection, the frame trembling under their fervor, runes flaring blue to heal the splintered gouge and restore its polished sheen. Her current surged through his hook once more, a radiant surge that flooded his veins with euphoric heat, like a tide of molten starlight coursing through him, his body shivering with rapturous pleasure, every nerve alight with her magic’s touch. Her gasps escalated to moans that echoed the storm’s fury.

The ship tilted with a monstrous wave, planks creaking, runes shimmering to heal every strain, the hull unmarred. Time stretched, their passion unyielding, as he pinned her again, their bodies slick with sweat, the storm raging outside, waves battering the pristine hull. Their eyes locked, her voice a raw moan, “My storm’s breakin’, love. Harder!” He growled, thrusting with fierce intensity, “Let it flow, Des, let your storm consume us!” The weather surged, the ship rocking violently, its runes glowing steady to keep it whole.

Waves crashed like thunderous war drums, frothy crests clawing the deck, the rigging screaming as Desylva’s magic fueled the gale’s wrath, ozone crackling with each lightning flash. Their bodies ground together, hips locked in a relentless rhythm, her moans rising to a fevered pitch, his growls deepening as sweat dripped from his brow, mingling with hers. The bed groaned under their weight, runes pulsing to mend its creaking frame, the cabin a maelstrom of heat and chaos.

For a few breathless moments, they built higher, her nails carving deeper into his shoulders, his thrusts growing fiercer, each movement stoking the storm within and without, their connection a blazing inferno teetering on the edge of release, the Jolly Roger trembling as runes ensured its pristine endurance.

Her scream sparked a thunderclap, rocking the Jolly Roger, its deafening boom rattling beams as her storm magic burst free, untamed. Her body convulsed, walls tightening around him, a shudder ripping through her as her release flooded, a torrent of heat and power, lightning streaking the sky in a jagged dance. His hand gripped her thigh, bruising force anchoring her, his hook pressing her side as his own release hit, a raw, guttural roar melding with the gale’s wail. His seed spilled, a searing pulse that shook him to his core, their bodies trembling in unison, the storm peaking with their ecstasy.

The ship tilted hard, waves smashing the hull, runes flaring blue to heal creaking timbers, the lantern crashing to the floor, its flame doused, but runes restored it, glowing anew in its hook. Charts lay crumpled, but runes smoothed them flat; the dagger's hilt jutted from the desk, its oak healed; shelves steadied, their rattles silenced; the tankard gleamed, its dent erased. Her magic relented, the wind dying to a soft moan, waves softening to a gentle lull, the Jolly Roger steadying, its groans fading to a weary creak, every surface pristine under the runes' vigilant glow.

Her chest heaved, her hair splayed across the furs, storm-gray eyes softened to a quiet glow, tracing his face with exhaustion and triumph. Her fingers brushed his cheek, smearing sweat and blood, her breath panting, syncing with his ragged gasps. He sank beside her, his hand sliding to her lower back, pulling her against his chest, his hook resting across her hip, its cool edge grounding her trembling form. Sweat and seawater glistened on his skin, dark hair plastered to his brow as he pressed his forehead to hers, a growl rumbling, "You're a bloody tempest, love, nearly tore me asunder." His voice was rough with awe, softened by their intimacy. She shifted, her thigh draping over his, body nestling into his warmth, her touch a quiet echo of their ferocity. Her lips brushed his jaw, soft against their savagery, her voice hoarse but warm, "And you're my match, wild as the sea's heart." He grinned, feral yet tender, his hand threading through her hair, fingers catching in the knots as he pulled her closer, his hook pressing her tight. "That trick with my hook, lass, sparks me like lightning," he murmured, his lips grazing her temple, their breaths slowing with the sea's gentle roll.

The cabin settled, the air cooling, thick with their musk, ozone, and her wildflower-salt scent, a lingering testament to their union. The bed stood pristine, runes mending its stresses; the window gleamed, its glass flawless; the door shone, its oak unmarred. The Jolly Roger rested, waves lapping the hull, runes glowing steady, every surface restored.

Their bodies melded, a tangle of bruised limbs and racing pulses easing into stillness, her hair fanning his shoulder, eyes fluttering shut. His hand rested on her cheek, thumb brushing her lips, hook curving her waist, a steady anchor in the calm. Their love, a primal fire that burned through the storm, left them forged anew in its wake, the sea a quiet witness to their untamed bond, its whispers carrying their triumph into the night.

Crew Quarters
(Simultaneous with Cabin Scene)

The quarters rocked, air thick with damp hemp and salt spray, lanterns swinging, casting jagged light across salt-slick planks. One-Eyed Jack clung to a crate, eye wide, as thunder crashed. "They're rippin' the sea to shreds, Cap'n and his lass!" he bellowed, voice rough. Black Tom gripped his harpoon, scarred arms rigid, grimacing silently as creaks from above shook the beams, runes flaring blue to heal splintering wood.

Billy, torch flickering, laughed, "She's a gale gone mad, Cap'n's fightin' the storm!" Smee, huddled near a hammock, clutched his hat, face pale. "Blimey, they'll sink us! Storm's tearin' the Roger apart!" he wailed, ducking as a tankard rolled, runes mending its dent. Lightning flashed.

Billy
Oh, the lass with fury in her roar,
She rocks the ship to the ocean's core,
Waves do smash, the gales do sing,
For Cap'n's wild heart wears her sting!

Her hips a tempest, fierce and tight,
They rut like beasts through storm and night,
The sea's their bed, the thunder's call,
Their fire'll burn 'til the heavens fall!

One-Eyed Jack chuckled, "Sing it, lad, they're shakin' the stars! Cap'n knows how to sail her straits!" Smee whimpered, "Hope the runes hold!" Black Tom's smirk flickered, harpoon steady.

(After the Cabin Scene)

The quarters stilled as the gale faded, the air cooling with the scent of rain-soaked wood, the Jolly Roger's rocking softening to a steady breath. Lanterns swayed gently, casting a dim glow over the crew's weary faces. One-Eyed

Jack eased onto a hammock, his eye drooping as he rasped, “They’ve battered it out, can sleep now without the sea breakin’ us apart.” Black Tom leaned his harpoon against the wall, scarred arms slack, a faint smirk tugging his lips, runes glowing blue to heal a cracked beam overhead.

Billy doused his torch, its hiss blending with the crew’s sighs, and grinned, “Storm’s tamed, Cap’n and his lass beat her down.” Smee, still clutching his hat, slumped onto a crate, relief flooding his face. “Blimey, thought we’d be fish food! They’re a maelstrom, them two, but the Roger held fast, runes and all!” he said, voice shaky but warm. One-Eyed Jack snorted, “Best rest now, ‘fore they spark another squall.” Billy strummed his lute softly, his voice rising in a bawdy shanty, echoing their triumph.

Billy
Oh, the storm’s fierce queen with eyes like flame,
She rides her pirate, no man can tame,
Their bodies clash where tempests soar,
Each thrust a wave that shakes the shore!

He grinned, fingers dancing over the strings, and launched into a second verse, vivid and raw, his voice carrying the crew’s awe at the lovers’ ferocity.

Billy
With nails like claws, she marks his skin,
His hook’s her anchor, deep within,
They grind and roar through lightning’s blaze,
Their lust a fire that drowns the waves!

Billy chuckled, “Reckon they’re tangled and sated now.” The crew bunked down, the dim light swaying softly, the night’s calm a hard-won peace after the gale’s savagery, runes shimmering faintly, the ship pristine under their watchful glow.

Interlude: A Night at the Rusty Anchor (Day 160)

The Jolly Roger rested at anchor in Stormhaven’s bustling harbor, sails furled tight under a sky bruised with the deep hues of dusk. Lanterns from the port town flickered like a swarm of fireflies along the weathered docks, their golden glow dancing on the dark waves that lapped gently against the ship’s hull, a rhythmic murmur beneath the distant clamor of taverns and the sharp clang of ship bells ringing through the salty air. The gangplank thudded onto the dock, its echo swallowed by Stormhaven’s growing roar.

Quarterdeck

Killian leaned against the helm, his black leather coat slung carelessly over the wheel’s edge, its hem swaying in the breeze, his hook caught the faint light of a swaying lantern as he traced the wheel’s grain, his piercing blue eyes glinting with a restless spark as he surveyed the crew below.

Main Deck

Smee, rosy-cheeked from the sea’s bite, adjusted his hat with a flourish, “A night ashore, Cap’n, rum and a good brawl’s what we need after all this floatin’!” his voice carried an eager lilt, his chapped hands rubbing together. One-Eyed Jack puffed a cloud of acrid smoke from his dented pipe, “Aye, been too long since I cracked a skull. Me fists’re itchin.’” Black Tom, silent and scarred, sat cross-legged, sharpening his harpoon with a steady scrape that echoed faintly. Billy’s freckled face alight, grinned wide, “Pub’s callin’, Cap’n, hear it?”

Killian’s lips curved into a roguish smile, his gaze drifting to Desylva beside him, her gray eyes caught the dusk’s glow, her presence a storm simmering beside his sea.

The crew’s chatter swelled, a rough harmony of anticipation. Smee hopped from one foot to the other, “Stormhaven’s got the best ale this side o’ the tides, heard it from a mate last port!” One-Eyed Jack exhaled a plume of smoke, “Better have fightin’ too, ale’s no good without a bruise to earn it,” his eye narrowed, glinting with mischief. Black

Tom's whetstone paused, his nod slow and deliberate, his dark eyes fixed on the blade as if it whispered back. Billy leapt to his feet, fists punching the air, "First round's mine, lads, I'll show 'em how pirates drink!" his voice cracked with youthful bravado, infectious enough to draw a grunt from One-Eyed Jack.

Quarterdeck

Killian's grin widened, "Aye, let's wet our throats and see what trouble finds us," his tone thrummed with command, the thrill of a night ashore igniting his blood. He turned to Desylva, her leather cloak rustling as she shifted. Her dagger gleamed at her hip, her mark a faint hum beneath her sleeve, "You owe me a drink, don't think I've forgotten," her tease was sharp, her gray eyes daring him. Her wildness a constant pull on his heart. Killian's hook tapped the air near her, "Earned it, have ya? We'll see," his voice dipped, a playful edge masking the warmth beneath.

Killian straightened, clapping a hand on the helm with a thud, "To the Rusty Anchor, then, best ale in Stormhaven, or so Smee swears," his voice rang out, cutting through the crew's din. Their cheer rose like a wave, ragged and fierce.

Main Deck

Smee scrambled to the gangplank, fumbling the ropes, "Rum's waitin', lads, don't dawdle!" his stout frame nearly tripped in his haste. One-Eyed Jack slung a pistol over his shoulder, its barrel clinking, "Hope they fight as good as they pour, me trigger's twitchin'" his gravelly chuckle followed. Black Tom sheathed his harpoon with a soft clack, rising with a nod that spoke volumes. Billy darted to the rail, "I'll race ye, Jack!" his wiry legs poised.

The ship creaked under their movement, groaning as if reluctant to release them. Killian's blue eyes swept the deck, "Ashore, ye scoundrels, leave her to breathe"

The Jolly Roger's lanterns swayed, casting long shadows as the crew rallied. Desylva stepped closer, her scent of leather and sea mingling with his, her voice dropped, "Don't get soft on me out there," her grin was a blade, a challenge he'd met countless times, he leaned in, "Never, lass, keep up or owe me."

The crew headed for the gangplank. Smee led the charge, "To the Anchor, lads, me throat's dry as bone!" One-Eyed Jack followed, pipe clenched, "First fool to cross me gets a fist," his boots pounded. Black Tom trailed, his silence a steady tide. Billy leapt, "Last one there's buyin'!" his laughter rang.

Quarterdeck

Killian lingered a moment, his hand brushing the helm, "Hold fast, old girl" the ship's timbers sighed, a home left to rest. He swept his black leather coat from the helm's edge, its worn folds whispering as he shrugged it on with a fluid grace, the fabric settling over his shoulders like a second skin, ready for Stormhaven's revelry.

Desylva adjusted her cloak, her storm magic crackling faintly, "You're dawdlin', Cap'n," her tease pulled him, his smirk flashed, "Savin' my strength for you," he stepped to her side, their strides syncing as they descended. Killian's voice barked, "Move, lads, Stormhaven won't wait!"

Dock

The crew spilled onto the docks, the Jolly Roger's lanterns dimming behind. A night ashore beckoned, a brief reprieve laced with revelry and risk.

A pair of dockworkers paused beside a stack of cargo crates. One squinted toward the ship. "Hold on." His companion followed his gaze. "No."

"Aye."

The man pointed toward the black hull. "That's the Jolly Roger."

Nearby sailors slowed. Whispers spread.

“Hook's ship?”
“Thought she was a story.”
“Stories don't drop anchor.”

Killian continued walking without breaking stride. Desylva caught several stares following them. A younger deckhand stepped aside quickly as they passed. “Evenin', Captain.”

Killian tipped two fingers in acknowledgment.

The deckhand froze after they passed. “Gods,” he breathed. “That was actually him.” One older sailor shook his head. “Two centuries sailin' the realms and still lookin' for trouble.”

“Aye,” another muttered. “And usually findin' it.”

Killian paid the whispers no mind. “Rusty Anchor's waitin', lads,” he called. Smee immediately brightened. “Now that's the finest thing I've heard all evenin'!” Billy whooped and bounded ahead. One-Eyed Jack rolled his eye and followed. Black Tom moved with his usual silent certainty. Desylva fell into step beside Killian as the crew disappeared into the harbor crowds.

The town’s din rose, a cacophony of life swallowing them whole.

The Rusty Anchor

The Rusty Anchor pulsed with raw chaos as they stormed through its weathered oak doors, the low beams groaning under a din that crashed like a breaker, tankards clanging with metallic rings, ale sloshing onto sticky floorboards in frothy arcs. Raucous laughter roared from salt-roughened throats, blending with the sour tang of spilled beer and the thick haze of smoke swirling from a blazing hearth, its flames spitting embers that danced across grime-streaked walls, casting jagged shadows over faces lit with rum-fueled fire. The heat pressed close, a furnace stoked by bodies packed tight, the air heavy with sweat and whale oil from lanterns swaying like pendulums in a squall.

Killian led the way, his black leather coat cutting through the crowd like a blade through mist, his boots pounding the warped planks, his blue eyes sweeping the room, sharp as a cutlass, seeking trouble or a brawl’s thrill, his hook flashing in the dim glow. Smee elbowed past a burly fisherman, his gut straining his tunic, craning toward the bar. “This den’s alive, Cap’n! Smells o’ coin and mischief!” His voice danced with greed, his ruddy face flushed from the harbor’s chill and the pub’s swelter.

One-Eyed Jack claimed a table with a thud of his pipe on scarred wood, growling, “Pints, now, or I’ll crack the barrel meself!” His eye gleamed predatory, ash tumbling from his pipe. Black Tom loomed beside him, a silent wall of scars, his dark eyes quelling nearby chatter. Billy darted through the throng, slipping past elbows to the bar. “Mugs, lass, quick, or I’ll sing ‘til ye beg!” His freckled grin flashed, bold and boyish, his voice piercing the din.

Desylva matched Killian’s stride, her leather cloak grazing his arm, her gray eyes catching the firelight with a storm’s sly mischief. “This place is a powder keg. Sure you can keep up?” Her tease carried their familiar edge, her lips curling. He flipped a silver coin to the barkeep, the metal winking in the air. “I thrive in chaos, lass. You’ll be in my debt by dawn.” His swagger warmed his tone, his eyes daring her.

The barkeep, wiry with a patchy beard, snagged the coin with a grunt. “Drinks comin’. Keep yer lot in line.” The barmaid, sturdy with auburn hair knotted messily, shoved tankards across the gouged bar, foam spilling in sticky rings.

Killian leaned against the table’s edge, his hook tapping a slow, deliberate beat against the wood, syncing with the pub’s wild rhythm. Desylva slid in close, her knee grazing his beneath the rough planks, her voice softening with a warmth that belied her sharp edges. Her storm magic flickered faintly in the smoky air, a subtle crackle.

Smee snatched his mug, hoisting it high. “To our Cap’n, sailin’ us through fire and fury!” His cheer sparked a roar, tankards clashing, ale splashing his coat.

Billy jumped onto his stool again, nearly losing his balance as he waved his mug overhead. “Fire and fury?” he laughed. “To survivin’ three realms!”

A few nearby patrons glanced over.

Smee puffed up proudly. “Aye! Forests what breathe. Hollows what whisper. Stars ye can sail across!” One-Eyed Jack pointed his mug at the crowd. “Crossed every cursed one of 'em and came back alive.” Billy grinned and declared, “Alive and drunk!”

The nearby table laughed. One sailor shook his head. “Three realms, eh? Convenient tale.”

Killian only smirked and lifted his drink. “Believe it.” Desylva's grin sharpened. “Or don't.” Smee raised his mug. “Makes no difference to us.”

One-Eyed Jack gulped his pint, slamming the mug down. “Kicks like a mule, not half bad!” His laugh rasped, smoke wreathing his scarred face. Black Tom sipped calmly, his scarred hands steady, his silence louder than the chaos. Billy wiped foam from his lip. “To Stormhaven, ours for the takin’!” His shout cracked with zeal, drawing a grunt from Black Tom.

The fiddler’s bow sawed a lively jig, notes cutting through the din, boots stomping in rhythm. Billy leapt onto a stool, clapping. “Shanties, lads! Let’s wake this port!”

The crew rallied, their voices raw, launching into a song about the Jolly Roger and Killian, mugs swaying in time.

Billy/Smee/One-Eyed Jack
Oh, the Jolly Roger sails so bold,
Through storm and fire, her tale’s retold!
With timbers strong and sails that soar,
She cuts the seas from shore to shore!

Yo ho, for Hook, our Cap’n keen,
His blue eyes sharp, his hook’s a gleam!
He steers through hell with a roguish grin,
No foe can halt where he’s begin!

Raise the mugs, ye salts, and cheer,
The Roger’s ours, her name we steer!
Through cannon’s roar and tempest’s wail,
With Hook at helm, we’ll never fail!

Oh, the Jolly Roger cuts the wave,
Her timbers bold, her spirit brave!
Through storm and squall, she holds her own,
Her ‘chanted oak, our pirate throne!

Yo ho, for Hook, with eyes like flame,
His hook’s a terror, his heart’s the same!
He steers through chaos, bold and free,
No sea nor foe can bend his knee!

Raise the mugs, ye rogues, and sing,
The Roger’s might makes oceans ring!
With Hook’s will, we’ll never fall,
Our ship, our Cap’n, conquer all!

The pub roared. The shanty shaking the rafters. Billy led a second shanty, for Killian and Desylva, the crew’s voices swelling with pride.

Billy
Oh, Hook sails with a heart of flame,
And Desylva's storm lights up his name!
Her gray eyes flash like thunder's spark,
She calls the winds to guide his ark!

Yo ho, their love's a tempest's dance,
Through seas of fire, they take their chance!
His hook's a blade, her storm's a might,
Together they blaze through endless night!

Raise the ale, ye crew, and sing,
For Hook and Storm, their legend springs!
No chain can bind, no foe can part,
The pirate's soul, the witch's heart!

Oh, Hook sails with a pirate's grace,
Desylva's storm lights up his face!
Her winds do howl, her eyes do burn,
She calls the gale to make seas churn!

Yo ho, their hearts are twined as one,
Through cannon's roar and risin' sun!
His hook's a blade, her tempest's might,
They carve their tale through endless night!

Raise the ale, ye crew, and cheer,
For love that laughs at death and fear!
No storm can break, no chain can bind,
The Cap'n's soul, the witch's mind!

Desylva's laugh rang out, her storm mark flickering. The crew cheered, their mugs raised. Billy struck up a third shanty, honoring Desylva's place among them, voices warm with loyalty.

Billy
Oh, Desylva's joined our pirate band,
Her storm's a blade in her steady hand!
With magic fierce, she lights our way,
Through darkest tides, she holds the fray!

Yo ho, our witch, with eyes like rain,
She fights, she loves, she breaks the chain!
From bow to stern, she's one of us,
Her gusts'll blow through any fuss!

Sing her name, ye rogues, with pride,
Our storm-witch sails where heroes ride!
With cloak and dagger, heart so true,
Desylva's strength will see us through!

Desylva's ours, with magic grand,
Her storm's a sword in her steady hand!
She fights with us, through tide and fray,
Her lightning clears the darkest way!

Yo ho, our witch, with heart so fierce,
Her winds'll rend what foes would pierce!
From mast to keel, she's crew through all,
Her thunder answers when we call!

Sing her name, ye salts, with pride,
Our storm-witch sails where heroes ride!
With cloak and blade, she's true and strong,
Desylva's home where we belong!

The crew pounded mugs against the tables, cheering loud enough to shake the rafters. Billy climbed back onto his stool, swaying slightly as inspiration struck. "Think that's the only tale we've got?" Smee laughed. "Gods help us." Billy ignored him and swept an exaggerated bow toward the room. "Allow me to sing of a few recent travels."

Billy (raising his mug, voice loud and dramatic)
We chased old tales through root and thorn,
Where ancient paths were battle-worn,
Through cursed woods and shadows sworn—
Yet still the Roger sailed!

We crossed dead lands where twilight bled,
Where fear itself walked overhead,
Where wiser sailors turned and fled—
Yet still our colors flew!

We sailed the roads the stars once made,
Through silver streams and cosmic shade,
Where beasts of light their hunting laid—
And still we carried through!

Smee/One-Eyed Jack/Billy
Raise the mugs and pour them high!
For fools who sail where legends lie!
Whether truth or tavern cry—
The Roger sails once more!

The song ended in laughter and pounding mugs. One patron frowned into his ale. "Hold on. Are ye claimin' ye lot actually sailed all them places?" Another snorted. "Pirates are liars. And braggers. No way these clowns sailed half the places in that song."

Billy pointed dramatically at himself. "I am deeply offended." One-Eyed Jack barked a laugh. "Good."

The first patron frowned. "So it didn't happen?" One-Eyed Jack took a long drink. "Maybe it did." He took another. "Maybe it didn't." A third sailor laughed. "Helpful." One-Eyed Jack shrugged. "Maybe it's just a song."

Several sailors laughed. Then an older dock sailor near the hearth spoke up. "Maybe." He jerked a thumb toward Killian. "But that's Hook."

The room quieted slightly. The dock sailor shrugged. "With him, who the hell knows what's true anymore?" Killian raised his tankard. "Now that's the smartest thing I've heard all night."

The pub erupted in laughter, the shanties binding the crew, their voices echoing off the beams.

Killian leaned against the table, his hook tapping in time with the fading notes. Desylva slid closer, her knee grazing his, her voice low. "They're loud enough to raise the tides." Her magic crackled, a spark in the smoky air. He nodded, eyes softening. "Family, lass, true as steel and rough as the seas. Wouldn't trade 'em."

A burly sailor lurched toward their table, beard matted with ale, voice slurring. "Ye pirate scum think ye own this port? Saw ye strut in with that fancy ship, soft hides!" One-Eyed Jack rose, fist cocked. "Tougher'n yer sorry hide. Come test me, whale, and ye'll eat dirt!" Smee shrank back.

Billy clapped, grinning. “Smash ‘im, Jack, show ‘im our grit!” Black Tom’s harpoon rested near, his hands poised, silent as a coiled spring. Killian stood, slow and deadly, his hook glinting in the hearth’s glow. “Step off, mate, or I’ll carve your tongue.” The sailor sneered, swaying on unsteady legs. “Bet ye can’t fight, pretty coat, soft as a wench!” Desylva’s hand gripped her dagger, eyes flashing. “Want a gust to send ya flyin’?” Her magic snapped, smoke swirling in eddies.

The tension spiked, rum fueling the fire. The pub held its breath. The sailor swung a clumsy fist. Killian sidestepped with a fluid twist, his hook pinning the man’s arm to the table with a thud. Desylva’s wind roared, slamming him back, his chair splintering as he crashed down. The crowd roared, a feral salute. Smee yelped. “Cap’n’s quick as a shark!” One-Eyed Jack barked a laugh. “Hook’s sharper than ever!” Billy bounced, clapping. “One move, down he goes!” The brawl fizzled fast, the sailor groaning as he clutched his arm. Desylva met Killian’s gaze, her nod firm. “Nice aim. Two drinks I’m claimin’ now.” He grinned, crooked and warm. “Tally’s growin’, lass.”

The Rusty Anchor thundered with cheers, a wild salute to their grit. The barmaid circled back, hefting fresh tankards with a weary grunt. “More, ye beasts? Ye’re drainin’ me stocks!”

Smee nodded, sloppy and beaming. “Aye, me throat’s parched as sand!” One-Eyed Jack waved a grizzled hand. “Stronger, lass. None o’ this weak swill!” Billy swayed.

Killian tossed another coin, his voice steady. “Keep ‘em full.” Desylva sipped, teasing low. “Spendin’ like a prince tonight, coins burnin’ your pockets?” He leaned closer, blue eyes dancing. “Pirate coins flow free, lass, you know me.”

The fiddler’s jig surged, boots thumping the floor. Killian turned to Desylva, his smirk playful, “Dance, love? Let’s show ‘em how it’s done.” Her gray eyes gleamed, a spark of delight. “Aye, I’ll dance with you.” She took his hook in her hand, her cloak swirling as they stepped into the fray, the crew parting to watch. Killian spun her, his hand at her waist, her laughter bright as they moved to the reel’s wild rhythm, her boots light, his hook flashing as he twirled her.

The crew cheered, Smee clapping, Billy whistling, One-Eyed Jack’s pipe bobbing as he nodded approval, Black Tom’s foot tapping faintly. Their dance was a storm and sea entwined, her storm mark flickering, the pub’s heat fading in their shared fire. The jig ended, and Killian pulled her close, their breaths mingling. “Three drinks, lass,” he murmured. She grinned, teasing. “You’ll be beggin’ for mercy Hook.”

Killian gave her a look, his blue eyes smoldering with a roguish promise, a spark of heat flickering in their depths as he tilted his head toward the creaky wooden stairs in the corner, their steps worn smooth by countless boots, leading to the private rooms above the tavern. The firelight caught his hook, glinting like a crescent moon as he motioned subtly, a silent invitation laced with mischief. Desylva’s lips curved into a knowing smile, her gray eyes flashing with a storm’s playful challenge, her cursed mark pulsing faintly beneath her sleeve, a soft blue glow that mirrored the fire in her blood. “Lead on, Captain,” she murmured, her voice low and teasing, her cloak brushing his coat as they moved toward the stairs, their strides synced like a tide rolling in.

The crew’s eyes followed, their chatter faltering as they noticed the pair slipping away. Smee leaned forward, his mug paused midair, foam dripping onto the table as he whispered to One-Eyed Jack, “Cap’n’s got that look again, don’t he? They’re off for a private storm, mark me words.” His ruddy cheeks flushed deeper, a grin tugging at his lips. One-Eyed Jack snorted, puffing a cloud of smoke, his eye glinting with amusement. “Aye, those two’ll set the rafters shakin’. Good on ‘em. Cap’n deserves it after all we’ve sailed through.”

Black Tom’s lips twitched, a rare flicker of a smile, his dark eyes flicking to the stairs as he sipped his ale in silence, his nod subtle but approving. Billy, swaying slightly, chuckled under his breath, “Bet they’re plannin’ to outdo the tempest in the Crimson Abyss!” His freckled face lit with boyish glee, his whisper carrying to the nearby table, where a few sailors smirked, raising their mugs in a quiet salute to the pair’s unspoken escape.

Room upstairs

The door opened with a creak, its hinges groaning as Killian and Desylva slipped inside, the door shutting behind them with a thud that muffled the tavern’s raucous din below, a spark of heat flaring between them like a flame catching dry tinder. The small room was dimly lit by a single lantern, its amber glow casting flickering shadows

across rough-hewn walls, the air thick with the scent of wax and aged wood, a faint trace of salt lingering from the open window where the sea's breath drifted in. A narrow bed stood in one corner, its quilt patched but clean, the wooden floor creaking under their steps, a wooden chair in another corner, and a small table holding a chipped pitcher and a pair of dented tin cups against the wall.

He threw off his coat and kicked off his boots with a flourish, the leather thudding against the floor as he wiggled his toes, a playful grin tugging at his lips. "Well, love, reckon we've earned a moment's peace," he teased, his voice a low, gravelly drawl, his eyes raking over her with a hunger that made her pulse quicken.

She removed her cloak and stepped out of her boots, her movements lithe and deliberate. She tossed her dagger onto the table with a clatter, its blade catching the lantern's glow, and smirked, "Alone at last." her voice was husky, laced with playful challenge, her fingers grazing his arm as she stepped closer, the touch sending a shiver through them both, her gray eyes dancing with mischief.

He reached for her, his hand cupping her cheek, his thumb tracing the curve of her jaw, rough against her soft skin. "Gods, you're a sight, Des," he rasped, his gaze drinking her in, the light catching the storm in her eyes. She leaned into his touch, her lips parting as she tilted her head, her fingers curling into his shirt, tugging at the laces. "So are you, Killian," she whispered, her voice a low, fierce promise, her hands sliding up his chest, feeling the heat of his skin through the fabric, the steady thud of his heart beneath her palms. Their lips met in a slow, searing kiss. His mouth firm and warm, hers soft but insistent, a dance of need and familiarity. His tongue brushed hers, a gentle exploration that deepened into a hungry claim, her fingers tightening in his hair, pulling him closer as a soft moan escaped her throat.

They broke apart, breathless, their foreheads pressed together, grins mirroring each other as they began to undress, the air electric with anticipation. He shrugged off his shirt, the fabric sliding to the floor, revealing a torso scarred from battles, lines of old wounds crisscrossing his chest, his muscles taut from years at sea. Her fingers traced a scar over his heart, her touch light but deliberate, her eyes softening with reverence.

"Every mark tells our story," she murmured, her voice thick with emotion. Her nails grazed his skin, sending a shudder through him. He caught her hand, kissing her palm, his lips lingering as he unfastened her tunic, peeling it away to reveal the curve of her shoulders, the swell of her breasts beneath a thin linen shift, her skin flushed with warmth. "And you're my favorite chapter, love," he said, his voice low and rough, his hook gleaming as he hooked the hem of her shirt, lifting it slowly, his fingers brushing her hips as he bared her skin to the lantern's glow.

She stepped back, her shirt falling to the floor, leaving her in nothing but her breeches. Her body a map of strength and grace, lean muscles honed by survival. Her cursed mark glowing faintly. Her breasts full and peaked in the cool air, nipples hardening under his gaze. She unbuckled her breeches, letting them slide down her thighs, revealing long, toned legs and the dark curls at the apex of her thighs, her skin catching light like polished marble.

His breath hitched, his eyes darkening with desire as he shed his own breeches, his arousal evident. His body rugged and powerful, broad shoulders, narrow hips, and a hardness that strained against the air, aching for her. "Desylva," he growled, stepping toward her, but she held up a hand, her lips curving into a wicked mischievous smile that promised she'd lead this dance.

"Sit, Captain," she commanded, her voice low and sultry, pointing to the wooden chair in the corner, its seat wide enough for what she had in mind. He raised an eyebrow, a roguish grin tugging at his lips, but he obeyed, settling into the chair with a creak, his legs spread, his hook resting on his thigh, his erection proud and waiting. "As you wish, my tempest," he teased, his voice dripping with charm and anticipation, his eyes sparkling as they locked on hers. She approached him, her movements slow and deliberate, a predator savoring her prey. Her eyes gleaming with a storm's promise as she straddled him, her knees bracketing his hips, as she settled onto his thighs, the heat of her core brushing against him, teasing without claiming.

She leaned in, her breasts grazing his chest, her nipples hardening, grazing his skin, sparking a low groan as she kissed him deeply, her tongue teasing his with slow, playful strokes, tasting the salt and rum of him. His hand roamed her back, fingers tracing the curve of her spine with a feather-light touch, then dipping to caress her backside, squeezing with a gentle firmness that made her gasp into his mouth. "Cheeky bastard," she murmured against his lips, her tone teasing as she nipped his jaw, her hands sliding down his chest, nails raking, teasing his nipples until he hissed, his hips shifting beneath her. "Aye, but you love it, lass," he growled, his hook trailing up her side, cool

metal against warm skin, tickling her ribs as she squirmed, laughing softly before kissing him again, her tongue claiming his with a playful hunger. She arched into his touch, her hands cupping his face, her thumbs brushing the stubble along his jaw as she kissed him again, her teeth grazing his lower lip, drawing a low growl from his throat.

Her fingers slid down his chest, nails raking gently teasing his nipples until he hissed, his hips shifting beneath her. She smiled against his mouth, her lips trailing to his neck, kissing the pulse point where his heartbeat thundered, then lower, her tongue flicking over his collarbone before she closed her lips around a nipple, suckling gently, her teeth grazing just enough to make him buck, his arousal pressing harder against her thigh. “Bloody hell, Des, you’ll be the death of me,” he groaned, his hand tangling in her hair, urging her closer as she lavished attention on his skin, her breath hot against his chest. hands caressing his shoulders, feeling the tension in his muscles as he fought to stay still, his arousal pressing insistently against her thigh. She moved to his other nipple, her tongue swirling, teasing, her hands sliding down his arms, squeezing the hard lines of his biceps as she whispered, “Not yet, Captain. I’ve got plans for you.”

She lifted her head, her gray eyes locking with his, a playful storm swirling in their depths. “I want you, Killian, now,” she whispered, her voice a sultry challenge as she shifted, her hand sliding between them to grasp his length, her fingers warm and firm, stroking him with a slow, deliberate rhythm that made his breath catch, his hardness pulsing beneath her touch. He groaned, his head tipping back, his hook gripping the chair’s arm. “You’ve got me, love. Always,” he rasped, his voice thick with want, his hand caressing her thigh, fingers digging into her flesh with playful need, his hook grazing her lower back, cool and teasing. She guided him to her entrance, her slick heat brushing his tip, a tantalizing promise that made them both shiver.

With a slow, deliberate movement, she sank down, taking him inside her inch by inch, her walls stretching to accommodate his girth, a soft gasp escaping her lips as he filled her, the sensation a delicious mix of pressure and pleasure, fullness and fire.

His breath hitched, his hand tightening on her hip, his hook pressing gently into her lower back as he pressed deeper, their bodies melding in a perfect, searing fit. “You take me so perfectly,” he growled, his voice raw, his eyes never leaving hers as she settled fully, her hips flush against his, her thighs trembling with the intensity of their connection, “And you fill me so completely,” she teased, her voice breathy but playful, leaning in to kiss him, her lips soft and teasing, her tongue tangling with his as she began to move, rocking slowly at first, her hips rolling in a gentle sway, a playful dance of control and surrender.

Her hands braced on his shoulders, nails digging into his skin as she rode him, her movements growing bolder, faster, each rise and fall sending waves of pleasure through them both. His hand roamed her body, caressing her breasts, his thumb circling a nipple until she moaned, her head tipping back, her hair spilling like ink over her shoulders. “Like that, do you, lass?” he murmured, his tone wicked. He leaned forward, his lips closing around a nipple, suckling with a gentle pull that made her gasp, her hips grinding harder against him, the friction building a fire that coiled low in her belly. “Killian,” she breathed, her voice a plea and a command, her fingers tangling in his hair as he lavished her skin, his tongue swirling, his teeth grazing just enough to spark a shudder through her.

The chair creaked beneath them, the wood groaning as their rhythm intensified. Her cursed mark pulsed brighter, her magic stirring with her rising pleasure, faint gusts swirling around them, misting the air with cool droplets that beaded on their skin, mingling with sweat. His hand slid between them, his fingers finding her clit, circling with a practiced teasing touch that made her cry out, her hips bucking as pleasure surged, sharp and electric. “That’s it, love. … Let go for me,” he teased, his voice a low growl against her breast, his lips trailing kisses up her throat, nipping at her pulse point as she rode him harder, her breaths coming in ragged gasps.

She felt the storm building, her magic and desire intertwining. Her rain misted the air, cool droplets beading on their skin, mingling with sweat as she moved faster, her walls tightening around him, drawing low moans from his throat. “Des … bloody hell,” he groaned, his hips thrusting up to meet her, each movement deeper, more desperate, their bodies locked in a primal rhythm. Her fingers dug into his shoulders, her lips crashing against his in a kiss that was all playful fire and need, her tongue teasing his as the pleasure coiled tighter, a storm ready to break.

Her walls tightened around him, drawing groans from his throat. His hips thrusting up to meet her, each movement deeper, more desperate. Their bodies locked in a primal, playful rhythm, the chair rocking with their fervor.

Her release hit first. A shattering wave that arched her back, a cry tearing from her throat as her walls pulsed around him, her thighs trembling as pleasure flooded her senses, her cursed mark flaring bright, lightning crackling faintly in the air, illuminating the room in a fleeting white glow, her magic humming in the air.

He followed, his release a guttural groan as he spilled inside her, his hips jerking, his hand gripping her hip hard enough to bruise, his hook pressing into her back as he held her close, their bodies shuddering together. The warmth of his release filled her, a pulsing heat that mingled with her own, their breaths ragged as they clung to each other, the aftershocks rippling through them like waves against the shore, their breaths ragged, his chest heaving as they clung to each other, the room a cocoon of their shared heat.

They stayed entwined, her forehead pressed to his, their breaths mingling as the storm in her blood quieted, the mist fading, the lantern's light softening the room. "You'll be the end of me, Killian," she whispered, her voice raw with emotion, her fingers tracing his jaw. He kissed her softly, his lips tender now, his hand caressing her cheek, his hook resting gently against her thigh. "You're my world, Des/ My storm, my home," he murmured, his voice thick with love, his blue eyes shining. They lingered in the chair, her body draped over his, their heartbeats slowing, their love a fire unquenched by any curse.

Later: Downstairs

Killian and Desylva descended the creaky wooden stairs, their steps light but deliberate, the worn treads groaning softly under their boots as they re-emerged into the Rusty Anchor's smoky chaos. The hearth's flames cast flickering shadows across their faces, Desylva's dark hair catching the light in wild waves, her leather cloak settling over her shoulders like a storm cloud, her cursed mark pulsing faintly, a soft blue glow beneath her sleeve. Killian's black coat swayed with his swagger, his hook glinting as he adjusted it, his blue eyes sparkling with a roguish grin, the flush of their upstairs tryst still warming his rugged features. The crew's eyes flicked to them, mugs pausing midair as sly grins spread across their faces, the air thick with unspoken jests.

Smee leaned back in his chair, his ruddy cheeks flushed deeper with ale, as he nudged One-Eyed Jack, his voice a conspiratorial whisper. "Told ye, Jack, they're glowin' like they outran a tempest!" One-Eyed Jack puffed his pipe, ash tumbling onto the scarred table, his eye glinting with amusement. "Aye, Cap'n looks like he's conquered more'n the seas tonight," he rasped, his chuckle rough as gravel. Black Tom's lips twitched, his dark eyes flicking to Desylva with a nod of quiet respect, his silence louder than words. Billy, swaying slightly, grinned wide, his freckled face alight with boyish glee. "Back to rule the pub, are ye? Stormhaven's got nothin' on you two!" His voice cracked with enthusiasm, drawing a few chuckles from nearby sailors, their mugs raised in a knowing salute.

Desylva slid into her seat, her knee brushing Killian's as she leaned against the table, her gray eyes catching the firelight with a playful spark. "Miss me, lads?" she teased, her voice low and edged with a storm's mischief, her fingers drumming lightly on the table, a faint gust stirring the smoke around them. Killian tossed a coin to the barmaid, who caught it with a practiced flick, her auburn hair falling loose as she smirked. "Keep 'em comin', lass," he said, his tone steady but warm, his hand resting briefly on Desylva's shoulder, a silent claim that made her smile. "Tryin' to buy their favor now, Captain?" she quipped, her lips curving as she sipped her ale, the foam clinging to her upper lip before she licked it away, her eyes locked on his with a teasing challenge

The fiddler struck up a new tune, a slower reel that wove through the din, its notes like a tide pulling the crowd into motion. A few sailors swayed with barmaids, their laughter mingling with the clink of tankards, the pub's heat pulsing like a living thing.

Killian leaned closer to Desylva, his voice a low rumble. "Another dance, love, or are we savin' our strength for the Roger?" His blue eyes danced with mischief, his hook tapping her wrist, the cool metal grazing her skin. She grinned, her storm mark flickering as a faint breeze swirled around them, lifting the edges of her cloak. "You're not gettin' off that easy, Hook," she murmured, her tone daring as she stood, pulling him toward the dance floor, their hands entwined, their steps a seamless rhythm born of countless nights under starlit skies.

A few hours later

Last call boomed, the barkeep roaring, "Out, ye sots, me barrels're dry!" Smee slumped. "No more ale? A cruel fate!!" One-Eyed Jack snarled, pipe cooling. "Cheap cur, should've brought me own." Billy swayed, slurring.

“Stormhaven’s conquered, mates!” Killian tossed coins, his voice steady. “For the mess we left.” Desylva stood, cloak settling. “Ship’s waitin’.”

The crew stumbled out, Smee hiccupping, One-Eyed Jack hauling Billy upright. Killian walked beside Desylva, their shoulders brushing, the pub’s glow fading as Stormhaven’s lanterns dimmed, the sea’s pull calling them home.

<u>En Route Back to Jolly Roger</u>

The crew wove through Stormhaven’s twisting streets, their boots scuffing cobblestones worn smooth by centuries, the gritty rasp echoing in the misty air. The harbor’s breeze swept in, sharp with salt and the briny musk of seaweed, cutting through the fading reek of ale and tobacco clinging to their clothes. Lanterns swayed on rusted hooks, their flames casting jagged shadows that danced across the damp cobbles, painting the crew’s faces in flickering gold and slate. Mist rolled off the docks, curling around their ankles like spectral fingers, their breaths puffing into faint clouds in the night’s crisp bite, mingling with the sea’s restless whisper.

Smee lagged behind, his stout frame swaying, boots slipping on slick stones, “Them drinks got me legs wobblin’ like a newborn colt!” He clutched his hat, nearly falling as he splashed through a puddle of brackish water. One-Eyed Jack grabbed his collar, steadying him with a gruff chuckle. “Straighten up, ye sodden fool, or ye’ll sleep in the muck!” His pipe glowed faintly, smoke spiraling into the mist.

Billy stumbled beside, crooning a slurred shanty, voice cracking, “*Oh, the sea’s me love, she holds me tight…*” he lurched, nearly toppling into a crate of fish bones, his freckled hands scrabbling for balance. Black Tom trailed, a silent giant, his harpoon slung across his shoulder, its tip catching moonlight in razor-sharp glints, his dark eyes scanning the shadows with unyielding vigilance.

Killian led the way, his arm draped around Desylva’s shoulders, his black leather coat creaking as he pulled her close, her warmth a steady flame against the night’s chill. His blue eyes traced the path to the docks, sharp and unwavering, missing nothing, not a flicker in the alleys nor the Roger’s silhouette looming ahead, sails furled against a star-pricked sky. Desylva nestled into his side, her leather cloak rustling, her gray eyes catching the lantern light with a playful glint. “Crew’s a mess,” her tease was soft, her storm magic humming faintly, a spark flickering in the air. He smirked, his tone rich with warmth, “And you fit right in, love, storm and all.” Her laugh was a melody, slicing through the hush, “High praise, captain. Keep that fire, I’m holdin’ you to it.”

The docks drew near, the Jolly Roger’s hull a dark beacon, her lanterns casting golden pools across the deck.

Smee panted, clutching his chest. “Sweet ship, I’m nearin’ me salvation!” One-Eyed Jack shoved him along, growling, “Quit moanin’, ye’re slower than a barnacle!” Billy’s shanty faltered into a mumble, his wiry frame weaving. “Home… sweet home…” Black Tom’s boots thudded steadily, his harpoon a quiet weight, his scarred calm anchoring the crew’s chaos.

The street narrowed, cobblestones slick with dew and fish oil, the stench wafting up, sour and sharp. Smee skidded, arms windmilling. “These stones’re cursed. Out to break me neck!” One-Eyed Jack’s laugh rasped. “Yer own clumsy feet’ll do ye in, watch it!”

A shadow lurched from an alley, a drunk with a matted beard, voice roaring. “Ye pirates, hand over yer gold, struttin’ like lords!” One-Eyed Jack’s hand dropped to his pistol. “Back off, cur, or ye’ll taste lead!” Smee trembled, shrinking back. “No more scraps, me heart’s flaggin’!” Billy laughed, clapping. “Look at ‘im sway, he’s done before he starts!” Black Tom stepped forward, harpoon poised, his silence a threat.

Killian’s voice cut sharp, his arm tightening around Desylva. “Clear out, mate, or my hook’ll send ya sprawlin’.”

Desylva’s gust flared, short and fierce, toppling the drunk into the muck. One-Eyed Jack chuckled. “Neat trick, cleaner than a blade!” Killian grinned, his eyes glinting. “That’s four drinks, lass, keepin’ score?” Her laugh danced. “You’ll owe me a barrel afore I’m done.”

The docks stretched wide, salt-worn planks creaking underfoot, slick with algae shimmering in the moonlight. The Jolly Roger loomed, her familiar sway a promise of rest.

Smee flopped onto a piling, groaning. “I’ve reached paradise, me bunk’s callin’!” One-Eyed Jack stretched, joints popping. “Solid night, worth the aches.” Billy swayed, humming softly. Black Tom ascended the gangplank, his boots soft, his harpoon steady.

Killian paused, his arm still around Desylva, scanning the town’s fading glow. “Stormhaven gave us a fight, a good run.” Her gray eyes traced his profile, her voice warm. “Worth the chaos, Cap? All that roar and rumble?” He nodded, firm. “Aye, lass, with you at my side, every moment’s gold.” Her smile softened, a rare quiet in her storm. “Careful, you’re gettin’ poetic.” His smirk gleamed. “Only for you, love.”

The sea’s lap whispered below, its brine cutting through the rum’s haze, a balm for their weary blood. Smee scrambled up the gangplank, panting. “I’ve survived, praise the tides!” One-Eyed Jack shoved him, growling, “Move, ye dawdler, yer bunk’s waitin’.” Billy stumbled after, his hum fading. Black Tom waited atop, his silence a guide.

Killian’s hook tapped his thigh, his voice ringing. “Home, lads, sleep it off.” Desylva leaned into him, her cloak brushing his coat. “Four drinks, don’t forget.” His chuckle rumbled. “I’m countin’, lass, always.”

The Jolly Roger

The crew clambered aboard the Jolly Roger, the gangplank shuddering under their unsteady boots, its oak groaning against the ship’s hull, a soft chorus of creaking timbers and lapping waves welcoming them home. The sea murmured below, weaving through the taut rigging’s sigh and the distant clatter of Stormhaven’s lanterns fading along the docks, their golden specks swallowed by the night’s velvet expanse. The deck gleamed faintly under starlight, its worn planks bathed in a silver sheen, the air sharp with brine and the faint musk of damp wood, a cleansing breath after the pub’s smoky grip.

Main Deck

Smee collapsed onto the deck with a theatrical groan, his stout frame sprawled, chapped hands clutching his chest. “Sweet ship, ye’ve saved me from that ale’s cruel claws!” His wheeze echoed, his legs twitching as if still dodging cobblestones. One-Eyed Jack strode to the cannons, his grizzled fingers tracing the pitted steel, his eye squinting into the shadows beyond the rail. “No dock rats skulkin’ after us, clean return.” His pipe dangled unlit, a whiff of tobacco lingering as he nodded, eased by the ship’s quiet. Black Tom stowed his harpoon with a soft clank, its tip catching starlight in wicked glints, his scarred hands moving with precision, his dark eyes tracing the horizon’s seam. Billy slumped against a barrel, his wiry frame sagging, mumbling incoherently. His freckled face slackened, rum pulling him under, his lute slipping to the deck with a soft thud, strings silent.

Quarterdeck

Killian claimed the helm, blue eyes lifting to the stars as their icy light caught on his hook. He gripped the wheel with steady purpose, his black coat flaring with the motion, leather creaking softly in the quiet. Desylva leaned beside him, her leather cloak rustling, her gray eyes catching the starlight with a storm’s quiet gleam, her storm magic humming faintly, a pulse in tune with the sea’s rhythm.

“Wild night.” Her voice was warm, a calm threading through her edge. He nodded, his gaze lingering on her, steady and deep. “Crew’s a mad lot, lass, but with you, every brawl’s worth the bruises.”

The Jolly Roger creaked, timbers settling into the night’s embrace, a home steadfast through chaos.

She tilted her head, her tease soft but sharp. “Ready for that bed, love? Starlight’s makin’ you look weary.” Her grin dared him, her fingers brushing his arm, a fleeting spark. His hook tapped the wheel, a slow rhythm, his smirk curling. “Not yet, lass. Got fire enough to keep you sparkin’ ‘til dawn.” Her laugh rippled, bright against the sea’s murmur. “Bold claim.” Their shoulders brushed, a warmth blooming in the cool air.

Main Deck

The deck hushed, stars blazing against the black expanse, their silver glow softening the ship’s rugged lines. Smee’s snores rolled like a distant gale, “Zzz… barmaid’s brew… zzz…” his stout legs kicking faintly, as if dodging fishbones.

One-Eyed Jack eased against a cannon, his grizzled frame melting into the steel, his murmur low. “Rum and a tussle, perfect brew for a pirate’s soul.” His pipe lay cold, a rare ease softening his scars.

Black Tom held watch at the bow, his scarred face calm, dark eyes tracing the sea’s edge where it bled into shadow. Billy’s mumble faded, “Sea’s callin’…” his lute silent beside him.

Quarterdeck

Killian’s hand rested on the wheel, his voice deep with pride. “She’s our heart and soul, this ship, strong through every rogue and storm.” Desylva’s fingers grazed his sleeve, her touch lingering as she leaned closer. “Tough as us” Her storm magic crackled, a spark flaring in the air, mirrored in their shared glance.

The sea’s breath cooled the deck, brine mingling with the fading scent of rum. His blue eyes locked with hers, softening. “Five drinks, lass, and I’m still countin’.” Her smile was a blade, warm and sharp. “Pay up soon, or I’ll claim more than drinks.” He took her hand, leading her to the companionway. The Jolly Roger’s sway a quiet embrace.

Killian & Desylva's Cabin

The cabin door clicked shut with a soft snap, the lantern’s golden flicker spilling across the bed’s quilt, the enchanted wood carved with runes that pulsed faintly, casting a warm glow across the dark grain. The ship’s timbers sighed under the sea’s swelling sway, a restless rhythm mirroring the charge in the air. A cool wind slipped through the window’s enchanted glass, its protective wards shimmering faintly, sharp with brine and the musk of oak, rustling the air.

Killian unlaced his heavy coat, letting it fall with a muted thud. He tugged his shirt over his head, baring his scarred chest, then kicked off his boots, the leather scuffing the floorboards, and shed his trousers, his arousal evident as he stood bare, his blue eyes tracing Desylva’s form with hungry reverence. Desylva unclasped her cloak, the dark fabric whispering down her shoulders to pool at her feet, revealing a linen shirt clinging to her curves. She peeled it off slowly, her storm mark pulsing blue against her wrist, then unlaced her trousers, stepping out of them and her boots, her bare skin glowing in the dim light, the curve of her hips a siren’s call.

“You’re still shinin’, lass, Stormhaven’s chaos couldn’t dim you,” he murmured, his voice a low, velvet growl laced with heat. She stepped closer, gray eyes glinting with a storm’s quiet fire, her lips curling into a teasing smile. “And you, still cuttin’ through it all, or did that ale dull your edge?” Her tone purred, seductive and warm, the space between them crackling as the wind outside swelled, tugging at the rigging with a low, insistent hum, waves lapping harder against the hull.

The cabin shrinking to the heat of their breath as their bodies drew near. Her fingers grazed his chest, tracing the ridges of his scars with a slow, caressing touch that sent a shiver down his spine, her nails lingering with tender intent. He caught her wrist, his hand gentle yet unyielding, pulling her flush against him, her bare warmth pressed into his chest, her heartbeat a steady thud against his ribs.

“Dull me? Never. You stoke the flames, lass, deep and wild. Always will,” he rasped, his lips brushing hers, a tantalizing promise as the wind howled louder, rattling the window’s frame, rain beginning to lash the glass. She tilted her head, her voice a sultry whisper against his mouth, “Then take me there, Killian, slow and burnin’.”

Thunder rumbled low, a resonant growl trembling through the hull, her storm magic flaring, static dancing along her fingertips. She grasped his hook, sending a warm, tingling current through the metal, a vibrant spark that surged into him, electric pleasure coursing through his veins like a lover’s caress, making his body hum with intense, enticing warmth, his groan low and guttural, his eyes darkening with hunger.

“Gods, lass, that spark. You’re lightin’ me up,” he growled, their lips meeting, soft and lingering, a kiss that deepened into a tender ache, tongues brushing in a quiet, hungry dance, the ship pitching as waves crashed against the hull.

They moved to the bed, and eased onto it, the enchanted wood creaking under their weight, its runes flaring brighter as the ship rocked with the sea’s rhythm, the wind’s wail weaving through the timbers like a lover’s sigh, rain pounding harder outside. His hook rested against the wall, glinting faintly, while his hand slipped across her back,

fingers splaying across her warm, silken skin, caressing every curve with worshipful care, drawing a soft moan from her lips. She arched into him, her hands roaming his shoulders, nails grazing with tender urgency, leaving faint red marks, her voice a velvet lure, “I’ll take you down, sink into me, slow and fierce, feel how I want you.”

His hand caressed her breast, thumb brushing her nipple, coaxing a gasp as he kissed her throat, tasting the salt and pulse beneath. “Gods, you’re too much. Unravel me slow, deep as the sea,” he breathed, his lips trailing lower, his hand lingering on her thigh. Lightning flashed beyond the window, a silver streak illuminating her gray eyes, her storm magic pulsing, a faint crackle heightening the heat as they pressed closer, trembling with need, the ship shuddering under a sudden swell.

The bed groaned as they shifted, the quilt tangling around their legs, the wind’s song rising to a seductive moan as she straddled him, her thighs clamping his hips with a possessive, gentle grip. His hand traced her spine, slow and worshipful, fingers dipping into every curve, caressing her lower back as he gazed up, her hair falling wild, a dark curtain framing her flushed face.

He twined a strand around his fingers, tugging her down for a kiss. “You’re mine, lass, take me in, deep as you dare,” he murmured, his voice thick with longing, a seductive plea that pulled her lips to his ear. Her whisper was hot, deliberate, “I’ll take you, Killian, fill me slow, every thrust, every inch, make me feel you to my core.”

Thunder rolled again, shaking the cabin as her storm magic surged, electricity humming along her touch. She grasped his hook again, sending another current through it, a stronger jolt that flooded him with pleasure, his body trembling, the sensation like a radiant spark igniting his core, enticing him further, his arousal throbbing. “Bloody hell, lass, you’re drivin’ me wild,” he groaned, as she positioned herself above him, her slick heat brushing his hardened length.

Slowly, she slid down onto him, guiding him inside her. Her tight, wet warmth enveloping him inch by heavenly inch, stretching her as his thick shaft filled her completely. Their gasps mingling, her moan sharp and trembling, his a ragged groan, as the intense sensation stole their breath. The ship pitching, waves crashing as lightning cracked outside, rain flooding the deck.

Their rhythm began soft and deliberate, the bed swaying with the ship’s pitch, the wind’s howl climbing to a fevered pitch, whipping the sails above, their runed canvas glowing to hold firm, urging the Jolly Roger through turbulent swells.

He thrust up, slow and deep, his hips rolling with tender force, each stroke sinking into her pulsing warmth, drawing a ragged moan from her throat, her hands braced against his chest, nails digging in, leaving marks. “Deeper, lass, you take me so sweet, feel it, how I need you,” he growled, his voice a husky caress, his hand caressing her hip to guide her, each thrust a steady burn that lit her gray eyes with raw desire.

She shuddered, her moan rising sharp and sweet, “Aye, Killian, I feel you, gods, keep goin’, fill me up, don’t stop.” Lightning cracked, a jagged flash bathing the cabin, her storm magic flaring, a wild pulse syncing with his thrusts, the air thick with heat, salt, and their musk, the ship’s timbers groaning under the storm’s wrath, the window’s glass rattling fiercely.

The pace intensified, still soft but unrelenting, the bed creaking louder as his thrusts grew firmer, each plunge coaxing her moans into a rising cadence, her body tightening around him, her breath hitching with every push, her hands sliding to clutch his shoulders, nails leaving fleeting scratches.

“Push in… yes, push… hold it there,” she gasped, her voice a ragged plea, locking eyes with him, gray storm meeting blue fire. He obeyed, thrusting up slow and powerful, sinking to the hilt and holding, her thighs tensed, pressing down hard, pinning him as she ground into him, her warmth clenching tight around his depth.

“Gods, lass, you’re takin’ me so deep,” he groaned, his voice trembling with ecstasy, his hand caressing her thigh as they held the moment, seconds stretching into eternity, her moan breaking into a sharp, shuddering cry, her body quivering as she pressed harder, both gasping, breathless in the exquisite strain.

Thunder boomed, a resonant clap shaking the hull, her storm magic surging, electricity tingling along his spine, the ship bucking as waves slammed against the hull, rain pounding the deck above.

Her hands roamed his chest, caressing his scars with tender reverence, her moans softening into desperate whimpers as their rhythm resumed, slow and insistent, each thrust a deliberate plunge that drew her tighter. His hand slid to her cheek, cupping her face, his fingers tracing her jaw as he gazed up, his heart in his eyes. “You’re my everything, lass,” he murmured, his voice thick with adoration.

The fire between them surged. With a swift motion, he flipped her beneath him, pinning her to the bed, her wrists caught gently in his hand, his hook beside her head, his blue eyes blazing with hunger. He teased her with soft, tender pushes, his length brushing her entrance, sliding just inside, coaxing gasps from her lips.

“Killian, stop teasin’... take the plunge, love... now!” she begged, her voice raw, her hips arching to meet him. He grinned, a roguish spark in his eyes, “As you wish, my storm,” and thrust deep, plundering her hard and rough, his shaft driving into her core with forceful intensity. Her cry was sharp and wild. The bed creaked furiously, its enchantments steadying the frame. The ship shuddered as lightning split the sky, waves crashing with relentless fury. The window’s glass quaked under the storm’s assault, runes glowing faintly to mend any cracks ensuring the window's stability.

Their pace turned frantic, his thrusts relentless, each stroke sinking to her depths, her warmth gripping him tightly, her legs wrapping around his waist, urging him on. “Harder, Killian... faster... gods... give me everything!” she pleaded, her voice breaking into moans, her nails raking his back. He growled, complying, his hips slamming into hers, each thrust a fiery claim, the friction igniting ecstasy as they moved for minutes, their bodies slick with sweat, the air thick with their arousal.

She grasped his hook, sending another vibrant current through it, a jolt of electric pleasure that surged through him, a radiant spark that made his body tremble, enticing him further, his groan animalistic, “You’re killin’ me with that spark!” The storm roared, rain flooding the deck. The window’s glass rattling, runes glowing again. Her storm mark blazing as they pushed toward the edge, their rhythm a desperate dance. The ship rocking wildly under the tempest’s wrath, waves crashing against the hull.

The edge loomed, the world narrowing to the bed’s embrace as his thrusts grew erratic, each plunge a claim, her cries sharpening into a crescendo. “Come with me, my storm. Release your tides. Soak me.” he breathed, his blue eyes locking hers, blazing with adoration, his voice a seductive pull as he thrust hard, teetering on release.

She trembled, her body clenching around him, her lips parting in a shuddering moan, “Killian… My storm is about to break, love. … Take me over the edge!”

Lightning flared, a brilliant streak illuminating their entwined forms, her storm magic peaking, a sharp spark racing through them as they broke. Her release crashed over her, a convulsive wave, her inner walls pulsing fiercely around his thick shaft, clamping in tight, wet spasms, her cry piercing as ecstasy flooded her senses, her body arching, trembling uncontrollably.

He followed, a guttural roar tearing from his chest, his length throbbing as he spilled inside her, hot, forceful spurts filling her, his release overwhelming, binding them in a radiant storm that shook the bed, the ship trembling as thunder boomed, waves slamming the hull, the window’s glass quaking but holding under its enchantments and runes, the storm’s fury mirroring their climax.

The wind quieted to a sigh, the sea’s lap soothing the hull as the thunder faded to a distant rumble, the cabin settling into a hushed glow, the bed’s runes dimming, their healing light fading as the scratches vanished. Killian’s arms wrapped her tight, his chest heaving beneath her as their breaths slowed, her cheek resting against his scarred shoulder, her fingers caressing his jaw with tender care.

“You’re my magnet, lass, every time, you pull me in,” he murmured, his voice soft and sated, his hand tracing lazy circles on her back, lingering on her curves as the lantern’s light flickered over their tangled limbs. She nestled closer, her moan a faint echo as she pressed a kiss to his jaw, her voice a tender tease, “And you fill my cave, Killian, don’t ever stop divin’ into me.”

The Jolly Roger rocked gently, her timbers creaking a lullaby as the lightning dimmed beyond the window, their love a quiet flame burning steady in the afterglow, the weather's wild dance a fading echo of their union beneath the starlit sky.

The Voyage for the Unicorn's Veil (Day 180)

The Jolly Roger swayed gently on a silvered sea, dawn's molten gold streaking the horizon, bleeding into night's fading violet. The sails caught a breeze laced with salt and a distant, sweet bloom, whispering of far-off shores. The deck hummed with the crew's restless energy, boots scuffing planks as they gathered near the helm, voices a low murmur under gulls' piercing cries.

Quarterdeck

Killian stood tall at the helm, his black leather coat flowing with the ship's rhythm, hook gleaming as it traced the wheel's edge. His piercing blue eyes scanned the horizon with quiet intensity. Desylva leaned against the railing, her leather cloak rustling, gray eyes catching dawn's glow, dark hair whipping in the wind, her storm-touched presence as vital to him as the sea itself.

Main Deck

The crew buzzed with tales from smoky taverns — the Unicorn's Veil. A legend of a cloth woven from a unicorn's mane, pure as snow, said to heal any wound, even cursed ones, igniting their hope.

Smee broke the quiet, sloshing rum from a dented bottle. "Heard it from a bard, Cap'n. … Veil's real, mends anything!" His face flushed, eyes seeking nods. His hands trembled around the bottle — not from drink, but from the lingering shakes Rumple's collapse curse had left in his bones. "Could fix this… maybe," he whispered. One-Eyed Jack, polishing a cannon, snorted, "Fairy tales, likely cursed itself." His eye betrayed curiosity, but his fingers twitched near an old burn scar Regina's venom curse had never fully let go.

Black Tom sharpened his harpoon, the steel's scrape his reply, a slight nod acknowledging the tale. The scar along his forearm — a jagged reminder of a wraith's strike — pulsed faintly in the cold dawn. Billy swung from the rigging, landing lightly. "Hidden on a misty isle, Cap'n. … Worth a shot!" His voice cracked with zeal, eyes wide.

Quarterdeck

The Veil's legend had grown insistent across ports, its promise to mend flesh and spirit a balm for scars from Rumpelstiltskin's schemes and Regina's curses. Killian's hook tapped the wheel, his gaze drifting to the faint line of darkened skin along his forearm — the mark Regina's despair curse had left, a wound magic never fully let go. The Veil's promise tightened his chest. "Could shift our fight," he murmured.

Desylva stepped closer, boots soft on the deck, gray eyes locking his, storm magic humming faintly beneath her skin. "Healing's rare. Could save us from worse than blades." Her words held a softer edge. Killian's grin flashed, roguish. "Aye, love. Let's chase the legend."

Killian drew a magic bean from his coat, its green-gold swirl catching light like a trapped sea, bartered from a shadowy merchant. He held it aloft, crew falling silent.

Smee gaped, "Our ticket, Cap'n!" One-Eyed Jack smirked, "Better not land us in trouble." Black Tom gripped his harpoon. Billy whispered, "Where's it go?"

Killian's blue eyes sparked trust, voice rising, "The Isle of Ethereal Mist!" He glanced at Desylva, her grin matching his. "Ready, lass?" Her hand brushed his. "Aye." He tossed the bean.
The sea recoiled before it struck — waves pulling back as though bracing for impact. A low hum rose from the depths, ancient and warning, vibrating through the hull like a heartbeat. The water twisted inward, spiraling into a shimmering whirlpool that glowed with silver light.

The ship trembled with purpose, Desylva's smile a rare flicker.

Enter Portal

Killian spun the wheel, the Jolly Roger plunging toward the whirlpool's shimmering heart. The sea twisted into a spiraling column of silver and jade, waves recoiling from its pull as though the ocean itself feared the breach.

Mist peeled away from the water, sucked into the vortex in long, ghostly ribbons. The crew braced. Smee clung to ropes. One-Eyed Jack steadied a cannon. Black Tom stood firm. Billy whooped from the rigging, torch flaring. The ship tilted into the spiral.

The bow struck the threshold. Light fractured around them — silver, jade, violet — shattering into spiraling shards that wrapped the hull in a cocoon of magic. The sea vanished beneath them, swallowed by the whirlpool's swirling dark. Sound warped into echoing hums, the world narrowing to the vortex's pull as the portal swallowed the ship.

The world folded inward — light, sea, sky collapsing into spiraling dark.

Exit Portal

The Jolly Roger burst from the whirlpool's far side, her hull shuddering as she carved into a silvered sea. Waves slapped against her bow, spray flaring into the dawn's molten gold. Mist unfurled across the horizon, thick and shimmering, veiling the distant shore in ghostly light.

The ship steadied, sails snapping taut as the portal's pull released them. The crew exhaled — Smee sagging against the rail, One-Eyed Jack muttering curses under his breath, Billy laughing breathlessly, Black Tom's harpoon gleaming with readiness.

Ahead, the Isle of Ethereal Mist rose from the sea — cliffs glowing with jade-green light, golden-leaved trees rustling in an unseen wind, their branches clawing at the sky. Pearlescent sand glittered like crushed moons along the shore, mist coiling in serpentine tendrils that drifted across the water.

Killian stepped forward, boots thudding against the deck, blue eyes narrowing as he took in the spectral coastline. Desylva moved beside him, cloak snapping in the breeze, her gray eyes slicing through the haze like twin storms.

The Jolly Roger drifted closer, the silvered sea whispering against her hull.

Main Deck

Killian's voice sliced through the spray, "Drop anchor, lads. Hold her steady!"

Black Tom and One-Eyed Jack leapt to the capstan, muscles straining as they cranked the anchor, its iron claws plunging with a thunderous splash, chains clattering until the ship stilled against the Isle's ghostly currents. Mist wove a dense shroud, its silvery tendrils slithering over towering cliffs that pulsed with an eerie, jade-green glow, their jagged peaks dissolving into a haze alive with whispered secrets. Gnarled trees fringed the shore, their spiraled branches clawing at the sky, golden leaves flickering like dying embers, casting a feverish warmth against the air's biting chill.

Killian strode from the helm, boots resounding on the deck, his black leather coat flaring, mist beading like diamonds on its edges. His blue eyes, sharp as a raptor's, pierced the fog, hook flashing in the torchlight's amber dance. "Eyes keen, blades ready!" he commanded, voice a low growl of authority.

Smee stumbled forward, wobbling, rum bottle clutched tight. "Too quiet, Cap'n. Feels like a trap brewin'!" His round face paled, eyes darting to the cliffs' spectral glow. One-Eyed Jack vaulted from a cannon perch, salt-crusted beard bristling, his eye glinting like a predator's. "Somethin' stalks us," he rasped, fingers twitching toward his cutlass. Black Tom advanced, a silent monolith, scarred hands gripping a harpoon, its steel tip gleaming wetly, his dark gaze unyielding. Billy dropped from the rigging, torchlight painting his freckled face in jittery shadows. "This place sings like a storm's risin', Cap'n!" he said, voice thrumming with eager dread.

Killian assessed the water's depth and observed, "Too shallow for the skiff, lads," he growled, noting the silvered sea lapping far below the waterline, rendering the gangplank useless. His gaze shifted to Desylva, her leather cloak snapping in the breeze, gray eyes blazing with a storm's ferocity. "Conjure us a bridge, love?" Her grin was a blade's edge, "Aye, Cap!"

Desylva stepped to the rail, boots firm on the mist-slick planks. She raised her hands, storm magic crackling along her fingers in electric blue arcs. The mist recoiled at her touch, swirling upward in spiraling ribbons as though recognizing her command.

She inhaled — slow, deliberate — and the air shifted.

Wind curled around her wrists, tightening like bracers of living gale. Rain shimmered into existence above her palms, droplets merging into translucent strands that wove themselves into a lattice of vaporous light. The mist thickened, condensing under her storm's pressure, each thread glowing faintly with silver and blue.

She thrust her hands forward. The bridge surged outward from the rail in a sweeping arc, its planks forming one by one — mist hardening into shimmering crystal, each step etched with storm-runic patterns that pulsed like a heartbeat. The rail rose beside it, woven from condensed fog that spiraled upward like a serpent's spine, frost glittering along its curves.

The bridge anchored itself to the shore with a soft, resonant hum, mist curling around its base like welcoming hands. The Isle's golden leaves drifted across it, sizzling faintly where they touched the storm-woven surface.

Killian and Desylva left the quarterdeck and headed to the main deck. They approached the rail where the bridge gleamed, suspended between ship and shore like a path carved from moonlight. He glanced at the crew. "Who's with us?"

The crew's eyes met, resolve igniting. Smee shuffled forward, muttering. One-Eyed Jack followed with a snarl. Black Tom's silence was a vow. Billy bounded last, torch aloft.

Bridge

Killian led the way, boots echoing on the ethereal planks as he stepped onto the bridge. The mist-woven span thrummed beneath him, each step pulsing faintly with Desylva's storm-runic patterns. The bridge arched gracefully from the Jolly Roger's rail toward the shore, suspended over the silvered sea like a path carved from moonlight and breath.

Desylva moved at his flank, her dagger catching the golden flicker of falling leaves drifting from the Isle's trees. Her cloak whispered against the bridge's crystalline surface, stormlight glimmering faintly beneath her skin as she tested the structure with a steady hand. The mist curled around her boots, recoiling from her storm-touched presence as though recognizing her command.

The crew followed close behind. Smee shuffled forward, muttering under his breath, his boots slipping on the slick vaporous planks. "Bridge's got no sense o' solid ground, Cap'n," he quivered, clutching his pistol and hat as though both might steady him. One-Eyed Jack descended next, boots crunching on frost-rimmed mist. His eye scanned the fog ahead, cutlass drawn, jaw set. "Feels like walkin' on a ghost's spine," he growled, the bridge's hum vibrating through his bones.

Black Tom's stride was steady, harpoon balanced across his shoulder. The bridge's glow reflected off the steel tip, turning it into a shard of moonlit ice. His silence held weight — a vow of readiness. Billy bounded last, torch aloft, flame casting jittery arcs through the mist. "Look at this, Cap'n!" he breathed, awe and dread tangled in his voice. "Bridge's alive — feels like it's breathin' under us!"

The mist thickened around them, drifting in slow coils that clung to their legs like damp silk. The bridge responded to each footfall, runes brightening beneath their boots, guiding them forward with a soft, rhythmic pulse. The silvered sea whispered below, waves curling white against the bridge's shimmering underside.

Halfway across, the Isle revealed more of itself.

Golden leaves drifted from the spiraled trees, sizzling faintly when they touched the bridge's storm-woven surface. The cliffs loomed closer, their jade-green glow pulsing like a heartbeat. The mist carried faint whispers — not words, but impressions — a distant hum that brushed their ears like a warning.

Killian's shoulder brushed Desylva's, a fleeting anchor in the haze. "Bridge holds," he murmured, voice low. "Good work, love." Her smirk flickered, sharp and sure. "Storm's got its grip. Just keep movin', pirate."

The crew tightened formation. Smee clung to the rail, muttering prayers. One-Eyed Jack kept his cutlass raised. Black Tom's harpoon gleamed, steady as a promise. Billy's torch carved a path through the fog, flame snapping in the Isle's strange wind.

The bridge narrowed near the shore, mist curling thicker, the air heavy with ozone and ancient magic. The Isle's heartbeat thrummed through the planks, urging them forward.

Killian lifted his cutlass, Desylva's dagger gleaming beside him.

Together, they crossed into the Isle's breath.

Shore

Killian stepped onto the shore, white sand crunching under his boots, the mist coiling around his legs like a serpent's caress, thick with the scent of ozone and ancient magic. Desylva matched his stride, her leather cloak whispering, gray eyes slicing through the haze like twin storms, her dagger's edge catching the golden glint of falling leaves. Her cursed mark pulsed vivid blue beneath her sleeve, throbbing in sync with the Isle's unseen heartbeat, a rhythm that set her nerves alight.

"This mist's alive, Killian. Magic's woven into its bones," she warned, voice a low hum, senses sharp as her dark hair lashed across her face. His grin flashed, hook gleaming like a star in the torchlight. "Then we'll dance with it, lass."

The crew fanned out behind them, torches casting wavering pools of light, breaths frosting in the biting chill, their boots scuffing the sand as they scanned the fog.

A guttural growl rumbled from the cliffs, a primal challenge that tightened their grips on weapons and set pulses racing. The path snaked upward, pearlescent sand giving way to glowing green moss, slick as glass underfoot, its faint luminescence pulsing like a living tide. Sheer cliffs loomed, their wet faces weeping mist, jagged outcrops fracturing torchlight into emerald shards that danced across their faces. Golden-leaved trees rustled, their gnarled branches swaying in an unseen wind, leaves drifting down like stinging sparks, each graze a jolt that prickled their skin.

Smee scouted ahead, weaving through twisted roots, his voice quaking over his shoulder, "No traps yet, Cap'n, but me gut's screamin'!" One-Eyed Jack hacked at vines with his cutlass, their sticky sap splattering his grizzled beard. "Bloody jungle's fightin' back!" he spat, blade flashing in the gloom. Billy's torch blazed, illuminating the path's treacherous curve. "Stay tight, lads. Fog's got claws in it!!" Black Tom prowled, harpoon poised, his dark gaze scouring the mist's depths, silent but lethal.

Killian's cutlass carved through a curtain of vines, their sweet sap glistening like honey, dripping onto his coat. "No dawdlin', lads. Move sharp!" he barked, his shoulder brushing Desylva's arm, a fleeting anchor in the haze. Her storm magic crackled, a faint spark leaping from her fingertips. "We're not alone," she murmured, her mark glowing brighter, her resolve a fire against the fog's weight.

Smee tripped, his rum bottle shattering on jagged stone, the sharp tang of liquor cutting through the mist. "Land's bewitched. I feel it in me bones!!" he yelped, his hat snagging a low branch. One-Eyed Jack snarled, "Step lively, ye blubberin' fool!" Billy's torch wavered as he spun, "Somethin's movin' out there!"

A snarl tore through the cliffs, louder now, hands tightening on blades and harpoons, the air thick with dread. A mist panther erupted from the haze, its black fur glistening like wet obsidian, ember-eyes blazing like twin infernos. Its claws raked the air, lethal arcs of bone slicing toward Killian.

“Damn beast!” he roared, diving aside, his hook clanging against its skull, parrying a swipe that tore his coat’s sleeve. Rumpelstiltskin’s vertigo curse struck, the cliffs spinning, the ground lurching beneath him. He stumbled, “Bloody hell!” his vision blurring as the panther lunged.

Black Tom hurled his harpoon, its steel tip sinking deep into the beast’s shoulder, pinning it to a gnarled tree with a sickening crunch, ichor streaming black. Desylva’s thunder roared, a bolt shattering the curse, her dagger carving a bloody gash across the panther’s flank, its snarl twisting into a yowl.

Black Tom sprinted, wrenching his harpoon free, the beast thrashing. Smee lobbed a jagged rock, “Take that, ye devil!” One-Eyed Jack’s cutlass slashed its hide. Billy’s torch flared in its eyes, blinding it.

Desylva’s lightning seared, a final crack felling it in a steaming heap, its embers fading. Killian’s grin blazed. “Sharp work, crew!” Their rhythm surged, a shared pulse of defiance, boots pounding as they pressed upward.

The trail grew treacherous, the moss slicker, the mist a suffocating veil that clung to their skin like damp silk, heavy with the Isle’s pulse. Golden leaves fell in stinging flurries, singeing exposed flesh. The cliffs closed in, their surfaces hissing steam that burned their lungs.

Killian hacked through vines, his coat sagging, sodden with mist. “Higher. Prize’s close!” he urged, his cutlass dripping sap. Desylva’s storm pulsed, her mark flaring blue. “It’s near, Killian. Feel it?”

Smee panted, “Me legs ain’t made for this!” One-Eyed Jack growled, “Push, damn ye, or stay behind!” Billy’s torch flickered, “Mist’s got eyes — feel it starin’!”

A faint hum rose, the air vibrating with magic, drawing them toward a shimmering grove ahead. The hum deepened. Warmth drifted through the mist. Strange and comforting.

Smee blinked. The usual tremor in his hands eased. Just for a moment. One-Eyed Jack rolled a shoulder and frowned. “That's odd.” The old stiffness in his scars faded like morning fog. Black Tom rubbed absent-mindedly at the wraith mark on his forearm. The constant ache had vanished. Billy looked between them. “You lot feel that?”

Desylva slowed. Her mark pulsed beneath her sleeve. Not painfully. Almost curiously.

The Isle's magic moved through them like a tide brushing weathered stone. Not healing. Not yet. Simply reminding them what whole felt like. The sensation faded as quickly as it came. The hum retreated deeper into the mist. Waiting.

The crew pressed on in uneasy silence. No one spoke. The memory of that fleeting wholeness lingered. Smee flexed his steadier fingers. One-Eyed Jack rolled his shoulder again, almost disappointed when the ache returned.

The mist thickened ahead. Golden light shimmered between the trees. The hum changed. What had felt comforting moments ago now felt watchful. Something moved within the golden light. Not a beast. Not a shadow. Something graceful. The mist parted around it as though making way.

A sylph materialized, its form a weave of air and light, its whisper laced with Regina’s trance curse, a honeyed lure that clouded Desylva’s eyes, her dagger slipping from her grip.

“Des!” Killian shouted, gripping her arm, snapping her back. Her thunder unleashed a deluge, rain pounding the sylph into oblivion, the curse shattering as her eyes cleared. “Damn it,” she gasped, shaking off the haze.

Smee ducked, “Ghosts in the fog!” One-Eyed Jack’s blade swiped uselessly, “Slippery bastards!”
Black Tom’s glare steadied Billy, who clutched his torch tighter.

Desylva slashed at the air, her gray eyes blazing, “Stay out o’ my head!” Killian’s hand lingered on her arm, his voice steady. “Iron will, Des.” She nodded, breath sharp. “You too, pirate.”

Their boots crunched onward, the crew’s resolve hardening.

The grove shimmered into view, a sacred hollow where white flowers with golden veins pulsed like heartbeats, their honeyed scent weaving through the mist, petals soft as a lover’s touch against their skin. At its heart hung the Unicorn’s Veil, a cascade of white threads woven from a unicorn’s mane, glowing with silver light that pulsed like a living star. Its delicate strands shimmered, each thread catching the torchlight, casting prisms that danced across the grove, its warmth radiating a promise of healing that stirred the air with ancient magic.

Killian’s breath caught. “There’s our prize!” Smee gaped, “It’s alive, Cap’n — like it’s breathin’!” One-Eyed Jack whistled low, “Worth every cut and curse.” Black Tom nodded, harpoon lowered. Billy’s torch flared, “Like a star fallen to earth!”

Desylva’s voice tightened, her mark pulsing in rhythm with the Veil. “It’s guarded. Brace yerselves.” Killian advanced, his coat brushing the petals, hook twitching, eyes ravenous. “Worth stealin’,” he growled, his voice thick with hunger.

A unicorn reared from the shadows — horn spiraling silver, mane a wild cascade of starlight, sapphire eyes ancient as the sea. Its haunting cry, Regina’s despair curse, slammed into Killian, memories of loss and vengeance flooding, his knees buckling, hook clattering against stone.

“No!” he gasped, clutching his head. Desylva’s thunder split the sky, rain purging the curse, her voice cutting through, “Fight it, Killian!” His mind cleared, cutlass slashing as the unicorn charged, its horn grazing his arm, blood welling crimson. Her lightning stunned it, a crackling gust pinning its hooves. “Grab the Veil!” she shouted, her storm raging.

Killian lunged, seizing the Veil, its warmth surging through him like a tide, soft yet alive, its threads humming with power.

The moment his fingers closed around the Veil, the unicorn's charge faltered. Its sapphire eyes locked onto his. For a heartbeat the grove fell silent. No storm. No battle. No fear. Only the Veil's silver glow between them.

Killian saw no rage there. No hatred. Only an ancient weariness and something older still. Understanding.

The unicorn's gaze drifted briefly toward Smee, then across the battered crew standing amid the ruined grove. Its ears lowered. The creature gave a single slow nod. So slight Killian almost questioned it.

Then the moment passed. The unicorn reared, crying out as the grove shook around them. The ancient sadness vanished from its eyes. Whatever understanding had passed between them was over. The guardian stood once more.

Killian gave a single sharp nod. Respect. Gratitude. Promise. The Veil pulsed once beneath his fingers, warm and alive. Then survival reclaimed the moment. “The Veil's ours!” he roared, tucking it into his coat. Something stirred against him as though alive.

As the Veil brushed his wounded arm, silver light spilled from its threads. The graze left by the unicorn's horn shimmered. Blood slowed. Torn flesh knit together before their eyes, leaving only a faint pink line where the wound had been. Killian froze.

Smee stared. “Cap'n...” Billy's torch dipped. “It healed ye.”

Killian flexed his hand, disbelief flashing across his features. The ache was gone. Desylva's eyes widened as the Veil's glow pulsed brighter. “Now that's magic.”

Smee's trembling hands rose instinctively toward the relic. Hope flickered across his face for the first time in years.

The unicorn's cry shattered the moment. Its hooves slammed into the earth, splintering moss and sending white petals swirling through the grove.

Desylva's storm surged immediately, lightning cracking across the clearing as she drove the beast back. Her grin flashed. “Move, now!” Killian tore his gaze from the healed wound and tightened his grip on the Veil.

Smee cheered. “That's the Cap'n!” One-Eyed Jack shoved Billy forward. “Save the gawkin' for the ship, boy!” Black Tom stepped into formation, harpoon raised.

The crew broke into a run as the grove erupted around them.

The grove fought their retreat. Mist churned across the ground in violent spirals, swallowing roots and flowers alike. The Veil's silver glow pulsed beneath Killian's coat, bright enough to cast pale light through the fog. The Isle felt the relic leaving. The air grew colder. The mist gathered ahead of them, twisting into a single towering shape.

The crew slowed instinctively, boots skidding against wet moss. Even Killian's stride faltered as he tightened his grip on his cutlass. Desylva's mark flared beneath her sleeve, its blue glow suddenly sharp against the gloom. Every eye fixed on the thing taking form within the fog.

A fog wraith rose, its skeletal tendrils stretching, lantern-eyes casting a sickly yellow glow. Rumpelstiltskin’s collapse curse quaked the ground, moss splitting beneath their feet. Killian fell, “Damn you!” his knees slamming stone, the Veil nearly slipping from his coat. Desylva’s thunder boomed, torrential rain breaking the curse.

She hauled him up, her strength fierce. “On yer feet, pirate!” she barked. Her lightning dissolved the wraith in a blinding flash, its tendrils shriveling. His hook ripped through its fading form, the Veil’s warmth pulsing against his chest. Her gray eyes locked with his. Her storm shielding them. Their hands brushing as they steadied. “Worth the blood,” he growled, his breath ragged. “For us,” she said, rain softening to a drizzle, her mark dimming.

Smee panted, “Ship, Cap’n, please!” One-Eyed Jack barked, “Move, ye louts!” Billy lit the way, his torch cutting the fog, Black Tom’s steady stride a silent vow.

The descent was grueling, the cliffs dripping with mist, golden leaves stinging like embers, the moss treacherous underfoot, threatening to send them sliding.

Killian led, his coat torn and sodden. “Not clear yet. Eyes open!” he called, his voice hoarse but firm. Desylva matched his pace, her dagger dripping ichor, her storm a low hum. “More’s lurkin’ out there,” she warned, scanning the fog. Billy’s torch glowed ahead, “Ship’s below, Cap’n!”

The Jolly Roger loomed through the haze, sails stark against the silver sea, lanterns flickering like beacons.

Smee stumbled, wheezing, “Me ticker’s thumpin’ like a drum. Veil better fix it!” One-Eyed Jack growled, “Keep yammerin’ and I’ll feed ye to the fog-beasts!” Black Tom’s harpoon gleamed, his silence steadying the crew. Billy’s torch flared.

Killian paused on a ledge, the path narrowing, cliffs pressing close. He turned to Desylva, the Veil’s glow seeping through his coat. “This weave’s more’n a healer, ain’t it?” he asked, his blue eyes searching hers. She nodded, her mark pulsing faintly, “Feels like hope. Somethin’ to tip the scales.” Her voice softened, “Think it’ll mend more’n cuts?” He gripped her hand, his fingers warm, “Aye, lass.”

Smee piped up, “Hope it fixes me shakes!” Billy laughed, “Or Jack’s temper!” One-Eyed Jack snorted, “Watch it, whelp!” Black Tom nodded, harpoon steady. Desylva’s grin flickered. “Let’s get it aboard ‘fore more beasts sniff it out.” Killian squeezed her hand. “Lead on, storm-lass.”

The path widened, the mist thinning as they neared the shore, sand crunching under their boots. “Close now,” Killian said, his hook tapping the Veil’s bundle, its warmth a steady pulse. Desylva’s storm stirred, “That unicorn’s cry, Regina’s work. She’s got her claws in this place.” Her voice hardened, “We’ll need that Veil when she strikes next.” Killian nodded, “Rumple’s curses hit hard too. This’ll even the odds.”

Billy’s torch flared, “Bridge’s in sight, Cap’n!” Killian lifted his cutlass the Veil’s glow seeping through his coat. “Right then — to the bridge.”

Bridge

The misty bridge shimmered ahead, its vaporous planks pulsing with Desylva's magic, the Jolly Roger's silhouette clearer now, her lanterns beckoning through the thinning haze. The silvered sea whispered beneath the span, waves curling white against the storm-woven underside. Golden leaves drifted from the Isle's twisted trees, sizzling faintly when they touched the bridge's crystalline surface.

Smee huffed, stumbling toward it, "Sweet tides, I've never been happier to see her!" One-Eyed Jack muttered, "Keep movin', or I'll shove ye across!" Black Tom's harpoon gleamed, his silence a steady vow.

They reached the bridge's base, mist curling around their boots like grasping fingers. The Isle's heartbeat pulsed through the planks, urging them forward with a soft, rhythmic thrum.

Killian and Desylva stepped onto the bridge first, sand spilling from their boots as they crossed onto the vaporous span. The mist shivered under their weight, runes brightening beneath each footfall, responding to Desylva's storm-magic and the Veil's living glow.

Desylva's cloak snapped in the rising wind, her storm stirred, her dagger flashing as she scanned the fog. "Isle's breath's still on our heels," she murmured. Killian offered her his hand, a fleeting touch, warm and sure. Their fingers sparked heat, a shared pulse of defiance. "Almost home, love."

The crew trailed behind. Smee, wheezing, clutching his hat and pistol as the bridge swayed beneath him. One-Eyed Jack, cursing stray vines that snagged his boots, cutlass raised. Billy, torch held high, flame carving jittery arcs through the mist. Black Tom, harpoon steady, stride unbroken, the bridge's glow reflecting off the steel tip like a shard of moonlit ice.

Halfway across, the mist thickened, drifting in slow coils that clung to their legs like damp silk. The bridge responded — runes flaring brighter, stormlight threading through the rail in shimmering pulses.

The Jolly Roger loomed ahead, lanterns flickering like beacons through the haze. Her sails stirred in the Isle's strange wind, runes along her hull glowing faintly in recognition of Desylva's magic and the Veil's power.

Killian tightened his grip on Desylva's hand. "Nearly there." Her storm hummed in answer. "Keep the pace."

The bridge narrowed near the ship, mist curling thicker, the air heavy with ozone and lingering magic. The crew pressed closer, boots thudding across the crystalline planks, breaths sharp in the chill.

The ship's rail rose before them, close enough to touch, lanternlight gleaming across the mist-woven span.

Jolly Roger

Killian stepped onto the deck, followed by Desylva, their boots thudding on enchanted oak. His black coat shedding mist in heavy droplets. The crew scrambled aboard behind him.

The Jolly Roger rocked faintly in the Isle's ghostly currents, lanterns flickering like watchful eyes. Mist curled along the rail, reluctant to release them.

Desylva lingered at the bridge's end, gray eyes sharp, cloak dripping, stormlight flickering faintly beneath her skin. She strode to the rail, raising her arms as storm-magic surged through her veins. The misty bridge behind her shivered, its vaporous planks pulsing in response to her call. Frost crackled along its spine, runes flaring bright blue as though bracing for dissolution. She swept her hands outward. Lightning snapped from her fingertips, weaving through the bridge's misty strands. The vaporous planks fractured into shimmering shards of frost-light, each step breaking apart like a dying star. Mist spiraled upward in ghostly ribbons, dissolving into the air with a hiss of ozone. The rail collapsed next — its fog-woven spine unraveling into drifting vapor that curled around her boots before fading into the sea. The entire structure melted into a cascade of silver droplets, falling like rain into the waves below.

Billy watched, awe widening his eyes. “Like a spell unwound — never gets old!”

The last of the bridge evaporated, leaving only the open sea and the Isle’s fading glow behind them.

Quarterdeck

Killian was already moving toward the quarterdeck, cutlass sheathed, hook tapping the wheel as he took his place at the helm. His blue eyes scanned the horizon, searching for the next path. The Veil’s warmth pulsed faintly through his coat, a steady reminder of their prize.

Desylva finished the dismantling, mist still clinging to her cloak. She crossed the deck, boots striking the planks with purpose, and joined Killian at the helm. Her storm settled into a low hum, her gray eyes warm but sharp.

“Raise anchor, lads!” Killian ordered, voice ringing across the deck.

Black Tom and One-Eyed Jack hauled the capstan, chains clanking as the anchor broke free, water streaming from its claws. The Jolly Roger lifted, freed from the Isle’s grasp.

Desylva’s gusts snapped the sails taut, wind spiraling around the hull in a rising gale. The ship surged through thinning mist, the Veil pulsing like a captured dawn. The silver sea stretched boundless, waves curling white. The crew cheering as the Isle’s cliffs faded, its hum swallowed by wind and tide.

Killian stood firm, his black leather coat torn where the unicorn’s horn had grazed, dried blood streaking his arm in dark lines. His hook tapping the wheel, “A healer’s prize, lads! For every curse that’s clawed at us,” his grin blazed, blue eyes fierce. Desylva leaned close, “Storm’s calm, done?” her voice gentling as the blue glow beneath her sleeve softened.

Smee sprawled, “No more beasts, tides be praised!” One-Eyed Jack chuckled, “Fog’s banished. Let the sea breathe again!” Black Tom coiled ropes, silent strength. Billy sang, “She’s runnin’ smooth, Wind’s with us, Cap’n!”

A tremor rippled across the silvered sea. The water darkened, then twisted. A whirlpool erupted off the port side, spiraling into a column of silver and jade, its edges crackling with ancient magic. Mist peeled away from the surface, sucked into the vortex in long, ghostly ribbons. The air vibrated with a rising hum, as though the sea itself urged the Jolly Roger toward the breach.

Killian spun the wheel, jaw tightening. “There she is. Hold fast!”

Enter Portal

The Jolly Roger banked hard, her hull catching the rising wind. The crew braced — Smee clinging to the rail, One-Eyed Jack steadying a cannon, Billy whooping from the rigging, Black Tom planting his harpoon. Desylva’s storm surged, wind threading through the sails, guiding the ship toward the spiraling maw. The vortex roared, its pull seizing the hull. Killian grinned, fierce and hungry. The Jolly Roger plunged into the whirlpool portal, swallowed by spiraling light.

A few hours later

The Jolly Roger was free of the Isle of Ethereal Mist, sails swelling beneath a sky shedding the last silver wisps of fog. The silvered sea unfurled wide, waves curling with white crests that caught the dawn’s gold in fleeting shimmers, scattering light like coins strewn across a velvet expanse.

Quarterdeck

The Veil rested on the map plate in front of the wheel, its white threads shimmering with a silver glow, a quiet promise of healing that warmed the air around it. The soft radiance pulsed gently, as though breathing in time with the ship’s steady roll.

The Roger carved through the waves with renewed grace, hull groaning softly as she settled into the open sea's rhythm. Ropes creaked, sails snapped taut under a breeze unshackled from the Isle's weight. The silver sea shimmered as the sun climbed, banishing the fog's last ghostly tendrils into oblivion. The deck glowed under the morning light, the scars of battle etched across planks and canvas like trophies of survival.

Killian's gaze shifted to Desylva, her storm a steady hum beside him, gray eyes locking with his, trust flaring bright. Her leather cloak dripped onto the planks, cursed mark pulsing faintly blue beneath her sleeve. His heart quickened. Her presence steadied him. Her fire thawing centuries of vengeance.

Killian brushed the Veil's soft threads, The sting in his grazed arm easing as warmth seeped in. "Gentle as your gusts, lass. Works like magic," he said, grin flashing wild. Desylva leaned on the railing, gray eyes tracing the horizon's clean sweep, dagger wiped clean on her cloak. "Trouble's still out there," she murmured, pushing off the rail and stepping closer, storm humming low, "What's this weave for, then?" He softened, blue eyes meeting hers, "Us. Keeps us fightin'." Her lips quirked, "Better not turn mushy on me." Their shoulders grazed, a quiet spark in the morning light.

Rumpelstiltskin's shadow flickered in Killian's mind, Regina's curses a distant hiss. Enemies lingered, but Killian's revenge burned steady, her flame outshining it. The Jolly Roger pressed on, their storm a shared strength, the crew a family carved from the fog's trials. The horizon glowed with open sea, silver fading to deep blue as sunlight bathed the deck, the ship's scars gleaming like badges of their victory.

Killian tapped his hook against the wheel. "We've tipped the scales, lads. Next play's ours," he called, voice firm with a captain's certainty tempered by their scars.

Smee hiccupped, swaying with run's glow, "No mist, no misery. Paradise at last!" His hands — steady now — lingered near the Veil's warmth as though testing its promise. One-Eyed Jack polished his cannon, his grin crooked, beard twitching. "Fog's behind us. Good riddance." Black Tom stood at the railing, dark eyes on the sea's expanse, steady as stone, harpoon resting against his shoulder like a loyal sentinel. Billy hummed from above, "She's tougher now, Cap'n, with that prize!" his torch stowed, hands dancing on the ropes as the ship surged forward.

Desylva's storm stirred, her grin mirroring Killian's — sharp and untamed. Her hand rested near his on the wheel, her presence a melody threading through his bones. The Veil shimmered softly, its silver glow warming the morning air, a promise of healing and hope carried across the open sea. The horizon stretched wide and waiting, trouble brewing somewhere beyond the blue.

Main Deck (Afternoon)

The Jolly Roger surged forward, sun climbing high, shadows stretching across the deck as the air warmed, salt tang erasing the isle's floral grip.

Smee raised his bottle, "To the Cap'n and his storm-lass!" tipsy cheer bubbling. One-Eyed Jack roared, "Best crew on the sea!" His hand slapped the cannon, pride glinting in his eye. Black Tom's nod was firm, scarred hands resting easy. Billy swung along the rigging, spirit soaring. The crew's ragged cheer echoed over the waves, a victory's roar.

Desylva stepped closer, her cloak rustling, her gray eyes softened, a flicker of vulnerability beneath her storm's edge, mark pulsing faint blue. His hand brushing hers, warmth flaring where they touched. Her presence a balm outstripping the Veil's magic.

The ship sailed into the afternoon, sea darkening to sapphire, amber and rose streaking the sky as the sun dipped west, a sharp breeze carrying gulls' cries overhead.

A few hours later (Dusk)

The Jolly Roger dropped anchor in a tranquil cove as dusk draped the sea, violet and gold spilling across the horizon. The water hushed to a gentle lap, mirroring the first stars piercing the twilight, their light twinkling like gems strewn over a sapphire canvas. The air held the day's lingering warmth, a crisp salt tang mingling with pine wafting from a shadowed shore, its silhouette a quiet guardian against the fading light. The Veil's healing glow a memory in the hold.

Killian eased off the helm, “Take yer rest, lads,” his voice shedding its usual bite, black coat unbuttoned and swaying in the breeze.

Smee sparked a fire on deck, its crackle sending sparks swirling like fireflies into the night, rum flowing from battered bottles into eager hands. One-Eyed Jack launched into a yarn, “That unicorn near skewered me. Worth it for the tale!” His grizzled laugh boomed, eye glinting with mirth. Black Tom sat cross-legged, harpoon gleaming under careful strokes, steel flashing in the firelight. Billy pulled a lute from his pack, strumming a slow, mournful tune, “Stars are out, Cap’n. Quiet after that cursed fog,” his voice softened, wiry frame unwinding.

Desylva perched on a barrel by the flames, her leather cloak still damp, gray eyes catching the fire’s glow, their storm-depth eased by a rare stillness. Her mark pulsed gently blue, echoing the Veil’s light stored in the hold, rum cradled in her hand, dagger resting clean at her waist. Killian lingered near the wheel, blue eyes tracing the crew’s ease, softening as they settled on her. Her storm a pulse across the deck, a rhythm in his chest, battles and trust distilled into this calm, her wildness a salve.

The crew’s scars faded in the firelight, a respite wrested from the isle’s jaws. He strode toward her, boots scuffing the planks, drawn by her quiet fire.

“Rough haul back there. Panther. Unicorn. All of it,” Desylva mused, voice a low hum. Killian slid onto a crate beside her, offering a bottle with a grin. “Tough as you are, lass. Share a swig?” Her smirk curved, “Still standin’, I’ll take it,” fingers brushing his as she accepted, warmth flaring in her touch. He leaned closer, shoulder pressing hers, “Mates through the muck, eh? Fog, beasts, curses. None’d stop us,” his blue eyes held hers, glinting with camaraderie. “Tight as a knot, Smee’d say,” he added.

Smee chuckled by the fire, his rum sloshing, “Aye, ye two’s a pair!” One-Eyed Jack winked across the flames, “She’s a rare one, Cap’n. Kept ye upright!” His voice rasped with drink. She laughed, “Don’t count on me haulin’ you every time, Cap,” her storm weaving with his sea, rum softening the edges.

Desylva’s whisper cut through, “That Veil’s more’n skin-deep. Keeps us rollin’.” He nodded, slow and sure, “Aye, lass,” her fire warming his bones. One-Eyed Jack’s tale faded, Black Tom’s hands stilled, snores blending with the crackle.

A pact sealed in the quiet. Desylva’s, gray eyes met Killian’s, storm humming low, wildness threading through. His hook rested near her dagger, her warmth a steady press beside him. Her hand hovered near his.

Later

The deck shimmered with starlight as Killian and Desylva slipped toward the companionway, the air sharp with salt and the musk of damp sails fluttering in the breeze. One-Eyed Jack scratched his beard, eye glinting, “Off to stir a squall, I’d bet. Gonna rock us tonight.” Black Tom hefted a barrel, a grunt agreeing, harpoon catching torchlight. Billy’s voice piped, torch flickering, “Best duck below afore her gales hit. Gonna be a shaker!” The crew smirked, the ship swaying gently, the sea’s murmur hinting at the tempest brewing within.

Killian & Desylva’s Cabin

Killian drew Desylva into the cabin, nudging the runed oak door shut with his elbow, its silver veins flaring to mend a fresh gouge from the latch. The air pulsed with the sea brine’s sting on their sodden clothes, and the wild, earthy fire of her skin, sharp with mist and victory’s thrill. Her damp hair, a tempest of untamed strands, framed her face, storm-gray eyes blazing with triumph’s heat, their silver depths sparking as she pressed close, her breath a scalding tease against his jaw.

They removed their boots, leather thudding on the tarred floor, runes pulsing to sweep away Isle sand. Killian pulled her into his arms, his hand sliding to her lower back, molding her curves against his taut frame, damp leather fusing with her warmth. His hook rested at her hip, its cool curve a thrill against her skin, contrasting his fevered touch. His lips crashed onto hers, a ravenous kiss of salt, rum, and survival, tongues dueling in a deep, desperate dance that burned away the Isle’s perils. Her fingers teased his coat’s clasps, opening them with agonizing slowness, her smirk

wicked as she peeled it off, leather slumping to the floor with a hushed rustle. “Triumph’s your color, pirate,” she purred, voice a sultry rasp, unbuttoning his shirt with a teasing tug, nails raking scars as it fell to the floor.

His fingers found the clasp of her cloak, the leather whispering as he eased it free. The garment slipped from her shoulders and fell aside baring her tunic’s damp cling to her breasts. He loosened its ties with quiet care, each knot yielding to his lover’s patience. Her dark hair spilled forward as he lifted it over her head, the fabric hitting the floor with a wet slap. His lips traced her neck’s pulse, stubble scraping, “You’re my cure, love,” he growled, voice raw with devotion, “every scar’s nothing with you.” Her moan unleashed a gust, shaking the bookshelf, tomes crashing as the storm outside erupted, clouds boiling into a blackened vortex, the sails’ runes glowing to shield against tearing winds. Their trousers dropped, she unbuckled his belt with a deft flick, leather clinking, while he tugged hers down, revealing her thighs’ smooth expanse, garments crumpling, runes mending a desk scuff nearby.

The cabin’s air crackled, desire a living pulse as the Jolly Roger rocked, waves hammering the hull, their thunderous rhythm mirroring the heat coiling between them. The stern window’s enchanted glass splintered under a wave’s assault, runes blazing silver to weave cracks shut. He gripped her hip, hoisting her with a pirate’s strength, carrying her to the runed desk against the blackened oak wall, its surface scarred from past ardor, runes pulsing to heal fresh gouges as he set her down. Charts and a quill skittered off, a brass compass clinking. Her legs locked around his waist, thighs a warm vise, pulling him flush, her sharp gasp cutting the charged air. Her storm-gray eyes seared into his, raw with hunger, her storm magic sparking lightning in her fingertips, a gale slamming the door, its runed latch rattling.

Her hands clawed his shoulders, nails biting muscle, her lips nipping his jaw, a playful taunt drawing a guttural growl. “Keep up, Hook,” she teased, channeling storm magic into his hook, warm currents pulsing through his arm, each tingling wave coiling pleasure in his core. He chuckled, hand fondling her breast, thumb circling her nipple, coaxing a shudder as she arched. His lips grazed her collarbone, kissing a faint scar, her fingers tugging his hair, urging him on.

Their foreplay lingered, her thigh grazing his, a deliberate spark, his hand caressing her hip, fingers tracing curves with possessive reverence. She nibbled his ear, whispering, “More, pirate,” her breath a shiver, his fingers slipping lower, teasing her inner thigh, her gasp stoking their fire.

The tempest outside roared, gale-force winds howling, rain flooding the deck in torrential sheets, sails’ runes glowing crimson to hold fast. Lightning split the sky, bathing her eyes, their wild vow blazing, her sweat-slick skin glistening. The ship lurched, timbers groaning, runes on the bookshelf flaring to mend a cracked shelf from the storm’s fury.

He pressed against her, shielding her on the runed desk, his hand gripping her thigh, fingers sinking into flesh. Her magic surged, a static crackle as she guided him, her touch on his hook sending another pleasure pulse, her grin a dare. He entered her with a slow, searing thrust, her tight, molten heat enveloping him, a pulse of fire tearing a moan from his throat. Her storm magic flared, lightning arcing across her skin, her hips rocking to meet him, each clash syncing with the waves’ apocalyptic crash. Her nails raked his back, leaving fiery trails, their bodies a furnace of friction and need. The desk groaned, runes sealing scratches, the stern window’s runes mending another crack.

His thrusts deep and relentless, rocking her against the desk, her breath hitching in sharp gasps. “Harder, love,” she urged, voice raw, legs tightening. He lifted her thighs higher, plunging deeper, sweat dripping from his brow, muscles straining. Sensing her need, he shifted, lifting her from the desk in a fluid spin, her legs wrapping his waist as he pinned her against the runed wall, oak cool against her back, runes glowing to mend a scuff from his boots. “Beg for it, lass,” he growled, voice a commanding rumble, pinning her wrists above her head with his hand, hook grazing her thigh, its cool edge a thrill. “Please, Killian,” she pleaded, eyes wild, “give me all of you.” Her desperation fueled him, his thrusts quickening, forceful and rapid, her cries rising, “More, please!” each plea met with a deeper drive, his dominance a fire claiming her, her storm magic spiking, winds shrieking, lightning cracking to light her flushed skin.

They lingered at the wall, his rhythm unrelenting, her body trembling under his control, her begging a siren’s call. “Don’t stop, love, I need you!” His growl answering her plea, “You’re mine, Des, every pulse.” Her hips bucked, meeting his thrusts, sweat mingling, their friction a storm of its own, runes flaring to mend a cracked wall panel from their fervor. He slowed, teasing her with deliberate, torturous thrusts, her moans a symphony, “Faster, Killian, please!” His chuckle was dark, “As you wish,” resuming a punishing pace, her storm-gray eyes blazing with surrender and hunger.

He eased her from the wall, lowering her gently back to the desk, their bodies pressed tight, her legs still locked around him, the transition a sensual glide, his lips grazing her throat as he laid her on the runed oak, runes pulsing to heal a splintered edge. His thrusts resumed, a primal cadence, slow then frenzied, her hair a wild tangle spilling over the desk's edge.

"You're my storm," he growled, breath scorching her ear, "mine to claim." Her eyes blazed, pupils wide, pulling him deeper, her body arching with desperate need. Her magic erupted, rain lashing the glass, charts crumpling, a compass rolling off with a clatter, runes mending a window crack and a singed chart from a stray lightning spark.

Her release shattered, a convulsive cry ripping through her, her body clenching around him, storm magic unleashing a thunderbolt that shook the cabin, runes blazing to stabilize the desk. He thrust hard, a forceful drive that sent her spiraling into her second climax, her scream raw, body convulsing in cascading waves, lightning arcing across the cabin.

As she peaked, he pushed deep, a final, powerful surge triggering his release, a primal roar, his body shuddering as he pulsed within her, a prolonged flood of heat melding with the gale's cataclysmic roar, waves smashing the deck, the Jolly Roger quaking, runes glowing fiercely to mend a splintered desk edge, a cracked bookshelf, and the window's fresh fractures, sails' runes holding firm against the storm's wrath.

The seas calmed, the Jolly Roger settling into a soft roll, its groans fading to whispers. Her eyes softened, tracing his face, her lips brushing his in a tender kiss, tasting rain and triumph, her sigh easing the storm, winds dying to a breeze, clouds parting to reveal stars.

He collapsed beside her on the desk, chest heaving, pulling her close, his hand cradling her neck, fingers threading her damp hair, hook resting across her hip, warmed by her touch. Her thigh draped over his, fingers tracing his scars.

The cabin hushed, their ragged breaths mingling with the ship's creak, the air warm with oak and her ozone-laced essence. Stars glinting off the cove's tranquil waters.

His strength surged back. His blue eyes gleamed, roguish. He scooped her off the desk, runes mending a nick from a fallen quill. Her laughter a bright spark as he carried her to the bed. He laid her on the crimson linens, sliding beside her, their bodies curling together, her head nestling against his chest, his arm wrapping her tight, hook resting gently on her back. Her fingers teasingly traced his jaw. He kissed her brow, lips lingering.

The ship rocking softly under starlight, a cradle for their victory.

Crew Quarters
(Simultaneously with the cabin scene)

The quarters thrummed with the savory steam of mutton stew and the sharp bite of pine tar. The Jolly Roger lurched as Desylva's storm raged, waves hammering the hull.

One-Eyed Jack sprawled on a crate, his leg thumping the floor, his eye glinting with a mix of awe and unease. "Her magic's got the Isle's mist whipped to madness!" he growled, voice rough as gravel, a smirk tugging his scarred lip as the ship pitched.

Black Tom's scarred arms bulged, bracing against a beam, his harpoon clattering against the oak with each roll, his silent stare tracking the lantern's wild swing, its chain clinking as lightning cracked beyond the deck, static prickling the air.

Smee fumbled a tin mug, stew sloshing onto his coat, his round face paling as he squeaked, "Blimey, Cap'n's got her thunder roarin'! We'll be swamped if they don't ease off!"

Billy, torch flickering in the chaos, grinned, his freckled face lit with youthful fire, "Cap'n's ridin' her storm, mates, and it's shakin' the sea!" He belted a shanty, voice cutting through the din.

Billy
Oh, the Veil did heal, but the storm's alive,
Her winds do dance where the shadows thrive,
With rain like tears and a sea to drive,
We'll hold the line 'til the calm arrives!

Her lightning cracks where their passion burns,
His hook's a spark, her tide it churns,
Thrusts shake the oak, the ship does turns,
Their fire's the gale that the night's heart earns!

The second verse drew a cackle from One-Eyed Jack, his fist pounding the crate, "Aye, Billy, sing their beddin' true! They're rattlin' the hull!" Black Tom's nod was curt, a rare glint in his dark eyes, while Smee clutched his mug, muttering, "Too much thunder for me poor nerves!"

The quarters trembled, runes on the bunks glowing silver to mend a cracked beam, the air thick with ozone and the faint, sweet echo of the Veil's healing glow, the crew's voices a raw chorus against the storm's fury.

(After the cabin scene)

The Jolly Roger eased into a gentle roll, the quarters dim with the musky scent of damp wool and cooling stew, the storm's echoes fading to a soft patter of rain on the deck above. One-Eyed Jack kicked back on his crate, his eye winking shut, a grizzled grin spreading. "They've tamed the night, lads. Storm's done, and we've earned our kip!"

Black Tom slumped in his bunk, scarred arms draping over his harpoon, its steel tip glinting in the lantern's steady glow, his silence a balm after the Veil's trials. Smee sprawled in his hammock, rubbing his stew-stained coat, his voice a weary chuckle, "Cap'n and his lass patched the dark, alright. Reckon they've left the ship hummin' with their fire!" Billy, torch extinguished, perched atop a barrel, yawning but bright-eyed, "Aye, storm's hushed, and they've healed more'n scars, I'd wager."

The crew settled, the air still with rain's faint tang, their breaths syncing with the soothing lap of waves against the hull, the Isle's perils a fading dream.

Billy strummed an imaginary lute, his voice soft but clear, singing a new shanty to seal the night.

Billy
The gale is gone, the sea's at rest,
We've sailed the mist, we've passed the test,
With Veil in hand, our hearts be blessed,
Now sleep's the prize for our quest!

Their love's a blaze that shook the night,
Her storm's embrace, his hook's delight,
The bedrock's quakin', stars alight,
They've healed the dark with passion's might!

One-Eyed Jack's laugh rumbled, "Sing it, lad. They've rocked the ship to glory!" Black Tom's faint smile flickered, Smee snorting, "Blimey, Billy, ye've painted their tumble clear as day!"

The quarters hushed, runes glowing faintly to mend a scuff from a fallen mug. The crew's camaraderie a steady anchor under the starlit sea.

The Quest for the Time Crystal (Day 200)

The Jolly Roger rocked uneasily on a restless sea, her hull rising and falling with the swell as though caught in the breath of some vast, unseen beast. Waves heaved beneath her, their crests foaming white before crashing against

the planks in thunderous bursts that sent spray arcing into the air. The ocean stretched in every direction, a boundless expanse of shifting steel-blue water, its surface rippling under the weight of the storm gathering overhead.

The sky loomed heavy and bruised, storm clouds layered thick as mountains, their bellies churning black and silver. Lightning flickered deep within their folds, jagged veins of light slicing through the darkness in brief, violent flashes that illuminated the horizon in stark silhouettes. Thunder rolled across the heavens, a low, rumbling growl that vibrated through the air and shuddered across the sea.

Wind tore across the deck in wild, spiraling gusts, howling like a living thing as it whipped through the rigging and snapped at the sails. Enchantments shimmered faintly along the canvas, runes glowing in fleeting pulses as they strained to hold the storm at bay. The air carried a sharp tang of ozone, mingling with salt and the faint scent of rain waiting to fall, the atmosphere thick with the electric promise of chaos.

Far from any shore, the ship drifted alone in the storm's vast maw — no islands, no cliffs, no distant lights. Only the roiling sky above and the heaving sea below, locked in a furious dance that swallowed the horizon whole. The world felt suspended, caught between lightning's flash and thunder's roar, as though time itself held its breath before the storm's full fury broke loose.

Quarterdeck

The storm raged around the Jolly Roger, wind tearing at the sails and rain threatening to break through the enchantments shimmering along the canvas. The deck pitched under the weight of the rising swell, ropes snapping taut as the ship fought the gale.

Killian stood at the helm, his black leather coat flapping in the wind, hook gripping the wheel with a sailor's unyielding resolve as he steadied the ship against the rising swell. But his gaze wasn't on the horizon — it was fixed on the storm compass resting on the map plate before him.

The compass was larger than any ordinary navigator's tool, its tarnished metal frame etched with runes that pulsed faintly beneath the storm's fury. Magic sealed it to the plate, anchoring it so firmly that even the wildest seas couldn't shake it loose. Its cracked glass face glowed with green and gold, the needle spinning in wild frantic circles, reacting to forces no mortal eye could see.

Killian's thoughts drifted to the night he'd bartered for it from a cackling witch in a rain-soaked port, its magic promised to guide through tempests to realms where curses held sway. Only now, in the heart of this storm, did he truly grasp the weight of that promise. The compass had guided him through tempests, across cursed waters, and now — here — to the edge of something older than the sea itself.

Main Deck

Smee clung to a rope nearby, shouting over the wind's roar, "Heard a tale 'bout somethin' called the Time Crystal! Older'n the seas themselves! Bends time like a rope. Twistin' it to yer will! … Hidden where storms never settle. Guarded fierce!" One-Eyed Jack braced himself against a cannon, gravel in his voice. "Sounds cursed. Likely is." Black Tom sharpened his harpoon with steady strokes, the rasp matching the storm's pulse. Billy clung to the crow's nest, voice piercing the gale as he shouted down, "Sailors whisper shadows guard it — shadows that don't die!"

Their voices wove a tapestry of dread and wonder, the legend of the Time Crystal rising like a ghost between lightning flashes. Killian's gaze flicked to Desylva, her storm-touched presence a steady fire beside him, her gray eyes glinting like the lightning above. Her hair whipped wild. His heart pulsed with her wildness. Her storm a mirror to the tempest around them.

The legend had crept like a whispered curse in shadowed taverns and bustling docks. An ancient relic from eons past, a faceted gem said to shimmer with every hue of dawn and dusk, its surface refracting light into fleeting glimpses of moments lost or yet to come. Its power to twist time was a double-edged blade, capable of rewinding a fatal strike, stretching a fleeting day into weeks, or trapping an enemy in an endless loop of their own making.

A weapon against curses. A blade against fate. A chance to outpace Rumpelstiltskin's dark schemes that had woven traps they'd barely escaped, and Regina's hexes that had left scars that lingered in flesh and spirit.

Quarterdeck

Killian traced the compass's rim with his hook, mind turning over the possibilities. This relic could be a tool to outpace their relentless foes, could shift the tides of their endless war, could offer a fleeting edge in a game stacked against them.

Main Deck

Smee sloshed rum from a dented bottle, his voice rising with a nervous edge, "Worth a go, Cap'n? Could dodge a fight or two, give us a breather!" One-Eyed Jack grunted, his eye narrowing, "I'd use it to blast 'em twice over, pay 'em back," his grizzled hand patted the cannon. Black Tom paused his sharpening, his dark eyes meeting Killian's in a silent vote. Billy swung down from the nest, breathless, landing with a thud, "Imagine turnin' back a storm, Cap'n, or a blade! Could change it all!"

Quarterdeck

Desylva stepped closer, her leather cloak rustling as her voice cut through the gale. "Time's a weapon. Could save us from more than steel." Her gray eyes locked with his, a challenge and a trust woven into their depths. Killian's grin flashed, sharp and daring, "Aye. Been too long since we chased somethin' mad," his vengeance burned steady, her storm fanned its flames.

He looked at the storm compass again.

The Jolly Roger trembled beneath their feet, alive with their reckless daring, a vessel poised on the edge of the unknown. The storm intensified around them, waves crashing like mountains against the hull, their whitecaps clawing at the deck.

The sky split wide with a jagged bolt of lightning, and the sea beneath it tore open — a rift at waterline, swirling with shadow and light, pulsing like a wound in the world. Waves recoiled from its edges as the storm compass's needle held steady, pointing straight into the breach.

Killian picked up the storm compass from the map plate, the magic seal releasing with a soft pulse of green and gold. He held it aloft, its cracked glass catching lightning in fractured gleams. The crew fell silent as the wind howled, every man's gaze locked on the relic that had guided them into the storm's heart.

Main Deck

Smee's eyes widened, "That's our way through, Cap'n," swaying as the deck pitched beneath him. One-Eyed Jack smirked, grizzled beard twitching, "Better not dump us in oblivion, or I'll blast the thing meself," his tone gruff but edged with thrill. Black Tom tightened his grip on the harpoon, scarred hands steady as stone. Billy gaped from the deck, "Into the storm, aye? Straight through?" his voice a trembling mix of awe and nerves.

Quarterdeck

Killian lowered the compass, its green-gold glow pulsing against his palm. He set it back onto the map plate, the magic seal snapping closed with a soft thrum as the runes re-anchored it in place. The needle held steady, pointing dead ahead — a silent command.

He leaned into the wheel, voice low enough to be swallowed by the storm. "Straight on," he muttered, the words meant for the ship, the helm, and the course alone.

Killian glanced toward the crew — Smee braced on a rope, One-Eyed Jack at his cannon, Billy clinging to the rigging, Black Tom steady at the rail — each man waiting for his order.

Killian's voice cut through the gale. "To the rift, lads!" he glanced at Desylva, her storm magic tingling in the air, "Time to ride the chaos," her grin matched his, fierce and wild, "Let's tear it open," her storm surged, a gust swirling.

The Jolly Roger surged forward, cutting straight into the glowing seam as the storm howled behind her.

Enter Portal

The ship lurched as Killian spun the wheel, the storm compass's green-gold glow reflecting off rain-slick planks. The ship surged forward, cutting through the heaving waves as the storm roared around her. Wind tore at the sails, enchantments shimmering to hold the canvas firm as the gale clawed at every rope and spar.

Smee clung to a line, boots skidding across the soaked deck. "Blimey—straight into the breach!"
One-Eyed Jack braced against his cannon, jaw set. "Hold fast, ye fools!" Black Tom planted his feet wide, harpoon angled downward, steady as stone. Billy whooped from the rigging, torch sputtering in the rain. "Ride it, lads!"

The sea recoiled from the rift ahead, waves pulling back in trembling arcs as though the ocean itself feared the threshold. The portal glowed at waterline — a vertical tear of shadow and light, its edges crackling with green-gold magic that mirrored the storm compass's pulse.

Killian's hook tightened on the wheel. "All hands — forward!" Desylva's storm surged beside him, cloak whipping wild. "Push her through!"

The bow crossed the threshold — and time rippled.

Moments bent like molten glass, colors smearing into streaks of dawn and dusk that folded over themselves as the hull slipped into the breach. The deck shuddered as layers of time slid across the planks. Past, present, and future flickering in fractured glimpses along the rails.

A chorus of ticking rose, handless clocks overlapping in a maddening hum. The storm's roar thinned, stretched, then snapped back in distorted echoes as the rift pulled them deeper.

The sea did not vanish — it froze.

Waves hung suspended mid-crash, droplets paused in the air like scattered jewels as the Jolly Roger slipped between seconds. Billy's torchlight fractured into mirrored copies, each flame flickering at a different speed. Smee's shout stretched long, then compressed into a sharp bark. One-Eyed Jack's curses folded over themselves like echoes caught in a loop. Black Tom's silhouette blurred, harpoon gleaming in flashes of different moments.

The world collapsed inward, folding into a tunnel of shifting centuries as the ship plunged deeper. The storm outside became a distant memory, replaced by a rushing blur of fractured time.

The Jolly Roger vanished into the portal, the Time Crystal's realm looming ahead — its danger a pulse, its magic a lure. The rift sealing behind them, with a sharp, metallic click — like a clock locking into place.

Exit Portal

The Jolly Roger burst from the portal with a shudder that rattled her timbers, the hull groaning as she tore free of the rift's grip. A shockwave of warped air rippled across her planks, the lingering echo of fractured seconds snapping back into place. For a heartbeat, the world hung still — then reality reasserted itself with a sharp, metallic click, like a clock locking into a new hour.

She settled onto solid ground. Her keel perched precariously on a jagged plateau of shifting stone, the surface rising and falling in slow, unsettling pulses as though breathing beneath her weight. The plateau stretched outward in fractured slabs, each one aging to dust before rebuilding into gleaming spikes, the cycle repeating in an endless loop of decay and rebirth.

The realm around her defied every law of sea and sky. Time warping around them.

Islands hovered in a void of swirling gray mist, drifting like broken thoughts suspended in time. Their edges crumbled into drifting grains, then snapped back into form with crystalline precision. Waves hung frozen in mid-air far below,

suspended in impossible arcs — some paused mid-crash, others reversing in slow, dizzying sweeps that twisted the senses.

The air thrummed with a metallic tang, sharp against the tongue, buzzing like static before a lightning strike. Faint ticks of handless clocks overlapped in a maddening hum, pulsing through the void like a heartbeat gone astray. Light itself seemed fractured — beams bending, splitting, and rejoining in shimmering ribbons that cast shifting shadows across the plateau.

Above, the sky was a storm of centuries. Clouds churned in spirals of silver and dusk-gold, their edges flickering between ages — newborn wisps one moment, ancient thunderheads the next. Lightning flashed in slow motion, crawling across the sky like glowing serpents, then snapping forward in sudden bursts that illuminated the realm in stark, impossible brilliance.

The Jolly Roger stood alone in the chaos, her sails stirring in a sourceless wind, her enchanted oak glowing faintly as the realm's time-magic brushed against her hull. The storm-forged runes along her timbers pulsed in quiet recognition, steadying her against the plateau's shifting breath.

The Time Crystal's realm surrounded her — a place where seconds broke, minutes twisted, and hours bled into one another like spilled ink

Main Deck

Killian strode from the helm to the main deck, boots striking the enchanted oak planks, cutting through the eerie silence, as the Jolly Roger groaned against the shifting plateau. The realm's fractured light bent across her hull, casting warped shadows that stretched and snapped like living things. Desylva followed, her storm-touched presence a steady fire amid the chaos.

He addressed the crew, "Steady, lads. Hold her together!" His black leather coat flared in a sourceless wind, his piercing blue eyes slicing through the haze.

Smee clutched the rail, swaying as the plateau pulsed beneath the ship. "We're on land, Cap'n—least I think it's land!" His face paled as he stared into the gray void, watching islands crumble and reform in looping pulses. "Time's wrong here. Feels like it's slippin' under me boots." One-Eyed Jack dropped from his cannon perch with a grunt, grizzled hand resting on his cutlass hilt. "Somethin's off," he muttered, eye darting warily across the fractured horizon. "Twists me bones. Like the realm's tryin' to remember itself."

Black Tom stepped forward, silent as ever, scarred hands gripping his harpoon. The weapon gleamed in the strange light, reflecting flickers of past and future along its edge. He scanned the shifting terrain with a hunter's stillness, jaw set. Billy slid down from the rigging, torch flickering in jittery pulses. The flame stretched long, then snapped short, dancing to a rhythm not its own.

Desylva stepped beside Killian, her gray eyes sharp as storm-forged steel as she scanned the fractured horizon. "This place lives," she murmured, her cursed mark pulsing vivid blue beneath her sleeve, casting faint light across her drawn dagger. "Time's awake here." Killian's hook flashed as he grinned, a roguish glint cutting through the chaos. "Then we'll tame it, lass."

The ship tilted — not dangerously, but with a slow, unsettling pulse, as though the ground beneath her breathed. Killian's gaze swept the surroundings. "She's perched, but not steady." Desylva stepped to the port rail, her gray eyes narrowing at the plateau's shifting surface. Her cursed mark pulsed vivid blue, reacting to the realm's temporal hum. "Time's tugging at her. She won't hold long."

She raised her hand. Stormlight gathered around her fingers, swirling with the realm's metallic haze. She drew the magic downward, weaving it into a lattice of time-forged roots — strands of storm-charged vine and glowing stone that slithered beneath the hull. The plateau resisted, crumbling to dust, then reforming around the roots in jagged pulses.

Desylva pressed her palm forward, runes flaring along her arm. The roots wrapped the hull to stabilize the ship against the plateau's shifting surface. They pulsed with blue-silver light, syncing with the ship's enchanted oak. A second layer of runes shimmered across the cradle — temporal wards designed to resist the realm's distortions. The Jolly Roger steadied, her timbers relaxing with a low, relieved groan.

Killian nodded. "Good. Now we move."

Killian cast one more look across the deck, ensuring the cradle held firm. The crew steadied themselves, boots planted against the now-solid planks as the plateau's pulse eased beneath them. The fractured horizon loomed ahead, shifting in slow, impossible rhythms. Killian exhaled once, a captain's measure of the moment — the ship was secure. He turned to Desylva, his voice low. "We're grounded, love. Conjure a way down?"

Desylva nodded, her storm magic crackling. She lifted her hand again. Storm magic spiraled from her fingers, merging with the realm's ticking hum. The air split in shimmering arcs as she forged a staircase of temporal stone and storm-woven metal, spiraling from the main deck to the island's fractured ground below. Each step forming from fractured seconds — appearing, aging, crumbling, then stabilizing under her command. Runes etched themselves along the treads, glowing faintly blue. The railing formed from condensed mist and time-glass, shimmering with shifting reflections of past and future. The staircase anchored itself to the plateau with a deep, resonant thrum.

Killian stepped to its edge, surveying the crew. "Step lively, lads. Before the ground changes its mind."

Smee swallowed hard as he gripped his rum bottle. One-Eyed Jack grunted approval, pistol at his hip, cutlass ready in his fist — eager for whatever cursed thing came next. Billy's torch jittered in fractured light. Black Tom's harpoon gleamed steady.

The descent awaited.

Staircase

The first step hummed beneath Killian's boot — a low, resonant vibration that traveled up through the sole and into the bone, as though the stair itself acknowledged his presence. The temporal stone shifted in subtle pulses, stabilizing only when Desylva's stormlight brushed across its runes. The air around them shimmered with fractured reflections, each one showing a slightly different angle of their descent.

Killian tested the next step.

It formed a heartbeat late — appearing, aging, cracking, then knitting itself whole again before his weight settled. The staircase stretched downward in a spiraling arc, suspended over the void like a spine of living time. Mist curled around the railing, drifting in slow, deliberate coils that reversed direction every few seconds.

Desylva followed close behind, her storm humming low, the blue-silver glow of her cursed mark syncing with the runes along the treads. Each pulse of her magic steadied the staircase, anchoring it against the realm's shifting breath. The steps responded to her presence, brightening in soft arcs of light that guided their descent.

The crew moved carefully. Smee gripped the railing, eyes darting as the mist flickered between past and future. One-Eyed Jack descended with a wary grunt, boots landing on steps that aged beneath him before snapping back into polished stone. Billy's torchlight stretched long, then shrank short, dancing in jittery pulses that matched the realm's ticking hum. Black Tom's harpoon gleamed with fractured reflections, each shimmer showing a different moment of its existence.

The void around them churned in slow, impossible rhythms.

Islands drifted past — some crumbling into dust mid-air, others reforming in crystalline bursts. Frozen waves hung suspended far below, locked in arcs that defied gravity. Lightning crawled across the sky in slow motion, branching like glowing roots before snapping forward in sudden bursts that illuminated the realm in stark brilliance.

The staircase itself shifted as they descended.

Sections rotated gently, aligning with new paths that hadn't existed moments before. Runes along the railing flickered, adjusting to the realm's temporal currents. The mist thickened, then thinned, revealing glimpses of distant structures — towers that aged and rebuilt in looping cycles, bridges that formed from fractured seconds, then dissolved into drifting grains.

Killian kept his hook steady on the railing, eyes sharp as he watched the shifting terrain. The descent was not steep, but it was unpredictable — the staircase adjusting itself to the realm's pulse, choosing the safest path through the chaos.

Desylva's stormlight flared once, stabilizing a section of steps that flickered dangerously. The runes responded, locking into place with a deep, resonant thrum that echoed through the void.

Behind them, the Jolly Roger remained perched in her cradle, storm-woven roots pulsing steadily beneath her hull. The ship's enchanted oak glowed faintly, resisting the realm's distortions as she watched her crew descend into the fractured world below.

The staircase curved onward, spiraling deeper into the realm's shifting heart.

They continued downward — toward whatever waited at the base.

Ground

The final treads flickered beneath their boots — appearing, aging, cracking, then knitting themselves whole again as the staircase curved into its last arc. Mist curled low across the fractured plain, drifting in coils that reversed direction every few seconds. Lightning crawled across the sky in slow motion, illuminating the jagged terrain in stark, impossible brilliance.

Killian stepped off first. His boots crunched onto sand that aged to dust and reformed beneath him, the ground pulsing like a living thing. The Jolly Roger loomed above on the plateau, her storm-woven cradle glowing faintly as she watched her crew descend into the realm's shifting heart.

Desylva landed beside him, her cloak rustling, her mark pulsing vivid blue. The storm hummed low around her, syncing with the realm's temporal breath.

Smee stumbled off next, muttering, "Solid ground, thank the seas!" His rum bottle clinked as the sand beneath him aged, crumbled, then rebuilt. One-Eyed Jack stomped down. "'Bout time!" His eye darted warily across the fractured horizon. Billy leapt off, torch flaring, eyes wide with awe. "Time's bendin' 'round us, Cap'n!" Black Tom descended last, silent, harpoon gleaming as he stepped onto the shifting sand.

Killian and Desylva took the lead, their strides bold against the realm's chaos. The crew fell in behind, boots crunching on ground that aged and rebuilt with every step.

The path twisted like a living thing. Cliffs rose and collapsed as if breathing, stone crumbling to dust in seconds only to rebuild into towering slabs. Vines snaked along the ground, sprouting vivid red blooms that withered to ash instantly, their decay tainting the air with a bitter edge.

Killian hacked through a curtain of vines with his cutlass, the blade a silver blur, sparks flying as it struck reforming stone. "Move sharp, don't dawdle!" His voice pierced the relentless hum, his coat brushing Desylva's arm. She flanked him, storm magic crackling, her mark glowing brighter. "It's watching us." Her dagger gleamed, her dark hair whipping across her fierce resolve.

Smee tripped over a shrinking root, his rum bottle clattering. "Cursed ground, I swear it!" His hat snagged as he scrambled upright. One-Eyed Jack growled, "Eyes up, ye fool!" His cutlass slashed a vine in half. Black Tom moved like a shadow, harpoon poised. Billy's torch cast jittery light, his voice sharp, "Somethin's closin' in!"

One-Eyed Jack shifted his stance, sliding the cutlass back to his hip and drawing his pistol in one smooth, practiced motion — a gravel-rough grin cutting across his face as danger thickened in the mist.

The crew tightened formation instinctively, boots grinding against the aging ground as the mist thickened and the air sharpened.

A chrono wraith erupted from the mist. Its skeletal form woven of bone and centuries, limbs shimmering across ages, clock-face eyes ticking backward in a hypnotic glare. Rumpelstiltskin's haste curse struck.

Killian's limbs slowed, each step a slog through tar. "Not yet, ye fiend!" His hook dragged through heavy air, slashing in a desperate arc that sparked against the wraith's ribs. Desylva's thunder cracked — a deafening jolt shattering the curse, the air splitting with ozone. She lunged, dagger slicing the wraith's misty ribs, her mark flaring blue.

The creature wailed — a grinding screech of gears clawing their ears.

Smee yelped, "Cap'n!" as Killian hauled him up.

One-Eyed Jack's pistol barked. "Blast ye!" The shot exploded through the wraith's skull, mist scattering.

Black Tom's harpoon speared its core. Desylva's lightning surged, collapsing the creature into dust. Black Tom retrieved the harpoon with a swift tug, steel dripping mist.

"Keep on. The Crystal's near!" Killian's grin flared, wild and defiant. He whispered to Desylva, "Well struck, love."

Time shuddered. Cliffs groaned.

Billy shouted, "She's shiftin' again!"

A plateau unfurled, its surface a paradox. Grass sprouting lush, then shrinking to barren dust in a loop. Jagged rocks pulsed, aging and crumbling with the realm's breath.

Killian steadied himself. "Close now." His cutlass gleamed as he advanced. "I feel it!" Desylva's storm hummed stronger. "There, look!" Her mark illuminated a shimmer ahead.

Smee panted, "Too fast. Me legs can't keep up!" One-Eyed Jack snapped, "Quit whinin'!"

A time serpent uncoiled from the mist — scales glinting like hours on a clock, fangs sharp as frozen moments. Regina's rewind curse hit.

Desylva froze mid-step, looping endlessly, visions of a storm flickering in her mind. Her dagger slipped, her mark dimming. Killian slashed the serpent's scales — sparks bursting as his cutlass ricocheted. Desylva's gusts roared back, shattering the curse. She plunged her dagger into the beast's flank.

The serpent hissed, fangs grazing her cloak, tearing fabric.

Smee ducked. "It's twistin' again!" One-Eyed Jack's pistol thundered, grazing its jaw. Black Tom's harpoon flew, piercing its eye.

Desylva's thunder crashed — the beast sank into dust. Black Tom retrieved the harpoon with a grunt. "Move. Now!" Desylva pointed ahead.

A spire loomed, piercing the void like a fractured sentinel. Its stone pulsing with cracks, shimmering rivers of time flowing across its surface. Cracks glowed sickly green, sealing and splitting. The air warped with heat-like haze, blurring sight. The Time Crystal's light refracting every hue of dawn and dusk. Time tightened.

At its peak, the Time Crystal glowed — a faceted gem casting arcs of dawn-and-dusk light across the plateau, its shadows twisting.

Killian scaled the uneven face, coat snagging on crumbling outcrops, cutlass clinking stone. “Bloody beauty, ain’t she?” His blue eyes blazed with hunger. Desylva climbed beside him, cloak catching on a spur, dagger steady, mark pulsing brighter. “Careful. Somethin’s guardin’ it.”

Stone dust coated their hands like ash.

A shadow clock whirred into being — a grotesque tangle of spinning gears, and ticking hands, eyes glowing with relentless rhythm. Rumpelstiltskin’s freeze curse struck.

Killian locked mid-step, hook inches from the Crystal. His voice strained through gritted teeth. “Blast ye. Move!” Desylva’s lightning split the air, shattering the curse. Sparks rained down the spire. She slashed forward, dagger carving through gears. “Go, now!”

The clock burst, gears clattering down the stone.

Smee shouted below, “Quick, Cap’n!” One-Eyed Jack’s pistol roared. “Blast it!” Black Tom stood steady, harpoon ready. Desylva’s gusts cleared the dust. “Grab it!”

Killian seized the Crystal. It burned cold, then hot. Time steadied. Islands halted their shift. Desylva’s gray eyes met Killian’s. Their hands brushed — a spark flaring as the Crystal pulsed.

They descended the spire, boots finding purchase on crumbling stone. Killian steadied Desylva with his hook. Her mark dimmed slightly. Their triumph glowed as they reached the plateau.

A tempest wraith roared from the plateau’s edge — wind and shadow swirling into a towering mass, limbs lashing like storm-whipped ropes, its howl a cacophony of shattered seconds. Sand stung their skin as Regina’s loop curse struck.

Desylva stumbled, her swing repeating in an echo, visions of the climb flickering. Killian lunged, hook tearing through the wraith’s tendrils, cutlass slashing in a furious arc, sparks illuminating the haze. Her thunder boomed, breaking the curse. She cut forward, dagger slicing the wraith’s core, wind tearing at their coats.

Smee pressed low. “Out. Get us out!” One-Eyed Jack roared, “Blast it to hell!” His pistol smoked, shots peppering the wraith’s form. Black Tom’s harpoon pierced through, retrieved with a swift pull, mist trailing. Desylva’s lightning surged. The wraith dissolved into mist.

Killian held the Crystal high, eyes locked with Desylva’s. Her storm shielded them, gusts swirling tight, their hands lingering, heat cutting through the chill.

The crew regrouped, breaths ragged in the now-still air.

Killian led them back toward the staircase, the Crystal clutched tight, its weight a promise. Desylva matched his stride, storm calming, mark pulsing faintly, her dagger sheathed.

Smee wheezed. One-Eyed Jack grinned, pistol holstered. Black Tom slung his harpoon over his shoulder, its steel gleaming. Billy’s torch flickered, his eyes wide with awe.

They walked toward the staircase. The realm’s breath pulsed behind them — gathering strength.

Staircase

The staircase flickered at the edge of the fractured plain, a lifeline to the ship. Its time-forged treads pulsing in slow, steady rhythms as though sensing their return. Mist curled around its base, drifting in coils that reversed direction every few seconds. Lightning crawled across the sky in slow motion, illuminating the shifting terrain in stark flashes.

Killian slowed as they approached, the Time Crystal humming in his grip. “Back to the steps, lads,” he said, voice steady despite the realm’s pulse. “Keep sharp.” Desylva’s stormlight flared softly, her mark pulsing faint blue. “The realm’s watching. It knows we have it.”

Smee wheezed, clutching his rum bottle. “Aye, well, it can watch from afar. I’m done with cursed ground.” One-Eyed Jack snorted. “Ground’s done with you too, ye fool.” Billy’s torch jittered in fractured light. “Cap’n… the steps look different.”

They did. The staircase had shifted — its lower treads rotated slightly, aligning with a new angle that hadn’t existed before. Runes along the railing flickered, adjusting to the realm’s temporal currents. The mist thickened, then thinned, revealing glimpses of distant structures dissolving into dust.

Killian tested the first step. It formed a heartbeat late — appearing, aging, cracking, then knitting itself whole again beneath his boot. “She’ll take our weight,” he muttered, watching the tread stabilize. Desylva stepped beside him, storm humming low. “Aye. The realm wants us gone.”

Black Tom planted his harpoon against the railing, silent as ever. One-Eyed Jack glanced at him, then at the flickering steps. “Up we go, then.”

They ascended.

The first few steps pulsed beneath their boots, stabilizing only when Desylva’s stormlight brushed across the runes. Mist curled around the railing, drifting in slow coils that reversed direction every few seconds. The air thickened with metallic static, humming in pulses that rattled the staircase.

Smee gripped the railing tight. “Feels like climbin’ through a clock’s guts.” One-Eyed Jack grunted. “Least these guts ain’t tryin’ to eat us. Yet.” Billy’s torchlight stretched long, then snapped short, casting jittery shadows across the steps. “Cap’n… somethin’s movin’ in the mist.”

Killian didn’t slow. “Let it move. We’re movin’ faster.”

Desylva’s stormlight flared, stabilizing a section of steps that flickered dangerously. The runes responded, locking into place with a deep, resonant thrum.

The mist surged upward. Not into creatures — but into echoes.

Shadows of the crew flickered along the staircase, each one a fractured reflection of a different moment. Some moved ahead of them, climbing faster. Others lagged behind, repeating steps they’d already taken. One shadow-Killian turned, hook raised, eyes hollow.

Billy yelped. “Cap’n—your shadow’s lookin’ at me!” Killian didn’t break stride. “Ignore it. Realm’s tryin’ to confuse us.” Desylva’s storm flared, lightning spiraling outward in a tight arc. The echoes dissolved, mist scattering in jittery pulses.

“Stay close,” she said. “It’s thinning.”

The mist receded, revealing the staircase stretching upward toward the plateau where the Jolly Roger waited — her storm-woven cradle glowing faintly, resisting the realm’s distortions.

Smee stumbled as a tread aged beneath him, cracking into dust before reforming. “Blasted steps!” One-Eyed Jack grabbed his collar. “Keep movin’, ye lump!” Black Tom steadied Billy as the torchlight flickered wildly. Billy, voice trembling. “Don’t let the shadows come back.”

Killian glanced back, cutlass angled downward. “They won’t. Realm’s losing its grip.” Desylva’s mark pulsed. “Not losing. Shifting.” Killian smirked. “Then we shift faster.”

The staircase curved upward, aligning with the plateau's edge. The Jolly Roger loomed above — sails still, hull glowing faintly with storm-woven runes. The cradle pulsed in steady rhythms, anchoring her against the realm's breath.

Killian reached the final arc of steps, boots steady on the time-forged stone. He lifted the Crystal slightly, its hum vibrating through the air. Desylva stepped beside him, stormlight dimming as they neared the ship. Her gray eyes narrowed, scanning the plateau.

"We're close," she murmured. "Realm's quieting." Killian nodded. "Good. Let's finish the climb."

They ascended the last stretch.

The Jolly Roger - Deck

The final treads of the temporal staircase pulsed beneath their boots as the crew climbed the last stretch. Mist curled around the railing, drifting in slow coils that reversed direction every few seconds. Lightning crawled across the sky in slow motion, illuminating the plateau in fractured brilliance.

Killian reached the top first. He stepped onto the deck of the Jolly Roger, boots striking the enchanted oak with a solid thud. The ship's storm-woven cradle pulsed beneath her hull, anchoring her against the realm's shifting breath. Desylva followed, her storm humming low, her mark pulsing faint blue as she crossed onto the deck.

Smee stumbled up next, wheezing. "Bless the seas, we're back on wood!" One-Eyed Jack stomped onto the deck. "Aye, and none too soon." Billy scrambled up, torch jittering in fractured light. "Cap'n—deck feels steadier already!" Black Tom ascended last, harpoon gleaming as he stepped aboard, silent as ever.

Killian didn't pause. He strode toward the quarterdeck, coat snapping in the realm's sourceless wind the Crystal pulsing in his hand. His hook brushed the wheel as he passed, the storm-forged runes along the helm glowing faintly in recognition.

Desylva turned back toward the staircase. She raised her hands. Her stormlight flared, runes along her arm pulsing as she raised her hand. The temporal staircase shuddered — steps aging, cracking, then dissolving into drifting grains of fractured seconds. Mist spiraled upward as the railing collapsed into shimmering dust. The last tread flickered once, then vanished entirely.

She headed to the quarterdeck. Her boots struck the planks in steady rhythm, storm humming low around her. She reached Killian's side, cloak brushing his coat as she scanned the fractured horizon.

A deep, resonant hum rose from the void. The air off the port side warped — bending inward, folding like pages of a book caught in a storm. Light fractured into spiraling arcs, colors bending in impossible rhythms. The mist recoiled, drifting away from the forming rift.

A portal tore open. A swirling vortex of dawn-and-dusk light, its edges flickering between centuries. Lightning crawled along its rim in slow motion, then snapped forward in sudden bursts. It pulsed with temporal energy, casting shimmering reflections across the deck.

Desylva's mark flared. Killian gave her a look — sharp, purposeful, unmistakable. She nodded.

Desylva stepped to the port rail, stormlight gathering around her fingers. The cradle's time-forged roots pulsed beneath the hull, anchoring the ship to the plateau. She raised her hand, runes along her arm blazing bright blue. The roots shuddered. They aged to dust, then dissolved into drifting grains. The temporal wards flickered, then snapped out of existence. The cradle collapsed in spiraling arcs of storm-woven light, leaving the Jolly Roger free upon the plateau.

Killian slipped the Time Crystal into his pocket. The shard hummed against the fabric, vibrating through his coat in steady pulses. His hand lingered a moment, feeling the cold-hot rhythm of fractured seconds.

The ship tilted — not dangerously, but with a slow, unsettling pulse as the plateau shifted beneath her.

Desylva lifted her hand. A gust of storm-charged wind surged beneath the hull, lifting the Jolly Roger just enough to steady her. The enchanted oak glowed faintly, syncing with her storm. The ship settled, timbers relaxing with a low, relieved groan.

The wind died down. The ship held firm. The portal pulsed off the port side, waiting.

Enter Portal

The ship lurched upward, caught in the rising pull of the portal's fractured gravity.

Killian's command rang out across the deck, sharp as a cutlass strike. "Set sail — now!" His hook gripped the wheel, blue eyes locking with Desylva's gray. Their triumph glowed between them, storm and sea entwined. The crew braced instantly — Smee at the ropes, One-Eyed Jack at a cannon, Billy climbing into the rigging, Black Tom steady at the rail.

The mist parted. The Jolly Roger surged forward, hull rising fully from the ground as the plateau sighed beneath her. The ship hovered on Desylva's conjured wind, runes along her planks glowing faint blue.

The portal hung thirty feet above the plateau, suspended in the fractured air off the port side. Not level with the deck — not reachable by sailing forward alone. It pulsed like a suspended storm-eye: dawn-and-dusk light spiraling. lightning crawling in slow motion, edges flickering between centuries, mist recoiling from its temporal pull

Killian angled the wheel toward the swirling vortex, jaw set as the portal's pull bent the sails inward. Desylva stepped beside him, storm humming low. He didn't need words — just a look. Sharp. Purposeful. Unmistakable. Desylva's lips curved in a knowing smirk. "Raising her."

She raised both hands. Stormlight spiraled from her fingers, swirling beneath the hull in a rising gale. The Jolly Roger tilted upward, her bow lifting as the wind gathered strength. Runes along her planks flared bright blue, syncing with Desylva's storm.

The ship climbed. Ten feet. Fifteen. Twenty.

The realm reacted — mist curling inward, lightning snapping forward, the plateau groaning as though protesting their ascent.

Billy shouted from the rigging, "Cap'n — she's holdin' steady!" Smee clung to the ropes. "Steady as she'll ever be in this cursed place!" One-Eyed Jack braced his cannon. "Just get us through the blasted thing!" Black Tom planted his harpoon at the rail, eyes fixed on the swirling vortex.

Killian tightened his grip on the wheel. "Higher, love."

Desylva's storm surged. The ship rose the final ten feet, leveling with the portal's pulsing rim.

Killian angled the wheel, guiding the Jolly Roger toward the swirling maw. The portal's pull caught the sails, bending them inward with shimmering arcs of fractured light. Desylva stepped closer, stormlight wrapping around her like a cloak. "She's aligned." Killian nodded. "Take us in."

She thrust her hands forward. A final gust of storm-charged wind propelled the ship straight toward the vortex. The hull vibrated, timbers humming as the portal's temporal energy wrapped around them.

The crew held fast. Smee gripping ropes. One-Eyed Jack bracing cannon. Billy clinging to rigging.
Black Tom steady as stone.

Killian and Desylva stood shoulder-to-shoulder at the helm, storm and sea united. The Jolly Roger crossed the threshold.

Light exploded outward — a swirl of dawn and dusk, fractured seconds spiraling, time bending in shimmering arcs.

The ship vanished into the vortex. And the realm behind them fell silent.

Exit portal

The Jolly Roger burst from the portal with a shuddering crack, the sound sharp as splintering glass. Light peeled away from her hull in shimmering ribbons, dissolving into the air as the vortex snapped shut behind her. The ship dropped the last few feet onto open water, landing with a clean, rolling splash that sent ripples across the lake's mirrored surface.

The world around her was transformed.

The sky above was a soft, luminous gold, streaked with pale rose and gentle lavender — the kind of dawn that felt painted rather than born. The storm clouds from the Time Crystal realm faded behind her like a distant memory, their bruised edges swallowed by the warm horizon. Sunlight spilled across the lake in molten sheets, turning the water into a living mirror that reflected every color of the waking sky.

The lake itself was impossibly still.

Waves curled only at the ship's landing, their white crests rolling outward in slow, soothing rhythms. The water shimmered with hints of emerald and silver, as though enchanted currents moved beneath the surface. The relentless ticking hum of timeless islands was gone, replaced by a quiet so deep it felt sacred.

Beyond the lake's edge, the Enchanted Forest rose in towering majesty.

Trees stretched skyward, their trunks wide and ancient, bark shimmering with faint iridescence. Leaves glowed in hues of jade, amber, and soft violet, shifting gently in a breeze that carried the scent of moss, wildflowers, and distant magic. Vines draped from high branches like living curtains, their blossoms opening and closing in slow, dreamlike pulses.

Mist drifted between the trees — not the fractured mist of the Time Crystal realm, but a soft, silver haze that curled lazily around roots and stones. Fireflies glimmered within it, their lights drifting in slow arcs like tiny lanterns guiding unseen paths.

The air hummed with quiet enchantment.

A distant waterfall murmured somewhere beyond the treeline, its voice low and melodic. Birds with shimmering feathers darted through the canopy, their calls echoing like chimes. The forest breathed in long, gentle rhythms, welcoming the ship with a calm that felt ancient and alive.

The Jolly Roger floated steady on the lake's surface, her sails billowing under the clearing sky, her hull glowing faintly as the last traces of temporal magic faded from her timbers.

She had left the fractured realm of time behind. And entered a world woven from living magic.

Main Deck

The crew staggered as the realm's pressure released, boots settling onto solid deck as the Enchanted Forest's dusk air rushed in to fill the void.

Quarterdeck

Killian eased his grip on the helm, the familiar creak of enchanted oak settling beneath his boots. His black leather coat was torn at the shoulder where the time serpent's fangs had grazed him, dried blood streaking his arm in dark contrast to the Time Crystal's faint shimmer in his hand. He had pulled it from his pocket the moment they cleared the portal, letting its faceted surface breathe in the Enchanted Forest's dawn light.

The crystal pulsed with every hue of dawn and dusk — cold-then-hot, slow-then-quick, as though time itself still clung to its edges.

“We’ve tamed time itself,” Killian said, voice ringing across the deck with a captain’s fire and a roguish grin that crinkled his piercing blue eyes. The forest’s golden light caught the grin, sharpening it.

Main Deck

Smee clapped Billy’s back, his shaky hand trembling with relief. “First twist o’ time I’ve lived through. Worth me achin’ bones, but me heart’s still poundin’ like a drum!” He sagged, his hat damp with sweat. One-Eyed Jack leaned against his cannon, grizzled laugh booming. “Next foe I’ll blast twice over — give ’em a taste o’ their own cursed tricks.” Black Tom nodded silently, scarred hands coiling rope with methodical care, his dark eyes scanning the treeline. He’d been in the Enchanted Forest more times than he could count — and he knew its quiet was never just quiet.

The crew’s triumph surged like a shared heartbeat, a hard-earned glow after the realm’s relentless perils.

Quarterdeck

Killian’s gaze found Desylva. Her storm-touched presence stood steady beside him, a flicker of warmth softening the steel in her gray eyes. Her leather cloak dripped onto the planks, her cursed mark pulsing faintly blue. The Enchanted Forest’s breeze brushed her hair, carrying the scent of moss, wildflowers, and old magic — a scent they all knew well. His heart pulsed with her wildness. Her storm a mirror to his sea. The Crystal’s light gleamed between them — a prize wrested from time’s unyielding grip.

The ship drifted across the lake, hull settling into the familiar sway of true waves. The deck tilted gently as ropes creaked and sails snapped taut in a crisp forest breeze, free of the void’s metallic tang. The sun climbed, banishing the last wisps of swirling gray mist that clung to the horizon like a fading nightmare.

Gulls wheeled overhead — not the sea-gulls of distant realms, but the shimmering-feathered birds native to the Enchanted Forest’s lakes. Their cries wove a melody of freedom, the air clearing to a briny freshness that erased the bitter scent of decaying vines and fractured seconds.

Killian rolled the Crystal between his fingers, testing its power.

A ripple spread across the lake — a wave paused mid-curl, held in shimmering stillness, then resumed its dance.

“It bends,” Killian said, grin flashing sharp and daring. “Ours to wield now.”

Main Deck

Smee sprawled across a barrel, rum bottle in hand, face flushed. “No more loops, Cap’n. I’ll take me time straight, thank ye kindly.” Billy swung into the rigging with a nimble leap, voice lifting in a bright tune. His wiry frame glowed with youth, the forest’s dawn catching in his hair. One-Eyed Jack chuckled, eye twinkling with rare mirth. “Sing loud, lad. Forest likes a good tune.” Black Tom’s silence was his nod, harpoon stowed beside him, gaze fixed on the treeline’s shifting glow.

Quarterdeck

Desylva leaned against the port railing near the helm, gray eyes tracing the lake’s boundless expanse. Her mark glowed faintly, her dagger wiped clean on her cloak. She stepped closer to Killian, storm humming low. His grin sharpened as he met her gaze. Their shoulders brushed — a quiet, electric beat — Rumpelstiltskin’s schemes and Regina’s curses lingering in his mind, their enemies outpaced for now. His revenge burned steady, her fire stoking it.

The lake steadied beneath the golden sun, its deep blue expanse shimmering with flecks of light. The horizon stretched boundless, the sails a defiant banner of victory. The deck buzzed with the crew's chatter — exhaustion and pride mingling above the creak of wood and slap of waves.

Rum bottles clinked. Ropes groaned. Gulls cried. Magic hummed.

Killian leaned against the wheel, hook tapping a slow rhythm. He tucked the Crystal back into his coat, its warmth a quiet reassurance. His thoughts settled as the crew's voices rose around him again, the forest's quiet pressing close against the hull.

Main Deck

Smee raised his bottle with a hiccup. "Safe at last — no twistin' me guts!" One-Eyed Jack polished his cannon, grizzled grin crooked. Black Tom stood at the starboard railing, dark eyes on the forest. Billy hummed softly, voice drifting with the breeze.

Quarterdeck

Killian's blue eyes met Desylva's. Her storm stirred. Her gray eyes held his. A spark flared. Their hands lingered near — a fleeting warmth, a bond steady as the ship beneath them. His heart pulsed, her fire a beacon, the Crystal a tool to shape their future.

The Jolly Roger sailed on, a tale glowing in time's bending light, and the Enchanted Forest — familiar, ancient, watchful — welcomed them once more.

Main Deck (A few hours later - Dusk)

Dusk draped the Enchanted Forest lake like a velvet cloak. The sky bled gold into violet, streaks of rose fading into the horizon as the first stars pricked through the deepening blue. The Jolly Roger drifted into a tranquil bay, her hull gliding across sapphire water that mirrored the sky so perfectly it seemed she sailed through two dusks at once. The air carried the day's lingering warmth, a crisp salt tang mingling with the faint, earthy scent of seaweed drifting from the nearby shore, her dark silhouette a silent guardian in the fading glow.

Killian eased the ship toward the anchoring point, the enchanted oak beneath his boots humming softly in the forest's magic. The anchor dropped with a muted splash, sending ripples across the lake's glassy surface. The surrounding trees glowed faintly — leaves shimmering in hues of jade and amber, their light reflecting across the water like scattered lanterns.

The Time Crystal rested safely below, locked within the runed sea chest in the hold. Its pulse was faint now, a quiet promise beneath the deck, its cold-then-hot rhythm softened by the forest's ancient calm.

Killian called from the helm, voice low but steady. "Rest, lads. Take it while it's ours." Relief tempered his usual commanding edge. His black leather coat hung unbuttoned, swaying gently as he leaned against the wheel. The graze on his arm — the serpent's bite — was a dull ache beneath dried blood, but the forest's magic eased the sting. The strain of the void's battles easing from his shoulders,

Smee kindled a fire on the main deck, coaxing sparks into a warm blaze. The flames danced in the dusk, sending embers drifting upward like fleeting fireflies. Rum flowed from battered bottles, their clinks weaving a lively rhythm through the crew's respite.

One-Eyed Jack launched into a tale, grizzled laugh booming across the deck. "That wraith near twisted me guts, curse its bones! I'd take another swing at it — just for the sport!" His eye glinted in the firelight, wild and proud. Black Tom sat cross-legged near the rail, methodically cleaning his harpoon. Each pass of his cloth sent a flash of steel across the dusk, his silence steady and grounding. Billy strummed his lute, fingers plucking a slow, mournful tune that drifted across the bay. "Feels strange, Cap'n," he murmured, voice mellow, as he relaxed against a barrel. "Forest's calm after all that chaos. Like it's holdin' its breath."

Killian stepped down from the helm, boots thudding softly on the planks. The forest's glow brushed his coat, painting the torn leather in warm gold. He watched his crew — their scars softened in the firelight, their laughter rising like a balm after the void's relentless perils.

Desylva leaned against the port rail, her gray eyes tracing the treeline. Her cloak dripped onto the planks, her cursed mark pulsing faint blue in the dusk. She wiped her dagger clean, the blade catching the fire's glow. The forest breeze brushed her hair, carrying the scent of moss and wildflowers — familiar, ancient, alive.

Killian approached her, the fire's warmth brushing his back. Her storm hummed low, steady as the lake beneath them. He met her gaze, a spark flaring between storm and sea. Their shoulders brushed — a quiet beat, warm and electric.

The bay held its serenity. Waves curled gently against the hull. Firelight flickered across enchanted oak. Gulls settled on branches, their shimmering feathers glowing faintly. The forest breathed in slow, ancient rhythms.

The crew's chatter softened into contented murmurs. Rum bottles clinked. Ropes groaned. Billy's tune drifted like a lullaby.

The Jolly Roger rested in the heart of the Enchanted Forest, a ship forged of storm and sea, anchored in a realm of living magic, her crew wrapped in dusk's quiet embrace.

A few hours later

Killian and Desylva sat near the fire's flickering glow, the warmth brushing their faces as dusk deepened into violet night. The flames cast soft gold across Killian's torn coat, the shoulder still marked where the time serpent's fangs had grazed him. His blue eyes softened as they traced the crew — rum warming his chest, easing the ache in his arm and the strain of the void's battles.

Desylva's storm stirred quietly beside him, a steady rhythm in his heart. Her leather cloak, still damp from the void's mist, draped over her shoulders. Her gray eyes caught the firelight with a rare calm, softening their storm-depth. Her cursed mark pulsed gently beneath her sleeve. An empty tankard rested in her hand, her dagger at her waist, its blade wiped clean of wraith dust. She set the tankard down with a soft clink.

"Serpent, wraith, clock… quite the gauntlet," she murmured, voice low over the fire's crackle. "Worth it for that gem?" Killian slid a little closer, their shoulders brushing. His grin warmed, roguish but softened by the forest's quiet. "Aye." His eyes held her's as he lifted a bottle, offering it. "Another?" She took it, fingers brushing his. "Just a little," she said, tone dry, a faint smile tugging her lips. "Forest's calm feels… earned." Their shoulders pressed gently together, her storm-touched presence a grounding current drawing him closer. Killian nodded, voice quiet. "We're ahead of our foes now. Time's on our side." Her gray eyes held his, steady and warm. "For the moment."

They sat for a few minutes more, savoring the fire's glow. The crew's chatter drifted around them — soft laughter, the creak of wood, Billy's lute humming a gentle tune. The Enchanted Forest's breeze brushed the deck, carrying the scent of moss and wildflowers.

Killian leaned toward Desylva, his lips brushing her ear as he murmured something low — a quiet thought meant only for her. A spark flickered in her gray eyes, subtle but bright. They rose together, hands lingering for a heartbeat before falling to their sides. Killian nodded toward the companionway, and Desylva matched his stride, her cloak brushing his coat as they walked.

The crew watched them go, their knowing glances sparking quiet comments about seeking shelter below deck, wary of the storm Killian and Desylva might conjure.

Killian and Desylva descended the companionway, the forest's quiet breathing around them, the ship steady beneath their feet.

Smee flushed from rum, muttered as he tipped his hat, "Cap'n's earned a bit o' quiet. Storm lass too. … Best get below, afore they whip up a squall to drown us all!" One-Eyed Jack barked a low, gravel-rough laugh. "Aye, let 'em rest — though rest ain't what's on their minds. Storm's brewin' mean tonight, fiercer'n that wraith we gutted, and

below's safer'n this cursed deck… 'less you fancy gettin' tossed like Smee's last brain cell." Billy grinned, lute still in hand, his voice teasing. "Forest's peaceful now. But I reckon they'll spark lightning down there, shake the whole ship!" Black Tom, coiling rope nearby, gave a rare smirk.

The crew drifted toward the hatches, their laughter softening as they scattered toward the hatches. The fire's glow dimmed behind them, the bay's serenity deepening into night.

Killian & Desylva's Cabin

Killian nudged the door shut with his shoulder, its runes flaring briefly to mend a faint scratch from his hook, the latch clicking as the world beyond faded to a murmur. The air hung warm and heavy, laced with the scent of polished oak, the musk of sea-damp wool, and the electric tang of her skin, sharp as a storm's prelude.

They kicked off their boots, leather thumping against the tarred floor. His hand slid to her shoulders, fingers deftly unclasping her cloak, letting it slither to the floor in a soft heap, then peeled her tunic away, the cursed mark pulsing blue beneath her sleeve. Her hair spilled free, catching the flicker of a single lantern hung from a beam, its amber glow swaying with the ship's gentle rock. Her storm-gray eyes glinted with timeless need, as she met his gaze, lips curving in a daring challenge.

He pressed her against the door, his body a warm anchor. His hook rested at her hip, its cool curve a tender contrast to the heat of his hand caressing her cheek, fingers tracing her jaw with reverent hunger. His kiss was slow, deep, a claim tasting of salt and rum, his tongue teasing hers with measured fire, drawing a throaty sigh from her. His fingers tangled in her damp hair, tugging gently, while her arms looped around his neck, pulling him closer. The seas stirred outside, waves tapping the hull with a rising rhythm, her magic waking with a hum echoing the Time Crystal's tick, winding their moments tight.

She tugged his coat free, buttons clattering, then stripped his shirt with a deft pull, her smirk a mischievous promise as her hands roamed his chest, fingers fondling the hard planes of muscle, lingering on jagged scars. Her touch sparked a slow burn beneath his skin as she murmured, "You're a map I'll never tire of reading."

Killian's hand caressed her waist, fingers grazing her ribs before fondling one breast, his thumb brushing its peak until it hardened, eliciting a soft gasp. His hook gently cupped the other, its cool curve teasing the nipple to a taut point with a delicate press. She unbuckled his belt, pants pooling at his ankles, her fingers grazing his collarbone, then sliding lower, teasing his arousal with a wicked grin. He stepped out of the fabric, his own hands unfastening her pants, sliding them down her thighs, caressing the smooth skin as they fell.

The cabin's air thickened, tension coiling as the ship tilted. A wave nudged the hull, the stern window's enchanted glass catching starlight, its runes mending a faint crack from the storm's pressure. Charts rustled on the desk, a quill trembling. He lifted her, his grip firm on her waist, carrying her to the bed, its runes glowing to heal a scratch from his hook as he braced it against the wall, wood creaking under his weight. He eased her onto the bed, the coarse pelts yielding with a muted creak. His lips trailed her throat, hot and deliberate, stubble grazing her pulse, then wandered to her breasts, kissing and fondling, drawing sharp gasps. Her hair tangled in the linens, strands clinging to her damp brow, her storm magic surging.

Outside, the wind keened, waves slamming the bow with a rising thud. Her cursed mark flared vivid blue. He poised above her and entered her with a slow, deliberate thrust, his length filling her with a stretch that made her breath catch, her walls clenching around him in a warm, pulsing embrace. Her legs tightened around his waist, thighs trembling, as he began with short, shallow thrusts, teasing her with languid control, each movement a deliberate spark that stoked her need.

She arched, her storm-gray eyes flashing, "Killian, stop teasing. Faster, harder!" Her voice was a desperate plea, husky with want. He grinned, blue eyes glinting, and quickened his pace, thrusts deepening, each one a firm press that rocked her against the bed, the frame's runes healing a gouge from its creaking strain.

Her hands caressed his back, nails raking lightly, then gripped his shoulders, fondling the taut muscle as she pulled him closer. She sent a current through his hook, its metal tingling with her storm magic, a jolt that surged through him, igniting his fire, his groan low and primal. The ship rocked harder, waves crashing with a timeless roar, the window's runes mending another crack as rain streaked its glass. He pinned her wrists above her head, fingers

clamping tight against the pillow, his hook brushing the linens with a faint scrape. Her eyes widened, a storm breaking in their depths as she gasped, hair a wild cascade. She sent another current through his hook, the shock pulsing through his core, his thrusts growing fiercer, their rhythm a long, relentless ride stretching moments into eternity.

Her magic spiraled, the hull groaning under her power, clouds swirling beyond the window, rain falling in a staccato beat. She begged again, “Harder, Killian!” her voice thunderous, charged with power. He obliged, his pace a furious cadence, each thrust a deep, unyielding claim that shook the bed, its runes flaring to mend a splintered edge. Her cries rose, a tempest’s chime threading through the storm’s roar, lightning flaring outside, bathing the cabin in stark light, sweat glistening on her skin. Her legs locked tighter, heels digging into his lower back, pulling him deeper. She sent a final current through his hook, the electric surge pushing him to the edge, his growl echoing her moan.

She kissed him hard, lips crashing, tongue sparking with rain and defiance, one hand tugging his hair, the other fondling his hook, her touch possessive. The ship pitched, waves slamming the hull, the lantern swaying, its chain clinking. Their rhythm built, a crescendo of heat and need, her body trembling beneath him, his muscles taut with effort.

Their release crashed over them, intense and shattering. Her walls pulsed around him, a fierce, rippling climax that drew a raw cry from her throat, her body arching, nails digging into his shoulders as lightning cracked outside, syncing with her peak. He followed, a primal groan tearing free as he spilled into her, his release a hot, pulsing flood that left him shuddering, their bodies locked in a trembling embrace, sweat-slick and breathless, the cabin’s walls glowing with runes mending a stress crack from the ship’s violent rock.

As they eased, the storm faded, the wind softening to a whispering breath, clouds parting to reveal steady stars. Killian held her close, his hand cradling her neck, fingers caressing her damp skin as he drew her against his chest. His hook traced a slow arc across her hip, its cool edge grounding her, her hair clinging to his sweat-damp skin, her storm-gray eyes softening into a quiet glow. The seas calmed to a gentle lap, waves whispering against the hull like time’s steady tick. The ship settled, its groans fading, her magic retreating, the air clearing of its electric charge.

He kissed her brow, lips lingering, warm and steady, murmuring, “You’re my eternity, love, every second’s yours,” his voice rough with tenderness, his hand caressing her cheek, thumb tracing her jaw. She chuckled, her husky tease dancing through the stillness, “You stopped time, reckon I’ll keep you for it.” He grinned, blue eyes glinting, nuzzling her neck, stubble rasping softly. The ship rocked gently, a cradle under the stars, the sea a moment held.

The cabin steadied, its runes doing their job. The door’s oak glowed, healing a final scratch from their entry; the wall’s runes mended a gouge from the hook’s brace; the bed’s frame shimmered, restoring a splintered edge from their fervor; the stern window’s enchanted glass pulsed, sealing a crack from the storm’s pressure, its starlit gleam framing the cove’s tranquil mirror. The lantern’s glow softened, casting a warm haze, charts scattered across the floor, edges curling in the damp; a quill rested against the desk’s leg, ink smearing; the window’s glass gleamed with rain’s last traces.

She nestled closer, her thigh draping over his, her fingers caressing his scars, mapping their shared trials with quiet reverence. His hand slid down her back, fondling the curve of her spine, pulling her tighter. His hook rested beside her, catching the lantern’s light, a testament to their battles. The ship swayed, waves lapping rhythmically. Her magic hummed, a breeze stirring the air, tugging a blanket over the bedframe. Outside, the night sky unfurled, stars winking over the cove.

The Jolly Roger stilled, as if her storm had rewound the night, suspending them in a fragile, perfect moment.

Their breaths synced, a slow cadence matching the sea’s pulse. Her hair fanned across his chest, a dark veil as she pressed a soft kiss to his collarbone, lips a tender spark. She murmured, “You’re my anchor, love, keeping me through every storm.” His hand cupped her face, fingers caressing her temple, murmuring, “You’re the storm that holds me still,” his voice a low rumble laced with awe.

Their love an eternal now, forged in the tempest’s quiet aftermath, the Time Crystal’s tick a heartbeat threading their timeless bond.

Interlude: Morning Duel (Day 210)

Jolly Roger (Dawn)

The sky was still a deep indigo just before dawn, the stars reluctant to surrender. The Jolly Roger drifted on a mirror-calm sea, her sails furled, the only sound the gentle lap of water against her hull and the occasional creak of enchanted oak. The Starward Compass glowed faintly at the helm, keeping the Jolly Roger on her steady course despite the stillness of the dawn sea.

Near the bow, steel sang. The sea mirrored their duel, ripples catching flashes of steel like scattered stars.

Killian circled Desylva with a predator's grin, cutlass flashing in the fading starlight. Desylva answered with a wicked smile, dagger spinning once in her hand, storm-mark already glowing faint blue. The air around her hummed faintly, the promise of lightning coiled beneath her skin.

"You're holding back," he taunted, voice low and rough. "Afraid I'll disarm you again?"

Desylva lunged without warning, blade slicing a tight arc toward his ribs. Killian drove forward with surprising force. He parried hard, steel ringing, then swept his cutlass in a broad countercut that forced her to leap back. She twisted mid-air, landing lightly and immediately driving forward with a rapid series of thrusts—high, low, high again—each one sharper than the last, each one testing his guard.

Killian met every strike, hook flashing as he deflected, then suddenly stepped inside her reach, shoulder-checking her back a step. "Careful, love, you're getting predictable," he growled.

Steel scraped in a harsh grind as Killian shoved her blade aside, the force driving her back a half-step across the dew-slick planks.

Desylva's dagger spun in her hand, storm-gray eyes bright with challenge. A faint blue glow pulsed along her storm-mark, sharpening as her pulse quickened, tiny sparks flickering along her arm with each strike. "Predictable?" She lunged again, blade whistling toward his shoulder. Killian's lips curved. "You always lead with the same flurry." She smiled and shot back, "Only so I can do this."

She dropped low, sweeping his leg. Killian jumped, boots skimming the planks, but she was already rising, dagger slashing upward. He caught her wrist with his hook, metal locking against metal with a sharp clack. He twisted, using his hook's curve to drag her guard off-line. His hook scraped dangerously close to her knuckles, forcing her to snap her hand back before the metal could catch skin and before his cutlass could follow.

For a heartbeat they strained, faces inches apart, breath mingling, the duel's heat rising between them. Killian felt her breath warm against his cheek before she twisted away, blade slicing toward his guard. Desylva's eyes locked with his for a split second, fierce and bright, before she broke the bind. A slight roll of the ship forced them both to adjust mid-strike, boots skidding for a heartbeat before they regained footing.

He countered, forcing her back a step, boots sliding on the dew-slick planks. Their movements were fluid, practiced—half duel, half dance. She twisted, ducking under his swing, and slashed low. Killian leapt back, hook flashing as he caught her wrist for a split second before she spun free.

"You're distracted," she teased, breathing faster, lips curved in a wicked smile. "Thinking about last night again?" He smirked. "Always." He lunged, cutlass singing past her ear. "Hard not to when you keep leaving marks like that on me."

A pulse of blue raced along her storm-mark as Killian pressed her back, the air around her crackling faintly with rising charge.

They danced closer to the bow, blades clashing in rapid rhythm. Desylva feinted left, then struck right. Killian blocked, grinning fiercely, as he caught the blow, steel locking against her dagger in a tight bind. "You fight dirty, storm-lass."

Her eyes sparkled. “Only way worth fighting with someone as old as you.” He flashed a wicked grin. “I may be over two hundred, love. But still devastatingly handsome and remarkably spry, as you know.”

Her dagger scraped along the curve of his hook, sparks flicking off the metal before she yanked hard, twisting free. The sudden motion sent them both stumbling onto the bowsprit. The narrow spar stretched out over the dark water, swaying with the ship’s gentle roll. Their boots balanced on the enchanted wood, the sea glittering far below, blades still flashing in tight, controlled arcs. One misstep could send either of them over the edge, but neither slowed.

Killian pressed forward, forcing her further out. The narrowing space forcing their strikes tighter, sharper, more dangerous. Steel flashed inches from the edge, the ocean yawning below with every step. A hard bind sent sparks scattering into the dawn air, the force of it nearly knocking Killian’s cutlass from his grip.

She gave ground, then suddenly lunged, dagger whipping toward his throat. For a breath, they were so close Killian could see dawn reflected in her storm-gray eyes before she broke away in a sudden strike. The bowsprit swayed beneath them, every shift of the ship turning the spar into a treacherous battlefield. A sharp creak from the enchanted wood warned how little room remained for error.

He leaned back, hook snapping up to catch her blade’s guard with a metallic *snick*. He yanked, pulling her off-balance. “Got you, love.” he said, voice rough with triumph. Desylva’s eyes flashed. “Not yet.”

She wrenched hard, ripping her dagger free. Their blades locked once more, the pressure so fierce Killian felt his grip slipping even before she twisted. His cutlass slipped from his hand just as her dagger tore loose. Steel clattered against the bowsprit, skidding once before dropping into the dark water below.

The sudden imbalance pitched them both forward. For a frozen heartbeat they teetered on the narrow spar—then the world tilted, and they plunged into the cool, dark sea with a sharp splash.

They surfaced laughing, water streaming from their hair and clothes. Killian immediately reached for her, hooking an arm around her waist and pulling her flush against him in the gentle swell. “Now look what you’ve done,” he murmured, voice husky, lips brushing her ear. “Drenched and still grinning about it.” He glanced down into the dark water. “And our weapons are now down there,” he said, breath steady. “Gonna have to dive for them later.”

Desylva wrapped her legs around his hips, her mark glowing brighter beneath the surface. “You hooked my dagger first, pirate.” She kissed him fiercely, salt and laughter on their lips, her fingers threading through his wet hair. “Seems only fair I dragged you down with me.”

He growled low against her mouth, hand sliding down her back. “I’ll allow it. This time,” then added with a roguish grin, “Later I’ll show you what this old man can still do.” She pulled back just enough to smirk, eyes dark with heat. “Promises, promises.”

A sudden gust of wind swirled around them, lifting them both out of the sea in a swirling column of air and spray. They rose smoothly, water shedding from their clothes, until they landed lightly on the quarterdeck near the helm.

Desylva didn’t let go. She pressed him back against the rail, kissing him again, deeper, hungrier, her body flush against his, one hand fisting in his wet shirt. “Better view up here,” she breathed against his lips. Killian’s hand slid down her back, hook resting possessively at her hip. “Much better,” he replied, voice rough. “Though I was enjoying the water.”

Desylva shifted her grip, turning Killian gently so he stood beside her rather than pinned against the rail. His arm stayed around her waist, steady and warm. Her hands slid from his shoulders. Storm-light gathered along her mark, brightening in a soft pulse. He watched, breath still uneven from the duel and the fall, as she lifted her hand toward the sea.

The air stirred—first a whisper, then a rising spiral that swept across the waves. Steel answered her call. A sharp gust spiraled over the waves, dragging steel upward. Killian’s cutlass and her dagger surged upward through the water.

Killian, awe flickering across his face, watched as the weapons spun once, shedding seawater like droplets of light, before settling neatly into her grasp.

“No diving today, pirate,” she smirked as she handed him the cutlass. He pulled her close, pressing a warm kiss to her lips — the kind he always gave her after a fight well-won.

From below deck came the first sounds of stirring—boots on ladders, muffled voices.

Desylva smiled against his mouth, not pulling away. “Looks like our private dawn is over, Captain.” Killian chuckled, stealing one last kiss before the first heads appeared from the crew hatch. “Then we’ll just have to continue this later. Properly. Age has its advantages, love.” She stepped back with a wicked grin, hair still dripping, storm-mark still faintly glowing. “Prove it tonight.” He flashed a roguish grin, “Always.”

Desylva flicked her fingers, storm-mark shimmering. A gentle breeze curled around them, warm and quick, drying clothes and hair in a heartbeat. Killian arched a brow, “Convenient,” he murmured. She smirked. “Wouldn’t want the crew thinking we fell overboard or decided to go for a swim while the ship was moving.” He chucked, “Fair enough, love.”

Killian brushed a hand through his hair, still grinning, and nodded toward the helm. “Helm’s callin’.” Desylva fell into step beside him, boots tapping lightly on the wet planks as they crossed the quarterdeck. Her storm-mark dimmed to a soft glow, the last trace of their duel fading as they moved toward the wheel together.

Ethereal Hollow: Isle of the Unwaking (Day 220)

Island

Killian, Desylva, Billy, Smee, One-Eyed Jack, and Black Tom tore through the cursed island’s choking undergrowth, their boots pounding into sodden earth, kicking up sprays of black mud and decayed leaves that clung to their legs like grasping fingers.

The air reeked of wet decay, salt, and something sweeter, almost cloying, like overripe fruit left to fester. Fog coiled low between gnarled trees, turning every shadow into a threat, while the distant roar of surf against razor rocks pounded like a war drum urging them faster. Vines twisted overhead like serpents, draping like nooses, their thorns glistening wetly in the dim, filtered light of the setting sun, which cast long, ominous shadows across the path.

Billy led, lungs burning, legs pumping furiously, his lute slung across his back bouncing with each stride, his freckled face flushed and streaked with sweat and dirt. “Faster! That beast’s still crashing behind us!” he gasped, voice cracking with panic and exhilaration. Smee lumbered beside him, his stout frame heaving, his ruddy cheeks puffed out, clutching a stolen idol to his chest like a shield. “Blimey, me lungs are on fire! This island wants us dead!”

One-Eyed Jack ran steady with a grim determination, his cutlass drawn, his eye sweeping the foliage for threats, his scarred face set in a permanent snarl. “Shut it and run, ya fat fool, or I’ll leave ya for the vines to choke!” Black Tom brought up the rear, his massive form silent and steady, his harpoon gripped like an extension of his arm, his dark eyes flicking constantly behind them, breath even, stride unhurried yet unstoppable.

Desylva matched Killian step for step, her leather cloak snapping like a storm banner, her storm-gray eyes fierce and focused, her cursed mark pulsing in time with each step, as if sensing the island’s malice. Killian ran at her side, his black coat flapping, his hook flashing as he slashed at low-hanging branches, his blue eyes narrowed in determination.

“Almost to the dock, love! The Roger’s waitin’!” he shouted over the crashing foliage, his voice a commanding growl that cut through the chaos. But as they burst through a wall of vines, one rogue tendril—thick, black-green, thorns razor-sharp and dripping with a vicious glowing sap— lashed out from the mist like a whip. It raked across Killian’s left forearm, tearing through his sleeve with a sharp rip, the scratch minor but burning like fire. He hissed through clenched teeth, slapping his hand over the wound as blood welled bright and fast between his fingers. “Bloody hell!”

The vine recoiled, sap glistening like venom.

Desylva's head snapped toward him, eyes widening in terror. "These are Hypnovine's. Don't stop moving!" The scratch was minor, barely more than a cat's claw, but they both knew. One nick from that cursed plant could send a man into a sleep so deep he never woke. The toxin was patient—delayed—but merciless.

Killian gritted his teeth, shaking off the initial sting and first faint wave of drowsiness that brushed his mind like fog. "Just a scratch, lass. Won't slow me." But his voice carried the smallest tremor, and Desylva's gaze lingered on the wound as they ran, fear coiling tight in her chest. A flicker of unease stirred, the island's curse wasn't done with them yet.

They continued through the undergrowth, branches whipping past as the jungle thinned with agonizing slowness. Killian forced his legs to keep moving, each stride a battle against the creeping heaviness beginning to pool behind his eyes. Desylva stayed just ahead, glancing back every few seconds, her breath sharp with fear and determination. The forest floor sloped downward, the trees finally breaking apart to reveal a smear of open shoreline ahead.

Through the drifting fog, a familiar silhouette emerged—dark, angular, and blessedly real. The Jolly Roger's masts speared upward like salvation itself. "There!" Desylva shouted, her voice cracking with relief. Killian pushed harder, ignoring the growing drag in his limbs. If he could just reach the gangplank before the toxin claimed him, they might still have a chance.

Jolly Roger

A rickety dock jutted from the island's black-rock shore like a broken finger, half-rotted planks sagging under the Jolly Roger's weight. The Jolly Roger loomed, her black hull rising like a shadowed guardian against the twilight sky. Her sails were unfurled, snapping impatiently in the rising wind, enchanted runes woven into the canvas pulsing silver as though the vessel sensed their panic and ached to flee. The runes spiraled along the boom and mast—older, more intricate—pulsing like a heartbeat as if the ship itself sensed danger approaching.

The deck lanterns flickered with amber light, casting warm pools amid the gathering dusk, their glass panes etched with protective wards that shimmered whenever the fog curled too close. The air was heavy with the scent of tar, salt, and the faint, acrid tang of the island's fog, but beneath it lingered the comforting undertone of polished wood and rope oil—familiar, grounding, a stark contrast to the wild, cursed breath of the island behind them. The Jolly Roger looked ready, almost eager, to flee.

Gangplank

The crew thundered up the gangplank, chests heaving, sweat and salt stinging their eyes, the cool sea air a relief against their heated skin. The wooden slats groaned and flexed beneath their boots, the ship rocking hard as they boarded.

Main Deck

Billy collapsed against a barrel with a wheezing laugh, lute still strapped tight to his back. "We made it… blimey that was close!" Smee stumbled aboard next, red-faced and gasping, clutching his side, relic still hugged to his chest like a child. "Me heart's gonna burst! Never run so fast in me life!"

One-Eyed Jack sheathed his cutlass with a metallic snick, his eye scanning for pursuers. "No time to pant. Secure the lines!" Black Tom boarded last, silent, steady, harpoon at the ready, his massive frame barely shifting the deck as he moved to the capstan, dark eyes flicking once to Killian's bloodied sleeve.

Killian didn't stop, he headed straight to the quarterdeck, his strides purposeful despite the burning scratch on his arm, the hypnovine's toxin beginning to whisper at the edges of his vision, a subtle fog he pushed aside. Desylva, sensing the urgency, spun toward the crew, her voice sharp and commanding, cutting through the night like a whip through the wind. "Raise the gangplank and the anchor. Now!"

A ragged chorus of "Aye!" answered her. Billy scrambled to the lines, hauling with frantic strength; Smee threw himself at the capstan, grunting as he turned the bars; One-Eyed Jack and Black Tom worked the ropes in brutal tandem, hemp singing through blocks, gangplank lifting with a protesting groan, anchor chain rattling upward in a

cascade of cold water and rust. The ship shuddered, coming alive beneath them, runes flaring brighter along the hull as if eager to flee the cursed shore.

Desylva turned, her storm-gray eyes narrowing as she noticed Killian face down on the quarterdeck, his body slumped near the wheel, coat splayed out like broken wings, body unnaturally still. “Killian!” The scream tore from her throat. She bolted up the steps, boots pounding wood, heart slamming against her ribs.

The crew looked up from their tasks, faces paling, Billy freezing mid-pull, Smee’s eyes widening in horror, One-Eyed Jack muttering a curse under his breath, Black Tom’s grip tightening on the rope, but they didn’t stop their tasks. Duty held them even as fear clawed their faces. The anchor chain clanked into place, the gangplank secured with a final thud, the ship ready to depart.

Quarterdeck

Desylva dropped to her knees beside Killian, her heart pounding like a storm drum, her hands shaking but urgent as she rolled him over, his weight heavy in her arms. His head lolled, black hair plastered to his forehead with sweat, blue eyes closed, skin pale and clammy. The scratch on his forearm stood out angry red, edges already purpling with the hypnovine’s insidious toxin, the sap glistening faintly like poisoned dew, faint veins of sickly green threading outward like roots seeking blood.

“No—no no no,” she whispered, voice cracking, terror clawing up her throat. She knew the curse too well: one scratch, and sleep could claim him forever, a deep, dreamless, unbreakable slumber from which few awoke. She seized his hook in one hand, the cold metal grounding her, and pressed her other palm over the wound, her touch warm against his chilled skin. Tears burned her eyes. “I love you,” she breathed, the words a vow, a prayer, a plea. “I love you. Stay with me.”

She closed her eyes, drawing on her storm’s power. Her hands began to glow—soft at first, then fierce—electric blue light crackling like bottled lightning. Currents surged through his hook, metal humming as energy flooded his body, hunting the toxin. Healing warmth poured from her other palm, sinking into the scratch, knitting flesh, burning away the green veins in slow, painful pulses.

The ship rocked harder, thunder answering her power, runes blazing along the deck as if the Jolly Roger herself lent strength.

She leaned down, her tears falling onto his cheek, her lips brushing his in a desperate, trembling, yet tender, kiss—true love’s kiss—pouring everything into it. Fear, relief, fury, devotion. A golden shockwave erupted outward, warm and radiant, washing across the deck like dawn breaking, shattering the last threads of the hypnovine’s curse, dispelling any lingering fog, the air shimmering with its power.

Killian’s eyes snapped open. He kissed her back, deep, hungry, alive, hand rising to cradle her face, thumb brushing away her tears. They broke apart, breathless. Happy tears streamed down Desylva’s cheeks, mingling with the sea mist, relief so sharp it hurt. Killian lifted his hand to her face, wiping away a tear with his thumb, his voice rough but soft. “Why the tears, love? I’m right here.”

Desylva smiled through sobs, sliding her hand from the now-healed scratch—smooth skin, no trace of poison—to cup his cheek. “Because you were almost lost to me, you idiot pirate. That vine… it could’ve taken you.” She kissed him again, slow, deep, pouring gratitude into every press of lips, every soft sigh. The ship steadied beneath them, runes glowing warm and gentle, as if sighing in relief with her, and celebrating their bond.

Main Deck

Billy, still gripping the line, watched the golden ripple spread. His freckled face split into a wide, relieved grin. “True love’s kiss saves the day. Again!” he shouted up, voice cracking with joy and exhaustion, carrying a mix of awe and teasing.

The crew laughed, shaky, ragged laughs of men who’d stared death down and walked away. Their earlier tension dissolving into nods and smiles. Smee wiped his eyes with his sleeve, muttering, “Bloody hell… never gets old.”

One-Eyed Jack snorted, shaking his head, his eye bright. Black Tom simply nodded once, deep and certain. The anchor now fully raised, the ship ready to sail.

Quarterdeck

Desylva helped Killian stand, her arm strong around his waist, steadying him as the last whispers of toxin faded from his blood. He leaned into her for a moment, long enough to breathe her in, “Easy there, pirate,” she murmured, her storm-gray eyes searching his for any sign of lingering effects. He straightened, his grin returning, though softer, more vulnerable. “I’m still in one piece, love.”

They moved to the helm together. Killian’s hand, steady now, plotting a course away from the cursed island. He spun the wheel. The sails snapped full with the fresh breeze, the ship surging forward, cutting through waves that still heaved with the storm’s after-breath. Desylva watched him closely, her brow furrowed, her eyes tracing every line of his face, wondering if the hypnovine’s effects were truly banished, the toxin was known for its sneaky persistence.

As the Jolly Roger pulled farther from shore, the island’s fog seemed to recoil, curling back like a living thing denied its prey. The enchanted runes along the hull brightened, responding to the open sea with a soft, eager hum. Waves lapped against the bow in rhythmic strokes, each one carrying them farther from the island’s grasp. A gull cried overhead, an ordinary sound, but after the island’s oppressive silence, it felt like a blessing. The crew settled into their tasks with renewed vigor, the tension easing from their shoulders as the cursed shoreline shrank into the distance.

A short while later

The ship sailed on a calm sea, the earlier chaos fading into a distant smear of fog and shadow behind them. She cut through the water with a steady, reassuring rhythm, her sails catching the soft night breeze as if grateful to be free of the island’s grasp. Lanterns swayed gently along the rigging, their warm glow flickering across the deck and casting long, wavering reflections on the dark water below.

Quarterdeck

Killian glanced at Desylva and caught her staring at him, really staring, as though she were trying to memorize every line of his face before it slipped away. He raised an eyebrow, his blue eyes twinkling with that familiar roguish spark, trying to lighten the heaviness he sensed in her. “What’s that look for, love? You’re lookin’ at me like I’m half-asleep! You think I might vanish?”

But Desylva didn’t smile. Not at first. Her gaze lingered on him with a quiet intensity that made the air between them feel charged, like the moment before lightning strikes. She studied the arm that had been scratched, her eyes narrowing ever so slightly as if she could see beneath the skin, searching for any hint of lingering poison. Her gaze returned to his eyes, as if she were measuring every breath he took. The wind tugged strands of her dark hair across her cheek, but she didn’t brush them away. She was too focused on him.

Main Deck

Around them, the crew moved with a subdued energy, relieved to be free of the island, but still shaken by how close they’d come to losing their captain. Billy tuned his lute absently, plucking soft, wandering notes that drifted across the deck like a nervous heartbeat. Smee kept glancing toward the helm, his brows knitted in worry, pretending to coil a rope he’d already coiled twice.

One-Eyed Jack stood at the rail, staring back at the shrinking silhouette of the cursed island, muttering under his breath as though warding off its memory. Even Black Tom, usually unshakable, kept his harpoon close at hand, his dark eyes flicking toward Killian every so often.

The sea itself seemed to sense the tension. The waves were gentle but restless, rolling beneath the hull with a low, rhythmic murmur. The sky above was clear, but the horizon still held the faintest bruise of storm clouds, remnants of Desylva’s earlier magic. The air tasted of salt and something else, something electric, like the world was holding its breath.

Quarterdeck

Killian shifted his stance, deliberately, teasingly. Desylva finally exhaled, a soft huff of amusement breaking through her worry. But the concern didn't leave her eyes.

She stepped closer, voice low, teasing, but threaded with lingering fear. "You gave me reason to stare," she murmured, her tone light but her eyes still sharp, still searching. Her voice dipped low, threaded with emotion she rarely let slip. "I'm making sure you're not about to keel over on me." Her lips curved into a teasing smile, her hand brushing his arm. "One of those vines scratched you. You could've slipped into a sleep we couldn't wake you from. I need to keep you awake… need to be sure it's completely gone." Her fingers brushed his healed arm, possessive, reverent.

Killian chuckled, but the sound was gentle, not mocking. He reached out, brushing his fingers against hers, grounding her. "I'm not going anywhere."

She held his gaze for a long moment, searching, weighing, as though the truth of his words depended on more than just his voice. The ship rocked softly beneath them, the lanterns swaying, the crew pretending not to watch. The night wrapped around them like a cloak, quiet, expectant, waiting to see whether the hypnovine's curse truly had been banished… or whether it still lingered in the shadows, biding its time.

Killian's grin turned roguish, but there was a flicker, just a flicker, of something tired behind it, a shadow that hadn't been there before the vine struck him. His hook tapped the wheel playfully, the metallic click echoing in the quiet night. "What did you have in mind?"

Desylva laughed, a low, sultry sound that cut through the night air like warm lightning. But even as she laughed, her eyes never left him. She watched the way his fingers curled around the wheel… steady, yes, but slower than usual. She watched the faint tremor in his breath. She watched the way his pupils dilated just a heartbeat too long before focusing on her. Her storm sensed it too, her magic prickled along her skin, whispering warnings she refused to ignore. "I need to examine you.'"

Killian's grin turned slow and wicked, eyes darkening with heat. "Well then, Doctor Storm… what exactly did you have in mind for this examination?"

She leaned over and flicked on the Starward Compass, its runes flaring to life in a soft, guiding glow. Then took his hand in hers, her touch warm and sparking faintly with her storm's energy. The moment their fingers intertwined, she felt it. A subtle drag in his pulse, a heaviness beneath his skin that made her heart clench.

She whispered, soft, sultry, "Something thorough." she replied, her voice laced with promise… and something else. Something protective. Something fierce.

Killian opened his mouth—likely to tease her again—but she squeezed his hand, and the words died on his tongue. Her grip was firm, grounding, almost urgent. He felt the tension in her fingers, the way she held him as though he might slip away if she let go.

She led him toward the companionway, their fingers laced tightly, her steps purposeful. Killian followed, but for the first time since waking from the curse, he felt the faintest wobble in his legs. He masked it with swagger, but Desylva felt it through their joined hands. Her jaw tightened. She didn't say a word. She didn't need to. The storm in her eyes said everything.

Main Deck

The crew, lounging on deck, watched with knowing smirks as the pair headed to the hatch. Billy strummed a soft, mischievous tune on his lute, the notes lilting like a wink. Smee tugged his hat with a chuckle, "Lucky bastard," his round cheeks flushed with relief now that danger had passed. One-Eyed Jack muttered, "Reckon Cap'n won't be sleepin' anytime soon," earning a round of snickers.

But beneath the teasing, there was something else, something quieter.

Billy's fingers faltered on the strings for a moment as he caught the way Desylva held Killian's hand a little too tightly. Smee's chuckle softened into a thoughtful hum as he noticed the faint pallor still clinging to Killian's skin. One-Eyed Jack's eye narrowed, tracking the captain's steps with a soldier's instinct for weakness. Even Black Tom, silent as ever, gave a slow, deliberate nod, not of amusement, but of understanding.

They all knew the hypnovine's reputation. They all knew Killian had brushed too close to death. And they all knew Desylva's storm was the only thing keeping that curse at bay.

The crew exchanged glances—some amused, some relieved, some quietly worried., as Killian and Desylva descended below.

Killian & Desylva's Cabin

Killian and Desylva entered the cabin, the heavy oak door slamming shut behind them with a resonant boom that echoed through the ship, its runes flaring in a violent pulse of sapphire light, sealing them inside their private, storm-lit sanctuary. The room was bathed in the flickering amber glow of a single lantern, its flame leaping wildly behind etched glass as if feeding on their raw, trembling need, shadows writhing across dark wood walls like living confessions. The air was thick, almost suffocating—polished oak, sea salt, sweat, fear, and the sharp ozone crackle of Desylva's barely-leashed storm.

Outside, the weather began to shift, the calm sea turning feral. The low rumble of thunder cracked like breaking bones, lightning slashed the sky in blinding white veins, rain hammered the hull in relentless, punishing sheets, the Jolly Roger rolling and pitching as massive waves slammed against her sides, timbers groaning in time with their ragged breaths, creaking in anticipation, the runes pulsing brighter with every surge of her storm, as if sensing the passion brewing within.

Killian turned to her, his blue eyes glinting with curiosity. his voice cracking, "So, what did you…" She silenced him with a single look, storm-gray eyes blazing, pupils blown wide with raw hunger and something deeper, more fragile. Fear. Fear that she had almost lost him. Fear that she still might. "Strip. Pirate," her voice a commanding whisper that sent a shiver down his spine.

The order hung in the air like a challenge, trembling at the edges. Her lips curving into a seductive smile. His grin widened, roguish and eager, almost feral, then faltered for half a heartbeat. He saw it, the crack in her armor. He obeyed, slow, deliberate, letting her watch every motion as if proving he was still here, still hers.

"Like this, love?" he murmured, kicking off his boots with a slow thud, voice low and teasing even as his hands shook. "Or do you want me to make you wait for it?" Her breath hitched, her lips parting. "Don't tease me, Hook. Not tonight. I need to see you. Need to know every inch of you's alive. Still here. Still mine."

He shrugged off his black coat, letting it fall in a careless heap. His chest rose with his quickening breath as he yanked his shirt over his head, exposing scarred, sweat-slicked muscle that gleamed in the lantern light—every mark a reminder of battles survived, of nights she had stitched him back together. "Still here. Still yours," he rasped, stepping closer, voice dropping to velvet gravel. "Every scar. Every breath. Yours."

He unbuckled his belt, cutlass clanging to the planks, and shoved his pants down. His thick length sprang free, already hard, throbbing, veins standing out, the tip glistening. His hands shook slightly as he stepped out of the fabric, the vulnerability he usually buried beneath swagger laid bare. He stood naked before her, chest heaving, eyes locked on hers, "Your turn, tempest. Show me you're still here too."

Her hands trembled slow, almost reverent, as she unclasped her cloak, letting it pool at her feet like spilled night. Leather tunic unlaced and peeled away with deliberate slowness, revealing flushed skin, nipples peaked and dark, cursed mark blazing like a heartbeat made visible. "Still here," she whispered, voice cracking. Belt unfastened, dagger sheath discarded with a soft, metallic clink, pants sliding down long legs until she stood naked, every curve lit like a weapon forged for war and worship, a vision of strength and allure, her dark hair cascading like a storm cloud. Her eyes never left his, searching, pleading, loving. "Still yours. Still terrified I almost lost you."

They stood inches apart, breathing hard, the air between them electric, the ship rocking violently, thunder rolling so close the window rattled, rain lashing the glass in furious sheets, the weather mirroring her rising storm. Her gaze raked him, slow, seductive, aching, her eyes dark with hunger. She pointed to the chair, with a commanding finger, “Sit.”

He obeyed, dropping into the worn leather chair with a low, broken growl, thighs spread, his arousal jutting upward, thick and flushed. The wood groaned under his weight. The ship rocked harder, thunder rumbling closer. His hands trembled as they rested on the arms, the bravado stripped away, leaving only the man who had almost died in her arms moments ago. “Like this, love?” he asked softly, voice raw. “Tell me what you need. Tell me how to prove I’m all here, and still yours.

She stalked toward him, hips rolling like a predator closing on prey, but her steps faltered once, twice, fear flickering behind the hunger. The lantern light carved every line of her body in gold and shadow, highlighting the faint tremor in her thighs, the way her cursed mark flared erratically, as if her own storm didn’t know whether to rage or weep.

She straddled him without preamble, thighs clamping his hips, her wet heat brushing the head of him, teasing, not yet taking. Her hands shook as they framed his face, thumbs brushing the dried blood at his temple. He gripped her hips, hook cool and unyielding on one side, hand burning hot on the other. She smiled down at him, wicked and commanding. “First test,” she whispered, voice fracturing, “make sure those fingers are awake.”

She caught his right hand and guided it between her thighs, her breath hitching as his touch neared. “Touch me, Killian. Touch me like you thought you’d never touch me again.”

His fingers brushed her swollen folds, slick, hot, dripping. She gasped, not just from pleasure, but from relief. One finger slid inside her easily, then two, stretching her with slow, deliberate pressure, feeling her warmth clench around him, her sigh a soft thunder. He growled, low and primal, “Like this, love?” She pressed down on his fingers, her hips rocking, as she hissed, “Yes… More,” she begged, her voice raw. “I need to feel you.”

He moved his hook to her back, caressing the curve of her spine, the metal cool against her heated skin. He added a third, then a fourth, four thick fingers buried to the knuckle, curling, spreading, pressing against her walls until she gasped. Her head fell forward to rest against his, cursed mark exploding in blinding blue light. Her juices coated his hand, running down his wrist in hot rivulets. “Gods, love,” he rasped, voice wrecked, his fire burning behind his eyes, “your cavern is flooding already… and I’m still here. I’m still yours. I swear it. I swear on every storm we’ve survived.”

She rocked harder, riding his fingers, inner walls fluttering. Her hands clutched his shoulders like lifelines. “The tide’s rising,” she choked out, “explore every inch of my cavern, pirate. Remind me you’re alive. Remind me I didn’t lose you.”

He twisted his wrist, fingers scissoring, thumb circling her clit in ruthless little strokes, pressing against her walls, the slick sounds filling the cabin. She moaned, low, broken, as her body trembled. Her juices flowed onto his fingers, coating them, her core flooding with heat.

Outside, the storm intensified, rain lashing the hull, thunder booming like cannon fire, the ship creaking and swaying as if joining their rhythm, the runes glowing brighter with each surge of her magic. The ship lurched as a wave hit broadside, timbers groaning, runes blazing. Her climax built fast, vicious, walls clamping his fingers like a vise. “Killian!”

He curled harder, thumb pressing firm, hook pressing into her back. She shattered, her back arching violently, a raw scream tearing from her throat as her release tore through her. Her thighs trembled as her walls clamped down, pulsing, spasming, gushing hot and wet around him, soaking his thighs, the chair, the floor. Her cursed mark exploded in blinding blue light.

Lightning flashed outside, blinding white, thunder exploding so close the lantern rattled, rain lashing the glass in furious sheets. As if the Jolly Roger herself were climaxing with them, the ship heaved wildly, waves crashing in time with her shudders, runes flaring electric blue.

She felt him stirring beneath her, hard and throbbing. She didn't wait to recover. She reached down, her hand wrapping around his thick length, stroking him firmly, her breath hot against his ear, "Time for the ship to enter now, Cap." She aligned herself over his straining length.

He removed his fingers slowly, slick and glistening, placing his hand on her hip. He moved his hook to her other hip, gripping firmly.

She sank down in one brutal, glorious slide, taking him to the root in a single, searing motion. They both groaned, loud and primal. He filled her completely, thick, hot, stretching her to the edge of pain and pleasure. Her walls fluttered wildly around him, still pulsing from her first climax.

She rode him hard from the start, hips slamming down, grinding in circles, nails raking red lines down his chest. "Feel that, pirate?" she hissed, voice wrecked. "Your ship's anchored so deep it's splitting me open."

He sighed deeply, thrusting up to meet her, hook digging into her hip, hand gripping her ass, pulling her down harder. "My tight little storm. Clenching like you'll never let me go."

The chair creaked dangerously. The ship rolled with a massive wave, thunder crashing overhead, lightning flashing through the window in stark white bursts, illuminating their bodies in frozen snapshots. Her head thrown back, mouth open in a silent scream; his teeth bared, eyes wild; their joined bodies glistening with sweat.

She slowed suddenly, torturously, lifting until only the head remained inside, then dropping back down with punishing force. Once. Twice. Three times. Each descent drew a guttural curse from him. "Teasing me now, love?" he snarled, voice shredded. She leaned in, lips brushing his ear. "Payback. You like to make me beg. Now it's your turn."

She clenched deliberately around him, slow, rhythmic pulses that milked his length. He bucked, hips jerking, a broken groan tearing from his throat. "Des… don't stop…. Keep…" She laughed, low, wicked. "Beg, Captain." He snarled, hook digging into her hip hard enough to bruise. "Please. … Ride me. … Let me be your Stallion. … Wreck me. … I want all. Ruin me."

She slammed down, hard, fast, merciless. The chair rocked dangerously. The ship pitched violently, waves crashing, thunder roaring, runes flaring blinding blue as if the Jolly Roger herself were climaxing with them.

She rode him toward the edge, her walls fluttering wildly as he throbbed and swelled inside her. She gasped, nails gouging his shoulders. He thrust up, a deep, brutal thrust, burying himself to the hilt.

He smiled, his voice a growl, "Your channel is flooding the ship." He pushed into her deeper, the sensation intense, her wetness enveloping him. She smiled, her eyes half-lidded with pleasure, and purred, "Yes. Flood is upon you. But storm is coming. … More. I need more. … Need to feel you inside me. Need to know you're not slipping away."

She reluctantly lifted off him and slid from his lap, her legs shaky but determined, her body aching for more, and moved to the desk, her hips swaying seductively, the lantern light playing over her curves.

The ship rolled with another wave, thunder booming as she crossed to the desk, hips swaying, her arousal glistening on her thighs in the lantern light. He watched her, his arousal throbbing, eyes dark with hunger. She perched on the edge, spreading her legs wide, beckoning him with a trembling finger. "Come here, pirate."

He rose, his arousal throbbing painfully hard, his body taut, and stalked to her, positioning between her thighs. She stroked his arousal, "I need you to take me hard, and fast, and deep." His tip brushed her entrance, teasing, circling, making her whimper. She wrapped her legs around his waist, pulling him closer. "Take me, pirate. Plunder me."

His hook grazed her back, cool against sweat-slick skin; his hand cupped her breast, thumb rolling her nipple hard, sending jolts through her. "Patience, love," he murmured softly. She arched, gasping, pressing up against him, clutching his shoulders. "Yes. … Fondle me, Killian. Make me feel every heartbeat. … Dive in, make me feel it."

He squeezed her breast firmly, kneading the soft flesh, pinching the peak until she moaned, her cursed mark flaring brighter. "As you wish, love," he rasped, voice cracking, thrusting in hard and fast, filling her with a powerful surge

that made her cry out, her walls stretching around him in exquisite agony. Her legs gripped tighter, nails raking his back, drawing blood. “Yes. Ride the waves, Cap. Steer the ship through the swell.”

Outside, lightning flashed, illuminating the cabin in stark white bursts, thunder shaking the timbers, the ship heaving wildly as waves crashed against the hull, mirroring their desperate intensity.

He plundered her hard, his thrusts deep and relentless, the slick sounds of their union filling the room, her wetness easing each powerful stroke. He grunted, “Oh, you feel so good,” his voice strained with pleasure and something deeper—fear, gratitude, love—his hand still fondling her breast, rolling the nipple between fingers. She whispered breathlessly, “So do you. … Deeper, pirate. I want to feel every inch of you—need to know you’re alert.”

He picked up the pace, his body slamming into hers, the desk creaking under the force, runes flaring to steady it. His hand moved to her other breast, kneading roughly, pinching until she arched, a fresh wave of heat flooding her core.

After a few moments, he withdrew slowly, her body clenching in protest, and scooped her up—hand under her thighs, hook supporting her back—carrying her to the bed. He threw her onto the crimson velvet with a wicked, trembling grin, “Now I’ll plunder you proper.”

She smiled, spreading her legs invitingly, placing her feet flat on the bed, knees bent, her core glistening in the lantern light. Killian crawled onto the bed, kneeling between her legs, his arousal throbbing. He brought his tip to her core, brushing against her entry teasingly, circling slowly, making her whimper. He lifted her legs, placing them on his shoulders, her body open to him. She butterflied her legs wider, her breaths quickening, voice cracking. “Please, Killian… I need you inside me. Need to feel your full mast.”

He looked at her, eyes dark with lust and raw emotion, “Prepare to be boarded.” He thrust in hard, pushing deep, filling her completely, her moan loud and arching her back off the bed. He placed his hook under her against her back, cool metal against heated skin, his hand gripping her hip. He pounded into her, each thrust intense and forceful, her body rocking with the impact, her breasts bouncing, her moans escalating into cries of pleasure and relief.

She pressed up against him, meeting his rhythm, hands clutching his shoulders and purred, “I need you to open me wider. Fully break me.”

He slowed his pace and stopped, but he didn’t withdraw. He slid one finger into her alongside his length, then another, then another. She sighed with each addition, the stretch intense, overwhelming, her walls fluttering around the intrusion. Once his fourth finger was in, he pushed them against her inner wall, opening her up further, the sensation raw and exquisite. She gasped, her body trembling.

He looked down at her opening, stretched wide around him and his fingers, then up at her, voice hoarse. “Like this?” She gasped again, voice fracturing, “Yes. Now hold me open and push in hard and deep.”

He obeyed. He pushed hard—slow at first, then faster—his length and fingers stretching her to the limit, the sensation so intense it bordered on pain, yet she arched into it, craving it, needing the proof that he was alive, here, hers. She sighed, “Yes. Oh, gods yes.” He pushed harder.

He slowly removed his fingers from her. He placed his hand and hook on her hips and pulled her closer as he thrust in hard. She pressed up against him, hands sliding under herself to raise her hips slightly, allowing him even deeper. He pounded into her—relentless, desperate—each thrust a declaration, a plea, a promise.

They talked between thrusts, voices raw. Killian growled, “Give me your storm, witch. … Give me your all. … Come for me. … Let it go. Let your storm break. … Flood my ship. Drown me as I plunder your channel.” Desylva replied, seductively, her voice husky, “Yes. … Don’t stop. … I will give you all. I will flood your ship. … I almost lost you, don’t ever leave me.”

He sighed, thrusting deeper, “I’m anchored so deep. I’m here, love. I’ll always be here.” She smiled, eyes locked on his, “Are you ready, Cap? Ready for my storm to break?” He growled, voice raw, “Yes. Let it go. Let me feel you

flow. Let me know you're mine. ... Come for me, storm. Flood me. Drown me." He pushed in hard and held it, his body tense, every muscle corded, veins standing out on his neck and arms, breath sawing in harsh, broken gasps.

She erupted—her climax hitting like a cataclysm, body convulsing in violent, uncontrollable spasms, walls clamping down on him and his fingers in rhythmic, vise-like pulses that milked him mercilessly, hot floods gushing around him in wave after wave, soaking his thighs and the sheets. Her back arching so hard her spine bowed, her scream raw and primal, tearing from her throat.

Outside, thunder exploded in a deafening barrage, lightning forking the sky in relentless, blinding strikes, the ship heaving like a beast in agony, waves crashing against the hull with bone-jarring force, timbers splintering faintly before runes flared to heal them.

He thrust in, coaxing her higher, prolonging the storm. She arched off the bed in a bow of pure ecstasy, cursed mark blazing so bright it seared shadows into the walls, her nails gouging bloody furrows down his back, her body shaking so hard he thought she might break apart in his arms. The intensity and vise of her body dragged him over the edge. He roared, a deep guttural roar that shook the cabin. His hips slammed forward, jerking uncontrollably as he erupted inside her, thick, hot pulses flooding her core, filling her, overflowing her, spilling out around him, dripping down his shaft, and her thighs. Each spasm wracked him, muscles locking, breath sawing in his chest, hook digging into her hip as if anchoring himself to her through the storm. His release so powerful it bordered on pain, muscles locking rigid, vision whiting out as he poured everything into her, body, soul, fear, love, gratitude, desperation.

The ship lurched violently, the window rattling, runes exploding in electric blue flares as if the Jolly Roger climaxed with them, waves pounding the hull in time with their spasms, thunder crashing so loud the lantern flame nearly guttered out.

They rode the aftershocks together, their bodies locked in trembling unity, breaths sawing, hearts thundering like the storm outside. Sweat-slicked, blood-streaked, utterly spent.

The rain pattered softly now, almost tender. The ship's rocking easing to a shuddering sigh, waves calming to a gentle roll, thunder retreating to a distant rumble, runes dimming to a soft, satisfied glow.

He collapsed forward, forehead pressed to her shoulder, still buried deep, his weight pressing her into the mattress, their sweat-slicked bodies entwined. "Gods, love… you undo me." he whispered, voice broken, hand cupping her breast tenderly now, thumb brushing her nipple in soft reverent circles. She lowered her legs from his shoulders, wrapped them around him, holding him close, her voice a whisper, "And you complete me, pirate. Every storm, every time." She wrapped her arms around him, fingers threading through his sweat-damp hair.

After long, shuddering moments, he slowly withdrew, both gasping softly at the intimate loss, and rolled off her. She rested her head on his chest, her hand tracing his scars with trembling fingers. He draped an arm around her, his hook caressing her side gently, the cool metal a grounding contrast to their heated skin. Their hearts hammering in tandem.

Killian, breathless, voice wrecked and thick with emotion, "So… is the examination complete?" She laughed, soft, broken, sated, "For now. Will need to check you again… in a few hours." He smiled against her hair, hook tracing lazy circles on her spine, voice warm, "I'll hold you to that, love."

They stayed like that, entwined, breathing each other in, as the storm outside faded to a gentle murmur, rain tapering to a gentle patter, the Jolly Roger rocking them like a cradle, runes glowing warm and steady, as if the ship herself was purring in contentment.

Next Day (Main Deck)

The storm had spent itself by first light. The sky above the open sea was a soft, bruised lavender fading to gold at the eastern rim, the last ragged clouds drifting like smoke from a dying fire. The Jolly Roger rode a gentle swell now, her black hull cutting clean through water that still carried the faint metallic scent of rain and ozone. The deck was slick and gleaming, runes dimmed to a sleepy silver pulse, as if the ship herself were exhaling after the night's fury. Sails hung half-furled, catching just enough breeze to keep her moving steadily westward, away from the cursed island that had nearly claimed her captain.

Killian & Desylva's Cabin

The lantern had burned low, its wick a tiny ember behind cracked glass. The air was heavy with the mingled scents of salt, sweat, sex, and the faint, clean bite of Desylva's storm-magic lingering like perfume. The bed sheets were a tangled ruin, one corner scorched where a stray spark from her cursed mark had kissed the fabric during their final, shattering climax. The pillows were scattered. The desk still bore a faint damp spot where her release had pooled hours earlier, now dried to a subtle sheen.

Killian lay on his back, one arm flung wide, the other curled possessively around Desylva. His chest rose and fell in the slow, deep rhythm of true sleep—finally, mercifully free of the hypnovine's shadow. The scratch on his forearm was gone, not even a faint line remaining; her healing had been ruthless in its thoroughness. His dark hair was mussed, lips swollen from hours of desperate kissing, faint red crescents on his shoulders where her nails had bitten deep in the throes of release. The hook rested against the small of her back, cool metal warmed by her skin.

She was draped half across him, cheek pressed to his heart, one leg hooked over his thigh as though anchoring him to her even in sleep. Her dark hair spilled like ink across his chest, strands still faintly crackling with residual static. Her cursed mark had dimmed to a soft, steady blue glow beneath her skin—calm now, content, no longer blazing with terror. One hand lay splayed over his heart, fingers curled loosely, as if counting each beat to reassure herself he was still here.

A thin stripe of dawn light slipped through the window, painting a golden bar across their entwined bodies. Desylva stirred first—slowly, reluctantly—lifting her head just enough to look at his face. His lashes lay dark against pale cheeks, mouth slack in the unguarded way only sleep could force from him. She traced the line of his jaw with a trembling fingertip, memorizing the shape of him all over again.

"Looking better," she whispered, voice hoarse from screaming his name, His eyes fluttered open—blue, clear, alive. He blinked once, twice, then focused on her face. A slow, sleepy, utterly roguish smile curved his lips. "Mornin', love," he rasped, voice gravelly from hours of growling her name.

His hook slid up her spine in a lazy caress. "Miss me?" She laughed—soft—and buried her face in the crook of his neck. "Never again," she whispered against his skin. "Never again do I let anything try to take you from me. Not vines. Not curses. Not death itself."

He tightened his arm around her, hand splaying wide between her shoulder blades, holding her like she might vanish if he loosened his grip even a fraction. "Nor I you, love." His voice cracked on the last word. "Thought I was gone last night. Thought I'd never feel your heartbeat against mine, your storm in my blood." He pressed a kiss to her temple, lingering, breathing her in. "You brought me back. You always bring me back."

They stayed like that—wrapped in each other, breathing in tandem—as the sun rose higher, turning the window light from gold to clear morning white. The ship's gentle roll rocked them like a cradle.

Main Deck

Billy's lute picked out a quiet, tender melody, the notes drifting down through the deck like a blessing. Smee's cheerful whistle joined it, One-Eyed Jack's low chuckle, Black Tom's silent footfall—life continuing on deck, the crew giving their captain and his storm-lass the privacy they so rarely allowed themselves.

Killian & Desylva's Cabin

Desylva lifted her head at last, eyes still shining, but steadier now. She traced the place on his arm where the hypnovine had bitten. "No scar," she murmured, almost disbelieving. "Not even a whisper of it."

Killian caught her hand, brought it to his lips, kissed her knuckles one by one. "You burned it out of me, love. Every last trace." His grin turned soft, almost shy. "Think you'll have to keep checking, though. Just to be sure." She laughed, bright, real, the sound cutting through the last shadows of the night. "Oh, I intend to. Thoroughly. Frequently."

She leaned down, brushing her lips against his in a kiss that was gentle, reverent, promising. “Every night. Until we’re both too old and creaky to climb the rigging.” He pulled her down fully, rolling them so she lay beneath him, bodies still sticky and marked and gloriously alive. “Deal,” he whispered against her mouth. “But only if you promise to keep saving me, tempest. Over and over.”

“Always,” she breathed, fingers threading through his hair, holding him like he was the only solid thing in all the realms. “Always, my pirate.”

Main Deck

The Jolly Roger sailed on into the dawn, runes glowing soft and steady, carrying her captain and his storm-lass toward whatever horizon waited next—together, unbreakable, fiercely, eternally alive.

Quest for the Storm Crown (Day 240)

The Jolly Roger carved a path through a restless sea, her hull slicing waves that churned silver beneath a twilight sky bruised in deep purples and fading orange. Her sails snapped taut against a brisk wind, catching the last glimmers of daylight as shadows stretched long across the deck. Lanterns swayed from the rigging, their warm glow flickering over the planks in gentle arcs as the ship rode the rising swell.

The air hung heavy with the promise of rain, a salty tang mingling with the musk of distant thunderclouds rolling low along the horizon. The sea murmured against her hull, the enchanted oak creaking softly in reply — a quiet conversation between vessel and water as the Jolly Roger pressed toward the storm-touched dusk.

Quarterdeck

Killian stood at the helm, the wheel thrumming beneath his hand, the Roger responding to his touch like a creature that knew its master. The wood vibrated with a low, eager pulse, as though the ship herself sensed the storm-born path ahead. His hook glinted with a menacing edge as his piercing blue eyes scanned the endless expanse. The wind tugged at his coat, snapping the worn leather like a banner, the scent of salt and distant rain threading through the air. Every storm he’d ever chased seemed to whisper at the edges of the horizon, urging him onward — old tempests calling to an old hunter, promising danger, glory, and the familiar thrill of defiance.

The crew’s voices — the heartbeat of the Roger herself — rose in a low, familiar hum over the creak of timbers and the rhythmic slap of waves. The ship seemed to breathe with them, her lanterns swaying in slow arcs, casting shifting gold across faces hardened by storms and sharpened by loyalty. Boots thudded softly on the planks, ropes creaked overhead, and the faint groan of the mast sounded almost like a living spine adjusting to the rising wind. Smee’s nervous chatter, One-Eyed Jack’s gruff retorts, Black Tom’s silent nods, Billy’s eager calls — each voice a thread in the ship’s living tapestry.

Main Deck

Smee shuffled forward from the mainmast, swaying with the Roger’s gentle roll, clutching a rum-stained map in trembling hands. His hands shook not from fear, but from the weight of the tale he carried. The map looked older than any of them — edges frayed, ink faded, the parchment smelling faintly of rum and old secrets. His hat glistened with sea mist as he thrust it upon the map plate in front of Killian.

“Cap’n, it’s the Storm Crown!” he rasped, voice a gritty blend of thrill and unease. “Whispers in every port from here to world’s end. Forged by thunder gods. Lost when a mad pirate king went down off the Tempest Isles.” His face creased with worry, bushy brows furrowing as he jabbed at the map’s faded ink. “Controls storms, they claim, summons lightning like a lash. Been sittin’ in that wreck for ages, waitin’ for some bold fool to nab it!”

One-Eyed Jack lounged against a nearby cannon, salt-flecked beard framing a scowl as he polished the barrel with a rag. “Cursed, Smee,” he growled, eye narrowing. “Heard it fries the unworthy crisp, thunder follows ’em like a hound.” Black Tom loomed silent by the railing, harpoon resting in his scarred grip, his dark eyes flickering with rare curiosity. Billy dropped from the rigging, freckles glowing with excitement. “Pure gold, Cap’n. Shines like a storm’s heart!”

A murmur rippled through the deck — awe, fear, greed, all tangled like rigging in a gale. Black Tom shifted his stance, eyes drawn to the map as if it breathed. Even the Roger seemed to lean in, her timbers groaning with the weight of old legends.

Quarterdeck

Killian's lips curved into a roguish grin, blue eyes glinting with mischief. "A storm-crown, eh? Sounds like treasure fit for us." The crew's cheers erupted, a raw, defiant roar that rolled into the twilight.

The legend of the Storm Crown had crept into their nights like a shanty shared over flickering flames, tales swapped across dented rum tankards, each yarn wilder than the last. A golden helm wreathed in crackling lightning, granting its wearer mastery over tempests with a mere gesture.

Some claimed the pirate king who wore it had commanded a storm so vast it split an island in half, the scar still visible on old maps. They say his ship was swallowed by a maelstrom still whispered of in awe.

Others swore the crown still hummed beneath the waves, its lightning never dimming even underwater — a caged beast of thunder that lit the wreck in a ghostly glow, fish swimming blind around its pulse as the shattered hull throbbed with trapped storm-fire. Some insisted the sea rose higher around the wreck, as if guarding the relic out of spite or reverence.

Every tale ended the same. No one who sought it ever returned. Even the bravest men shifted uneasily. The Storm Crown wasn't just treasure — it was temptation. Power. Danger. A relic that could turn the tides of war or drown the world in a single breath.

Main Deck

Smee smoothed the map across a barrel, his finger tracing a jagged cluster of ink-circled isles. "Tempest Isles, Cap'n. … Wreck's there, if the old tars ain't spinnin' lies. Hid in reefs sharp as blades." One-Eyed Jack spat over the side, his rumble cutting through the wind. "Rumpelstiltskin'll sniff it out. Loves anythin' magic twisted. Bet he'd zap us from leagues off." Black Tom's grip tightened on his harpoon, a silent nod signaling caution. Billy's eyes widened, voice piping high. "Regina'd drown us just to crown herself. Turn the seas black with her gales!"

Quarterdeck

Killian's hook tapped the wheel in a steady clink, his mind racing. He felt the old hunger stir — the one forged in vengeance and tempered by centuries of loss. His gaze flicked to the railing where Desylva leaned, leather cloak fluttering like a raven's wing, her eyes meeting his with a fire that quickened his pulse.

She'd changed him. Her storm had carved new purpose into his restless hunger, wild and bright, mirroring the part of him that had never found peace on any shore. The crown wasn't just a relic anymore — it was a challenge, a promise, a chance to seize something greater than the ghosts that haunted him. Her storm-touched presence had become woven into him, her wild magic and gray eyes now as familiar as the deck beneath his boots.

She was his tempest, and the crown felt destined for their hands.

Desylva pushed off the railing, boots thudding softly as she strode to Killian's side. She moved with the confidence of someone who had danced with storms and survived. The air shifted around her, charged with the faint hum of her magic. Even the lantern light seemed to bend toward her, drawn by the pulse of her storm-mark. Her leather cloak shimmered with salt. Her dark hair whipped free in the wind, cursed mark pulsing faint blue beneath her sleeve, its quiet thrum syncing with the sea's unrest. A faint ripple of static brushed across the deck as she approached, raising gooseflesh on the nearest crewmen — a reminder that storms answered her before she ever raised a hand.

She stopped beside him, shoulder grazing his, her voice slicing through the crew's murmur like a honed blade. "A crown that commands storms? That's no bauble. It's power carved for us. Let's rip it from whatever abyss holds it." Her gray eyes locked with his, a challenge laced with a spark, her defiance a beacon he'd chase through any gale.

Main Deck

One-Eyed Jack snorted, pushing off the cannon with a grunt. “Hold on now,” he growled, eye narrowing. “Why chase a storm crown when we’ve already got a storm-witch aboard? Lass bends the skies well enough without some cursed trinket.” His tone wasn’t mocking — it was wary, the kind of blunt practicality only One-Eyed Jack ever dared throw at Killian. “Seems a fool’s errand to grab a relic that’s fried better men, when her magic’s already keepin’ us alive.”

Killian’s grin sharpened, voice low and firm. “Aye, she’s a tempest in her own right. But this crown’s a weapon, not just a whim. Amplifies her might. Turns a squall into a maelstrom none can outrun. And if Regina or Rumpel get their claws on it first, we’re dead in the water.”

Desylva’s lips quirked, storm-mark pulsing faintly, tone edged with hunger. “And it’s a taunt. … Proof we can snatch what gods and kings couldn’t keep. I’ll wield it. But we claim it as ours.” Her gaze held Killian’s, a shared fire flaring between them.

One-Eyed Jack chuckled darkly. “Fits us mad lot, lass. Cursed or not.” Black Tom’s nod was deliberate, Billy’s grin stretching wide. “We’ll show ’em, Cap’n. Snag it right under their noses!” Smee muttered, “Steal it with them two huntin’ it? Brave or daft, we are.”

The crew’s voices rose again. Some eager, some wary. All bound by the same reckless loyalty. They were pirates, after all. Storm-chasers. Rule-breakers. Men who’d follow Killian into the jaws of a maelstrom if he told them there was gold at the bottom.

Quarterdeck

Killian’s chest swelled, her words stoking the ember in his core, her storm woven into his being as fierce as the seas they roamed. He tilted his head, grin softening. “Aye, love. Ours to take. Power and pride in one.” Their eyes met — storm-gray and ocean-blue — a pact forged in silence. The crown wouldn’t just be a prize. It would be theirs. A relic meant to be claimed by storm and sea together.

Killian’s hook gleamed as he gripped the wheel tighter, resolve hardening in his bones. The crew watched, their trust a steady gust at his back. Killian spun the wheel hard to starboard, setting course for the Tempest Isles.

The Jolly Roger surged with intent, timbers groaning as the wind rose, propelling them toward the shadowed horizon. “Full sail, lads!” he bellowed over the growing gale. “We’ll claim that Storm Crown afore the devils snatch it!”

Main Deck

The ship leapt forward, sails billowing like wings as she cut into the rising wind. Her hull creaking under the weight of their ambition, a vessel tempered by blood and rebellion now chasing a thunder-born legend. The horizon darkened, lightning flickering in distant clouds as if the storm itself were watching their approach.

Smee scrambled to the ropes, stout hands fumbling as he huffed, “Hope it don’t cook us all, Cap’n!” One-Eyed Jack’s laugh boomed as he primed a cannon. “Let ’em come — I’ll blast ’em to cinders!” Black Tom shifted his harpoon, his silence a forged vow. Billy swung back to the crow’s nest. The crew’s shouts swelled, a ragged hymn to their captain’s will.

Quarterdeck

Killian’s blue eyes blazed, his heart tethered to the woman beside him, her magic and his mettle a dance of peril and passion. Desylva leaned closer, her breath warm against the wind’s bite, her hand brushing his on the wheel — a fleeting touch that sent a spark through him. Her voice dropped, a whisper meant only for him. “If we find it, it’s ours… together. No one else crowns it.” Her gray eyes held a storm’s depth, a vow wrapped in the wildness that

had grown between them. Her cursed mark flared brighter, static tingling the air, mirroring the tempest he'd always pursued.

Killian's grin softened, blue eyes warming. "Aye, love. Together we'll wield it. None'll pry it from us." His hook rested near her fingers, cold metal meeting her heat, an unspoken pact sealed in the fading light.

Main Deck

One-Eyed Jack smirked, but even he straightened subtly when Killian and Desylva stood shoulder-to-shoulder. Black Tom's grip tightened on his harpoon, not in fear but in readiness. Billy's grin widened, freckles bright in the lantern glow. Smee's muttering quieted into reverent awe. The crew didn't just see their captain and their storm-witch — they saw the storm itself choosing a direction, and they braced for whatever madness followed.

The Roger surged on, her sails swelling as the wind rose, the deck alive with purpose. The sea darkened beneath her hull, waves rising in slow, anticipatory swells as though the ocean recognized the hunt. Stormlight flickered faintly along the horizon, distant and waiting. Killian and Desylva stood at the helm, storm and sea in quiet accord, the crew rallying behind them as the ship carved into the deepening twilight — a hunt begun, a legend stirring, and the first breath of the Tempest Isles curling across the wind like a warning.

Arrival

The Jolly Roger approached the Tempest Isles, a jagged sprawl of volcanic stone rising like the broken teeth of some ancient leviathan. The sea churned violently around them, waves smashing against the black rock with a fury that sent plumes of white spray clawing into the air.

Lightning forked through the roiling sky, veins of molten fire illuminating the cliffs in brief, eerie flashes. Each strike revealed more of the Isles' brutal silhouette — sharp ridges, narrow spires, and cavernous hollows carved by centuries of storms. The thunder rolled low and constant, a growl that vibrated through the Roger's timbers.

The air thickened with ozone, sharp and metallic, stinging the lungs with every breath. Salt whipped through the wind in stinging bursts, carrying the briny scent of kelp torn from the reefs below. The sea itself seemed restless, its surface heaving in uneven swells as if recoiling from the cursed waters surrounding the wreck.

The pirate king's shattered galleon clung to a jagged outcrop like a skeleton refusing to sink. Its splintered hull sagged under the weight of time and tide, draped in thick curtains of kelp that swayed like ghostly banners. Each wave struck the wreck with a hollow boom, rattling its warped timbers and sending shivers through the surrounding reef.

Lightning flashed again, revealing the wreck's broken masts jutting skyward like snapped bones. The storm's glow flickered across rusted iron, shattered planks, and the dark water pooling inside the ruined deck. The entire structure groaned under the relentless assault of the sea, as though warning any who approached that it had claimed lives before — and would gladly claim more.

The Jolly Roger drifted closer, her hull slicing through the churning water with steady resolve. No voices rose from her deck. No orders broke the storm's roar. Only the ship moved, a lone shadow pressing toward the tempest-scarred graveyard where the Storm Crown waited.

Quarterdeck

Killian, coat snapping in the gusting wind, hand gripping the wheel, eyed the reef's jagged teeth. To navigate the perilous rocks, he flicked the coral toggle on the Starward Compass, bolted beside the wheel in its teak box. The compass hummed, its celestial runes flaring silver, the star-fallen needle snapping to their course with a click sharp as a pistol's cock.

The Jolly Roger stirred, her wheel turning under the compass's arcane guidance, sails snapping taut as she wove through the reefs with unearthly precision, her hull skimming inches from rocks cloaked in spray, the ship gliding as if kissed by starlight. "Cunning lass, you are," Killian murmured, his blue eyes glinting with trust in the relic's sorcery, the compass's hum a siren's echo threading through the storm's roar.

Killian braced his boots and raised his voice over the storm's rising snarl. "Eyes open, lads. Wreck'll be hidin' in this mess. Port side, starboard, bow. Call out anything that looks like bones or timbers."

Main Deck

One-Eyed Jack grunted and lifted a spyglass, scanning the starboard side with a practiced squint. Black Tom moved to port, harpoon in hand, gaze sharp as a hawk's. Smee shuffled toward the bow, muttering about reefs sharp enough to gut a man. Billy clambered higher into the crow's nest, spyglass already pressed to his eye.

Quarterdeck

Desylva stepped beside Killian, cloak snapping in the gale, her storm-mark pulsing faintly as she swept her gaze across the churning waters. "I'll watch the swells," she murmured, voice low. "Storms hide things in their folds."

Full Deck

The Roger wove through the reef, her hull skimming dangerously close to stone. Spray lashed the deck. Lightning flickered across the sky in jagged bursts. The crew scanned every shadow, every swell, every flicker of light on the water.

Minutes stretched. The storm thickened. The reef narrowed. Then—

Billy's shout cracked through the gale. "Wreck off the port bow! Half-sunken — see the mast!"

Quarterdeck

Killian snapped his spyglass up, catching the silhouette of broken timbers jutting from the waves like snapped bones. "Aye, I see it." He spun the wheel, guiding the Roger toward the outcrop with careful precision, the Starward Compass humming in agreement.

The ship angled closer, her port side drifting parallel to the shattered galleon. Killian eased the wheel, aligning the Roger perfectly with the wreck. The reef snarled around them, but the Roger held steady, her hull kissing the edge of danger with practiced confidence.

Killian glanced at Desylva, a roguish spark lighting his blue eyes. "Up for a swing, love?" Desylva's lips curved, storm-gray eyes gleaming. "Thought you'd never ask, pirate."

They headed down from the quarterdeck to the main deck, boots thudding against the planks as the crew braced for the next step. Ropes hung ready from the mainmast, swaying in the storm-wind.

Main Deck

Killian grabbed one, testing its tension. Desylva took another, tying the knot with deft fingers. Her cloak snapped behind her like a storm-torn banner.

Smee approached reluctantly, rope in hand, muttering under his breath. "Ain't built for swingin'. I'm a sailor, not a monkey…"

Killian arched a brow. "Stay aboard if you're scared."

Smee stiffened, eyes widening. "Scared? Me? Never, Cap'n. Just… preparin' me joints." He tied the rope with trembling determination.

Desylva smirked. "You'll be fine, Smee. Just don't look down." Smee immediately looked down. "Oh gods…" Killian clapped him on the shoulder. "You'll manage."

The three of them stepped toward the rail, ropes secured, storm roaring around them. The wreck loomed ahead — dark, broken, waiting.

Killian met Desylva's eyes, the storm reflected in both. "Together?" She nodded once, fierce and sure. "Together."

They gripped their ropes, braced their boots, and prepared to swing.

Wrecked Ship

Killian swung over first, rope taut in his grip as he launched from the Roger's mainmast. The storm-wind caught his coat, snapping the leather like a dark banner behind him. He landed hard on the wreck's splintered planks, boots skidding across wet wood before he steadied himself with a sharp drag of his hook. Lightning flashed overhead, illuminating the jagged timbers beneath his feet. He drew his cutlass with a metallic rasp, its blade catching the lightning's flicker.

Desylva followed a heartbeat later, her swing graceful but fierce. Her gray eyes sharp as the storm above. Her leather cloak, stitched with seaweed from a past she rarely spoke of, billowed behind her like a storm-torn wing. Her boots striking the wreck with a crunch that echoed across the reef. Her cursed mark pulsing a faint, restless blue beneath her sleeve, a heartbeat of magic syncing with the tempest's pulse. She drew her dagger, its edge catching the lightning's flicker.

Smee swung last, yelping as the rope jerked him forward. He landed in a stumbling heap, patched coat sodden, boots slipping on the slick planks. "Blimey. Too much swingin'. Not enough landin'!" he rasped, clutching the nearest rail as the wreck groaned beneath them.

Killian and Desylva secured their ropes to rusted belaying pins along the wreck's rail, the lines snapping taut against the storm's pull. The wreck shuddered under the relentless waves, its warped timbers creaking like the ribs of some ancient beast.

The air was thick with brine and ozone. Lightning forked through the sky, casting eerie flashes across the skeletal remains of the pirate king's galleon. Kelp draped the shattered hull in ghostly curtains, swaying with each surge of the tide.

Jolly Roger

Spray lashed across the Jolly Roger's deck as the storm tightened around the reef. The ship held her position with stubborn resolve, runes along her hull glowing faintly as she braced against the shifting tide.

One-Eyed Jack stood at the cannon, jaw set, his eye fixed on the wreck where Killian and Desylva had vanished. He adjusted the cannon's angle with slow, deliberate precision, muttering under his breath. "If anythin' crawls outta that graveyard, I'll blast it back in."

Black Tom remained at the rail, harpoon poised, the coiled line at his feet ready for recall. His stance was iron-still, shoulders squared, gaze locked on the churning water. A faint twitch of his jaw, a narrowing of his eyes, said more than words ever could: something was wrong.

Billy clung to the rigging above, torch sputtering in the wind. He caught the stiff set of Black Tom's shoulders, the way the harpoon angled a fraction lower. "Jack… Tom's seein' somethin', isn't he?" he called down, voice tight. "Sea's shiftin' strange. Swells twistin' like somethin's churnin' under the wreck."

Black Tom didn't look away from the waves. He simply shifted his weight, tightening his grip on the harpoon.

The gesture was small, but One-Eyed Jack saw it and his expression hardened. "Storm's always twistin', lad," he said, though his voice lacked its usual swagger. "But aye. He feels it." His grip tightened on the cannon's handle, betraying the tension beneath the bravado.

Billy scanned the wreck through the spray, voice rising with nervous energy. "Cap'n'll give the signal if he needs fire. I'll see it from up here!"

One-Eyed Jack barked a rough laugh. “You’ll see it, lad — but let’s hope we don’t.”

The Roger groaned as another wave struck her hull, lanterns swinging wildly. The crew braced themselves, eyes fixed on the shattered galleon ahead, ready to answer whatever madness the Tempest Isles spat back at them.

Wrecked Ship

Killian’s grin flashed, wild and fierce as the lightning, his blue eyes alight with the thrill. “Ready?” Desylva’s nod was a blade’s edge, her voice a vow echoing their twilight pact at the helm. “Aye.” Her storm magic hummed low and fierce as they advanced, the air around her crackling with faint static.

Killian’s gaze sharpened, anticipation flickering like storm-fire. “Stay sharp,” he growled, voice low and steady. “This place ain’t quiet for no good reason.” Desylva’s storm hummed beneath her skin, her gray eyes sweeping the warped planks and shadowed hollows. “Storm’s holdin’ its breath,” she murmured. “Something’s waitin’.”

Smee’s footing faltered on the slick deck, knuckles whitening around the rope. “Feels like the sea’s watchin’ us, Cap’n… like a trap waitin’ to spring.”

Killian steadied him with a firm grip of his hook. “Eyes open, mate. We move together.

They felt the shattered hull tremble beneath their boots, a warning pulse rising through the planks like the heartbeat of something buried deep below. The storm snarled overhead in answer, lightning flashing across the warped timbers as though illuminating a warning carved into the bones of the ship.

The wreck’s hull stretched before them like a twisted graveyard of warped planks and rusted iron. Kelp swayed like living tendrils in the churning current, catching the lightning’s glow to reveal bones glinting white among the timbers — remnants of a crew long swallowed by the sea’s hunger.

A gust tore across the deck, whipping Desylva’s cloak sideways. The wreck tilted with a groan, water sloshing over the planks in icy sheets. Smee stumbled again, breath hitching. “Somethin’s stirrin’ down there, Cap’n… I feel it in me bones. … Like a trap waitin’ to spring!”

Killian’s blue eyes narrowed to slits, his hook steadying Smee with a firm grip. “Hold fast.” His voice was calm, but his stance shifted — weight braced, cutlass angled slightly forward, senses honed by centuries of facing the unknown.

A low growl rumbled from the wreck’s depths, a primal vibration that crawled up their legs and set Smee’s teeth chattering. The planks beneath them quivered, dust and kelp shivering loose from the beams.

Desylva’s storm-mark flared, a sharp pulse of blue light. “Killian…”

The sea erupted in a geyser of foam and fury. A tempest drake surged forth, its massive form a nightmare of storm-gray scales slick with brine. Lightning crackled across its wings, arcs snapping and hissing in the damp air. Its roar shook the reef, thunder rolling overhead in a deafening chorus. Its eyes burned like twin lanterns, yellow and fierce, fixing on the trio with predatory intent. Claws long and curved like scythes flexed as it reared, its serpentine tail thrashing the waves into a frenzy.

Smee yelped, grip slipping as he flailed. “Blimey, Cap’n, it’s a bloody monster!”

The wreck lurched sharply, icy water flooding across the deck, soaking their boots and chilling their legs.

Killian planted his feet, cutlass raised. He slashed with a fierce cry, the blade sparking against the drake’s scales with a screech of metal on stone. “Back, you scaly beast. You’ll not take us!”

A talon raked across his chest, tearing leather and drawing a hot line of blood that seeped through his coat, staining the black crimson. Killian staggered but didn’t fall, his jaw clenched against the pain.

Rumpelstiltskin's collapse curse struck in the chaos — a dark ripple of magic buckling the wreck's planks with a groan, threatening to splinter them beneath their feet. The deck tilted violently, sending Smee sprawling.

Desylva's thunder cracked, a jagged bolt of her storm magic slamming into the drake and stunning it mid-lunge. Her cursed mark flared bright, a vivid blue glow illuminating her fierce gray eyes. "Up, Killian — now, before it breaks apart!"

She darted forward across the tilting deck, her dagger sinking deep into the drake's flank. Ichor sprayed like black rain across the waves. Her gusts surged, a wall of wind breaking the curse's hold and steadying the deck as it rocked beneath them.

Jolly Roger

A burst of lightning lit the wreck, revealing the drake's massive form rearing above Killian and Desylva. Billy saw it first from the crow's nest, torch sputtering wildly in the wind. "Jack! Beast's up. It's huge!" he shouted, voice cracking with urgency.

One-Eyed Jack didn't hesitate. "I see it!" he barked, swinging the cannon into position. The Roger pitched under a heavy swell. He planted his boots and fired.

The cannon boomed, a thunderous blast that echoed across the reef. The shot streaked through the storm-lit air and slammed into the drake's wing with a crack of splintering scale.

Black Tom moved the instant the cannon fired. Silent as ever, he hurled his harpoon with brutal precision. The barbed tip struck the drake's wing with a wet thud, ichor spraying as the tethered line snapped taut. He planted his boots, holding the line firm, muscles coiled like iron.

Billy clung to the rigging, eyes wide. "Hit it again, Jack! Tom's got it pinned!" One Eyed Jack reloaded with a growl, rain hammering his shoulders. "Hold it steady, lad — Cap'n'll need the opening!"

The Roger groaned under the storm's fury, lanterns swinging in frantic arcs as the crew braced themselves. Runes along her hull flickered, responding to the surge of magic and chaos erupting across the reef.

One-Eyed Jack's cannon thundered once more, Black Tom's harpoon line strained, and the crew held fast — answering Killian's battle with their own.

Wrecked Ship

Desylva's lightning felled the drake with a final, shuddering crash, its massive body sending waves surging high. Their rhythm was a dance — danger a spark that lit their fire. Killian steadied himself with a fierce grin through the pain. "Well struck, love." Desylva's hand brushed his arm, breath ragged. "Let's finish this."

A sharp jerk rippled through the wreck as Black Tom hauled the harpoon line from the Roger. The drake's wing wrenched sideways, its balance breaking with a guttural snarl. Killian's eyes flicked toward the Roger, catching Black Tom's silhouette braced at the rail, muscles straining as he reeled the beast toward open water.

"Good lad," Killian growled, gripping his cutlass tighter. Desylva's storm-mark flared in answer, her gray eyes narrowing.

The wreck's hold yawned before them like the jaws of some ancient leviathan — dark, dripping, and hungry. Seawater trickled down warped timbers in thin rivulets. Kelp curtains swayed like ghostly fingers, brushing their boots as they approached. The air was thick with salt-soaked rot and the faint metallic tang of old blood.

Smee clung to a dangling length of rigging that hung from the collapsed ceiling, his stout frame trembling as he peered into the gloom. "Into that maw? It's a tomb waitin' to claim us!"

Killian hauled him forward with a firm grip on his collar, his hook glinting as he steadied himself against a splintered support post, his voice a low growl over the wind, "Move, Smee, or I'll toss you in myself!"

Desylva's boots crunched on splintered planks. Her dagger sliced through a tangle of kelp with a wet snap. Her storm simmered beneath her skin, gray eyes flicking to Killian with a spark of defiance. Her cloak trailed water as she moved with a predator's grace.

Regina's despair curse struck without warning — a cold, suffocating weight sinking into Desylva's mind like lead. Her gray eyes dimmed, knees buckling as memories clawed free: chains rattling in a tower, a storm she couldn't reach, a sky she once feared she'd never touch again. She sank to one knee with a gasp, dagger slipping from her hand.

Killian caught her instantly, fingers rough but warm around hers, his voice a lifeline cutting through the curse's haze, "Stay with me, love. You're stronger than this. Fight it."

Desylva's thunder rumbled low — a defiant pulse that shook the wreck. Rain burst from her in a sudden downpour, breaking the curse's grip. Her storm-mark pulsed brighter. She rose, gaze snapping clear, breath steadying. "I'm here. Let's keep goin'."

Smee's nervous chatter faded into awe. "Blimey… she's a force."

A kelp wraith rose from the shadows, its form woven of writhing tendrils, eyes glowing with Rumpelstiltskin's vertigo curse.

Killian spun as the world tilted, horizon twisting, planks rolling beneath his boots. "Bloody weed — hold fast!" He stumbled, hook slashing wildly at the air. Desylva's gusts pinned the wraith against the timbers. Her lightning shattered the curse with a crack that echoed through the hold. Rain washed away the ichor as she pulled Killian upright, grip firm. "Got you. Keep your feet — we're not done." Killian's blue eyes cleared, locking with hers. "Aye. Anchoring me again."

The wraith fell, tendrils crumbling into the water. Her storm a shield. His sea a blade. Together they cut through the dark. The crown's gleam flickered deeper within — a golden promise pulling them on.

The hold narrowed into a claustrophobic passageway. Rotted timbers creaked underfoot. Water pooled ankle-deep, sloshing with each step, icy chill seeping through their boots. Barnacles clung to the walls, jagged shells glinting in the faint light of Smee's trembling lantern, casting shadows that danced like specters.

Smee hunched as he clutched the light, his voice a whisper. "This ain't no ship. It's a bloody crypt, Cap'n. Bones and all."

Killian's cutlass scraped a beam as he led, black coat brushing Desylva's arm, hook tapping a rhythm against the wood. Rumpelstiltskin's blaze curse ignited without warning — fireballs raining from the shadows above. Sparks hissed as they struck wet planks. Flames flared briefly before Desylva's rain doused them.

Smee yelped, ducking a stray blaze that singed his coat. "Ow. Hot, hot!" Killian shielded Desylva with his body, coat smoldering.

Then he saw it. The Storm Crown. "There it is!" he shouted, voice fierce.

The crown rested on a skeletal throne at the passageway's end — a helm of gold veined with living lightning. Its glow pulsed like a living heartbeat, casting jagged shadows across the warped beams. The throne itself was fused to the wreck, ribs of bone and timber interwoven as though the sea had claimed the pirate king and refused to let him go. Strands of kelp draped the throne like tattered regalia, swaying with each breath of the storm.

Desylva's gray eyes locked on it, storm surging. "Killian — go. I'll cover you."

Killian moved — boots slipping on slick planks as he advanced toward the throne. But before he could reach it, a storm wraith materialized from the damp air, vaporous form swirling, eyes crackling with Regina's trance curse.

Killian spun back toward Desylva, instinct pulling him away from the crown. "Wraith!" he barked, cutlass rising.

The curse hit Desylva like a wave. Her senses blurred. Her voice faltered. “Where are you…?” Killian’s hand found hers, grip steadying. “Right here, love. Focus on me.”

Thunder roared — a deafening crack that shook the wreck. Rain doused the curse in a torrent. Her dagger slashed. Killian’s hook pierced.

The wraith wailed, form dissipating into mist. Lightning arced from the crown, scorching the deck with a sizzling hiss.

Killian turned back toward the throne, breath sharp, determination burning in his eyes. “No more interruptions.” He lunged. His boots hammered across the slick planks as he reached the skeletal throne. His hook snagged the edge with a metallic clink that echoed through the stifling gloom. The crown’s lightning veins flared, reacting to his touch — testing him, tasting him. Sparks danced along his fingers like captured stars. The golden glow bathing his black leather coat in a molten sheen

His grin widened, blue eyes blazing. With a triumphant roar that rivaled the tempest outside, he tore the crown free.

It pulsed in his grip — a radiant surge of storm-fire casting molten gold across his scarred face. The air crackled with unbound power, the wreck groaning as the timbers split under the storm’s weight.

Desylva’s gusts surged, shielding him from falling debris. “Move! Wreck’s breaking apart!”

Jolly Roger

The Jolly Roger shuddered as the wreck began to collapse, a deep groan rolling across the reef like the death-cry of a sinking titan. Lanterns swung wildly, casting frantic arcs of light across the deck. Waves slammed her hull, lanterns swinging in wild arcs as the storm tightened its grip.

Billy clung to the crow’s nest, torch sputtering in the wind. “Jack! Wreck’s givin’ way — Cap’n’s movin’!” he shouted, voice tight with urgency.

One-Eyed Jack already had the cannon angled toward the collapsing hull, rain hammering his shoulders. He fired — the cannon boomed, a thunderous retort that echoed across the Tempest Isles. The shot slammed into a jutting beam, blasting it aside as the wreck buckled inward.

Black Tom moved the instant the cannon fired. Silent as ever, he hurled his harpoon with brutal precision. The barbed tip grazed a shadowed spar, the tethered line snapping taut as he braced himself, muscles coiled. With a sharp pull, he recalled the harpoon, ripping loose a collapsing timber that threatened to seal the trio inside.

Billy leaned out from the rigging, eyes wide. “Deck’s splittin’ — they’ll be comin’ back any second!” One-Eyed Jack’s jaw tightened as he scanned the collapsing wreck. “Aye. Keep watch, lad. Clear what you can.”

The Roger groaned under the storm’s fury, runes along her hull flickering as she fought the tide. Waves slammed her sides, spray lashing across the deck. The crew braced themselves ready to support Killian and Desylva’s escape if needed as the wreck died.

Black Tom’s recalled harpoon clattered against the rail. Billy’s torch flared. One-Eyed Jack steadied the cannon for another clearing shot.

The Roger stood ready — a steadfast guardian in the tempest, as the wreck began to die.

Wrecked Ship

Desylva’s storm flared as they burst onto the wreck’s main deck, a wall of wind and rain holding the chaos at bay. The Storm Crown pulsed in Killian’s grip, its lightning-veined gold casting jagged shadows across the splintered planks — a prize torn from the Isles’ depths by their unbreakable bond.

The wreck groaned beneath them, timbers shuddering as seawater poured through the gaps. Smee stumbled forward, boots slipping on the slick boards. “Cap’n — the whole place is comin’ apart!”

Killian’s blue eyes swept the deck, jaw tight. “Aye. But we’re not alone.”

The sea beside the wreck bulged.

A maelstrom serpent surged halfway from the flooded depths — not fully breaching, but enough to reveal a massive coil slick with brine, scales black as midnight shimmering with an oily sheen in the lightning’s sporadic glow. Its sinuous body twisted through the water with a grace that belied its menace. Venom dripped from its fangs, sizzling where it met the waves. Its eyes glowed an eerie green, twin beacons of malice fixed on the trio — fixed on the crown. Its hiss cut through the storm’s roar like a blade. The sound crawled across the deck, raising gooseflesh.

Smee scrambled backward, nearly toppling over the rail. “Another beast, Cap’n. We’re cursed!” Desylva’s storm curled protectively around them, her gray eyes narrowing. “It’s not after us.” Killian lifted the crown slightly, lightning crawling across its surface. “Aye. It’s after this.”

Regina’s venom curse struck without warning — a sharp echo of magic lashing Desylva’s arm. A searing burn raced up her skin, her leather cloak smoking where the venom’s echo touched. Her storm-mark flickered erratically. She gritted her teeth. “Damn her… won’t stop me.”

Her storm shuddered, then steadied — a low rumble of thunder rolling through her as she forced the venom’s echo back. Rain beaded along her arm, cooling the burn, her storm-mark brightening to a steady blue. She drew a sharp breath, shoulders squaring as the curse’s grip broke.

Killian moved to her side, his hand closing around her forearm, rough and steady. His touch grounded her storm, the thunder in her chest easing under the warmth of his voice. “Easy now, love. I’ve got you.” Her breath hitched, the burn fading as her storm-mark steadied beneath his grip.

The serpent dipped beneath the waves, circling the wreck in a tightening spiral. The water churned as its massive coils brushed the hull below, testing the timbers, drawn to the crown’s stolen power and enraged by its theft.

Smee clutched a rope, voice trembling. “Help, oh gods… help us…” Desylva steadied herself, storm simmering. “Killian… it’s gatherin’ strength.” Killian’s jaw set. “Aye. And when it rises — we’ll be ready.”

The serpent’s shadow passed beneath the deck — vast, ancient, coiling. The wreck shuddered. The sea went still. Too still. Something moved beneath the waves — rising, gathering, waiting.

Jolly Roger

The Jolly Roger lurched as the serpent’s shadow swept beneath her hull, the sea rising in a violent swell that slammed against her sides. Lanterns swung wildly, casting frantic arcs of light across the rain-slick deck.

Billy clung to the rigging, torch sputtering in the gale. “Jack — it’s comin’ round again!”

One-Eyed Jack angled toward the serpent’s last breach point. The shot blasted a chunk of the serpent’s tail into the sea, black ichor splattering across the deck.

Black Tom didn’t flinch. He hurled his harpoon with brutal precision, the barbed tip sinking deep into the serpent’s thrashing flank. The tethered line snapped taut as the beast recoiled, dragging him a step forward before he braced himself, muscles coiled. With a sharp, practiced pull, he recalled the harpoon, ichor dripping from the barb.

Billy’s torch guttered in the wind. “It’s angry — real angry!”

The serpent’s massive coil slammed against the Roger’s hull, rocking the ship violently. Runes along her sides flared blue as the Starward Compass fought to keep her steady. The deck pitched, sending water cascading across the planks.

One-Eyed Jack gritted his teeth, gripping the cannon's frame. "Stand firm! The Roger's built for storms like this!" Billy pointed toward the wreck, voice cracking. "Cap'n's still over there — we gotta keep it off 'em!" Black Tom planted himself at the rail, harpoon raised again, silent as stone. His eyes tracked the serpent's shadow as it circled beneath the waves, gathering strength for another rise.

The sea around the Roger went still — too still.

One-Eyed Jack's eye narrowed. "Brace yourselves. It's about to breach."

The serpent's shadow swelled beneath the surface.

Wrecked Ship

The serpent's coils lashed against the wreck, sending waves crashing over the splintered deck. The whole structure rocked violently, timbers groaning as seawater surged through the gaps.

Killian caught Desylva around the waist before she slipped, pulling her tight against him. His coat dripped with seawater and serpent ichor, his voice low and fierce against her ear. ""Breathe, love. I'm right here — let your storm settle. You've weathered worse."

Desylva's storm shivered, still recovering from Regina's venom echo. Her gray eyes flickered with pain, but she steadied herself, leaning into Killian's hold as her storm-mark pulsed a stubborn blue. "I'm fine," she breathed, though her arm trembled. "Just… need a moment."

Smee clung to a jutting beam, eyes wide with terror as another wave slammed across the deck. "Cap'n — it's tearin' the whole place apart!"

Killian's gaze swept the wreck, jaw tightening. The serpent's shadow coiled beneath them, rising and sinking in slow, deliberate arcs — not striking, but testing, waiting, gathering strength.

Desylva lifted her head, storm simmering around her. "It's angry," she murmured. "And it knows we have the crown."

Killian shifted his grip on her, keeping her steady as the wreck pitched again. "Aye. And it'll come for us proper soon enough."

The serpent's massive body brushed the underside of the wreck, the impact rattling the planks beneath their feet. A deep groan rolled through the structure, louder than before — a warning.

Smee whimpered, clutching the beam tighter. "Cap'n… I don't like that sound…"

Desylva's storm curled protectively around them, her breath steadying. "Killian… the wreck won't hold if it keeps hittin' us." Killian nodded once, blue eyes blazing with resolve. "Then we brace. And when the moment comes — we move."

Another coil slammed the wreck, harder this time. The deck lurched. A crack split through the planks near Smee's boots.

Killian tightened his hold on Desylva, voice sharp. "Stay close."

The serpent's shadow passed beneath them again — vast, ancient, rising. The wreck shuddered. The sea went still. Too still.

Something moved beneath the waves — gathering, rising, readying its next strike.

Jolly Roger

Billy hauled ropes from the deck, his wiry frame straining against the wind as the Roger pitched under the serpent's latest strike. Rain hammered the planks, the storm howling through the rigging.

“Cap’n!” Billy shouted toward the wreck, his voice slicing through the gale. “Swing back — quick! She’s goin’ down!”

One-Eyed Jack snapped his gaze toward the collapsing wreck. The serpent’s shadow coiled beneath it, rising again. “Tom! Keep that beast off ’em!”

Black Tom planted himself at the rail, harpoon raised, silent as stone. The runes along the Roger’s hull pulsed blue, bracing her against the storm as she held position for the swing-lines.

Billy’s torch sputtered wildly. “Cap’n’s gotta move now — the wreck won’t last another hit!”

Wrecked Ship

Smee clung to a line with desperate strength as the wreck lurched beneath him, a jagged crack splitting across the deck. Seawater surged through the widening gap, the whole structure groaning like a dying beast. “Cap’n!” he cried, voice breaking. “Let’s get free afore it’s too late! I ain’t dyin’ on a ship that’s already dead!”

Killian steadied Desylva with one arm, the Storm Crown tucked tight against his side. Her storm simmered around them, still recovering but steady enough to move. Desylva’s gray eyes swept the collapsing deck. “Killian… it’s givin’ way.” Killian nodded sharply. “Aye. Time to go.”

The serpent’s shadow passed beneath them again — rising. Testing. Waiting.

Jolly Roger

Black Tom pulled the ropes taut on his harpoons, the barbs still dripping with serpent ichor. Rain streaked down his scarred face as he braced himself for another throw. One-Eyed Jack reloaded the cannon with practiced speed, his eye glinting with grim determination. “Come on then,” he muttered toward the serpent’s shadow. “Try me.” Billy leaned out from the rigging, torch guttering. “They’re movin’! Cap’n’s gettin’ Smee ready!”

The Roger held steady, runes glowing bright as she fought the storm’s pull, waiting for the swing-lines to go taut.

Wrecked Ship

Killian darted to Smee as the wreck pitched again, the deck splitting another inch beneath their boots. Smee’s rope was still tied to a half-broken rail, the knot slick with seawater.

Killian’s hook slashed through the knot with a sharp twang. “Back ye go, mate!” he barked, giving Smee a firm push toward the swing-line. Smee yelped, grabbing the rope with trembling hands. “Oh gods—oh gods—don’t let me fall!”

Desylva steadied herself beside Killian, her storm curling protectively around them as the serpent’s shadow rose again beneath the wreck.

Jolly Roger

Smee swung across the gap, the storm whipping his coat as he hurtled toward the Roger. He landed with a wild stumble, sprawling across the slick planks. “Blimey, Cap’n,” he gasped, clutching his chest. “Me heart’s in me boots!”

Billy hauled him upright, half laughing, half panicked. “You’re alive, ain’t ya? Now stay low!” One-Eyed Jack kept the cannon trained on the serpent’s last breach point. “Tom — eyes sharp. Cap’n’s next.” Black Tom nodded once, harpoon raised, ready to cover Killian and Desylva’s swing.

Wrecked Ship

Killian turned to Desylva as the wreck groaned beneath them, another crack splitting across the deck. She was already untying her rope with deft fingers, her storm-mark glowing steady blue.

He untied his own, the Storm Crown draped securely over his arm. The serpent's shadow rose beneath the wreck again, closer now, the water churning in violent spirals.

Killian stepped close, hook curling around her waist as he pulled her against him. His grin flashed, roguish even in the storm. "Not leavin' without you, love. Together or not at all," he murmured, his blue eyes blazing with mischief.

She smirked, gray eyes sparking. "Then hold tight, pirate." She let her rope go, sending it whipping back toward the Roger. Killian grabbed his swing-line, arm tight around her as they stepped to the edge.

The wreck shuddered violently beneath them — the serpent rising.

They swung back on his rope, her cloak billowing, his arm locked around her as the storm swallowed them.

Jolly Roger

They landed with a heavy thud on the Jolly Roger's deck, the swing-line snapping back into the storm behind them. Killian's boots skidded across the slick planks, but he caught himself, one arm locked around Desylva as he steadied her against his chest. Her breath came ragged and warm against his neck, her storm still simmering from the serpent's assault. The crown's golden weight pulsed between them, lightning threading faintly across its surface.

Killian lowered his forehead to hers, voice rough with relief. "You're my storm, always, love — through every squall."

Her gray eyes lifted, exhaustion and fire mingling in their depths. "And you're mine. Don't ya dare lose that crown." Her cursed mark glowed bright, a steady pulse illuminating the rain-dark deck.

Smee let out a shaky chuckle, wiping sweat and seawater from his brow. "She's a keeper, Cap'n — still savin' us!"

The crew answered with rough, heartfelt cheers — men who had stared death in the teeth and laughed anyway. Billy thumped the mast with his torch, One-Eyed Jack reloaded the cannon with a triumphant grunt, and Black Tom stood silent at the rail, harpoon dripping serpent ichor.

Killian's grin widened, a roguish spark lighting his blue eyes. "Let's test this beauty… once we've got clear skies again — and the sea remembers who commands it." He tapped the rail with his hook as he handed the crown to Desylva, lightning dancing across the gold. Her fingers brushed his. "Together, then?" His breath warmed her ear, steadying her storm. "Aye, love. Always."

Killian guided her toward the quarterdeck, the crew parting for them as the Roger's runes pulsed beneath their feet. The helm loomed ahead, its brass fittings gleaming with storm-light. Beside it sat the reinforced chest — carved with compass sigils, bound in iron, built to hold relics of dangerous power.

Killian lifted the lid. The interior glowed faintly, runes awakening to the crown's presence. Desylva placed the Storm Crown inside, its lightning dimming to a soft, contained pulse as the chest accepted it. Killian closed the lid with a firm click, the sigils sealing.

"Safe," he murmured. "For now."

The wreck behind them groaned, splitting apart as the serpent's coils dragged the last of it beneath the waves. Planks snapped, beams folded, and the final remnants sank into the churning sea..

Killian gripped the helm, the Roger responding instantly. The runes along her hull flared blue, pushing her gently backward from the collapsing wreck.

Desylva stepped beside him, her storm settling into a quiet hum. "We should move clear of the reef." Killian nodded. "Aye. Let's leave this cursed place behind."

The serpent's shadow rose once more beneath the waves — a final warning, a last echo of the danger they had escaped. It did not strike. It watched. Then it sank into the depths, coils disappearing into the dark.

Killian turned the wheel three notches to port, the Roger answering at once as she slipped free of the Tempest Isles' jagged grasp. The ship began to glide forward, the storm loosening its hold as the crew settled into their stations.

The wreck vanished behind them. The waves calmed. The wind shifted. The Jolly Roger began her departure. The ship eased into the storm's calmer edge, sails shivering as they caught the first breath of open wind.

Departure (night)

The Jolly Roger glided free of the Tempest Isles' jagged grasp, her hull easing out of the storm's fading reach as the last echoes of the wreck's collapse sank into the dark. Sails swelled under a sky slowly shedding its storm clouds, tatters of gray drifting aside to reveal a deepening twilight, the first stars pricking through like silver pins in a velvet shroud.

The horizon shimmered silver ahead, an endless expanse where the sea lapped gently against the hull, waves glinting with starlight's fractured gleam. The ship's timbers settled with a soft groan, runes humming faintly as they finished mending storm-bitten scars, the memory of serpent coils and shattered planks fading into the night's quiet.

Lantern light pooled warm along the deck, swaying with the Roger's steady glide as she left the Tempest Isles behind, a lone banner of wood and sail cutting through the calming sea beneath a star-streaked sky.

Quarterdeck

Night wind tugged at Killian's torn black coat, salt crusting the leather, blood drying in dark streaks across his chest from where the tempest drake's claws had raked him, the sting dulled under the steady thrum of victory. Behind them, the Tempest Isles shrank into shadow, the last remnants of the wreck swallowed by the dark sea.

With the reefs behind them, he flicked the coral toggle on the Starward Compass, deactivating its arcane guidance. The celestial runes dimmed, the star-fallen needle drifting idle with a lazy spin, its siren-hum fading into the quiet. The Roger settled fully under mortal hands — his hands.

Killian opened the helm-chest and lifted the Storm Crown. Its golden veins hummed with latent power, sparks dancing along his fingers like lightning tasting the air. His blue eyes blazed with a pirate's defiance, the crown's weight a thrill in his grip. Lanterns swayed overhead, casting amber pools across salt-scarred planks as the runes along the deck pulsed faintly, mending the last gouges left by serpent coils.

Main Deck

Smee clapped Billy's back, sweat gleaming on his hatless head, his patched coat still damp with seawater and ichor. "Thought we'd sizzle in that drake's jaws, but we're still kickin', lads!" he crowed, swaying with the ship's gentle roll. One-Eyed Jack grinned, swiping the cannon barrel clean with a rag, its iron glinting in the starlight. "Next time give us a gale to strut through!" he boomed, his salt-flecked beard bristling with mischief.

Black Tom coiled ropes with quiet precision, his scarred hands deft, his nod a steady mark of victory. Billy's shanty rose bright and clear, "To crowns and gold, we sail bold!" The crew's cheers rolled out, rough and triumphant.

Quarterdeck

Killian's gaze slid to Desylva beside him. Her leather cloak hung heavy with seawater, its hem trailing rivulets across the planks. Her hair clung to her pale cheeks, framing storm-gray eyes that smoldered with a tempest's fire. Her cursed mark pulsed a vivid blue beneath her sleeve, syncing with the crown's hum.

His hook brushed her arm, its curve a cool tender graze against her damp skin. "That storm of yours could rival the crown." he murmured, voice dropping to a husky murmur.

Her nod was sharp, lips quirking into a fierce grin, her fingers tightening briefly on her dagger's hilt. "Rival it, pirate? I'll outmatch it. My storm'll leave yours beggin'. And if the crown thinks it can keep pace with me, it's in for a shock. You'll see firsthand." Her hand rested on his, her storm magic a restless spark in the air.

Main Deck

The Jolly Roger surged forward, runes mending a cracked beam with a soft glow, sails snapping taut against the starlit sky, their edges defiant. Smee scratched his damp scalp. One-Eyed Jack chuckled, mischief glinting in his eye as he polished his cutlass, its blade catching the lantern's glow. "That crown's a beauty, let's hear it roar!" Black Tom stowed his harpoon, his silence deepening as the deck pulsed with life, his dark eyes flicking to the horizon where stars met sea.

Quarterdeck

Killian settled the Storm Crown on his head. Its golden weight ignited a gust that swirled at his thought, lightning arcing through the rigging with a sharp crackle, illuminating the mainmast in stark relief. The sails billowed, the Roger leaping forward under the crown's first true breath.

Desylva's storm magic hummed in tune, her gray eyes tracing the sparks, her dagger sheathed at her hip. She leaned into him, shoulder grazing his, the air electric with their shared power. His grin flashed, roguish and warm, then he tilted his head as the crown's power surged through him, a tingling rush that quickened his pulse.

"I could get used to this. Being your equal. Fancy a contest? See who conjures the better storm," he teased, blue eyes glinting with challenge. Desylva's eyes narrowed, a smirk tugging at her lips, her voice edged with wild delight. "If that's a challenge, I accept. Prepare to take a beating."

Main Deck

Smee sputtered, clutching a rope, "A storm-off? Gods help us, we'll drown!" One-Eyed Jack guffawed, slapping the cannon barrel, its clang ringing out. "Now that'd be a show!" Billy whooped from the rigging, his freckled face alight, "Crown versus curse. Place yer bets!"

Quarterdeck

Killian struck first. He raised an eyebrow, the crown gleaming as a gust roared across the deck, dark clouds rolling overhead, their edges tinged with silver starlight. Lightning forked across the sky, jagged and bright, the sea churning beneath a sudden swell that rocked the Roger. The crew staggered, laughing and shouting.

Desylva answered with a smirk — soft, subtle — letting him think he had the upper hand. Her cursed mark flared. Thunder boomed. Rain lashed the deck in a fierce curtain, waves spiking higher than Killian's, their crests frothing white. Her storm wrapped around his, testing, pressing, rising.

Killian countered with a whirlwind, the crown's sparks spiraling into a vortex that rattled the lanterns and sent Billy swinging wildly from the rigging. "Ha! Thought you had me, love?" he shouted over the gale.

Desylva let him savor it — for one heartbeat. Then she struck. A blinding flash split the sky, her storm slamming into his with a force that rocked the entire ship. Rain stung like needles. Thunder cracked so loud Smee yelped and dove behind a barrel. The Roger bucked between their tempests, runes flaring blue to keep her steady.

Killian laughed, breathless, exhilarated. "That all you've got?" Desylva's grin sharpened. "Not even close." She unleashed a final surge — a spiraling column of lightning that wrapped around his whirlwind, swallowing it whole and exploding upward in a brilliant arc that lit the sea for miles.

Main Deck

The Jolly Roger bucked between their tempests, as the crew clung to ropes and rails. Smee yelped, ducking a wave that soaked his coat, "They'll sink us afore they're done!" One-Eyed Jack roared with delight, his eye gleaming, "That's the spirit, more thunder, Cap'n!" Black Tom braced against the mainmast, a rare grin tugging at his scars, his hands steady on the ropes. Billy's shanty morphed into a chant, "Storm and storm, clash and soar!"

The duel peaked — lightning and rain merging in a chaotic dance, the sky a canvas of their shared ferocity — until they both eased off, breathless and grinning, the sea settling under a shared drizzle. Lanterns swayed gently. The deck glistened with rain.

Quarterdeck

The horizon gleamed under a velvet night, stars glinting through thinning clouds, their light dancing on the calming sea, waves lapping like a whispered vow. Killian's blue eyes softened as they held Desylva's, her storm-touched intensity mirroring his own. Her wild soul had claimed his pirate's heart as surely as the sea.

Main Deck

Smee chuckled nervously, wiping seawater from his brow. "Blimey, ye're both gods now. Spare the ship next time!" Billy swung from the rigging, hollering, "No winner. Both storms rule us!" One-Eyed Jack reloaded the cannon with a grin. "Give us another. I'd dance in that!" Black Tom's slow nod fixed on the crown's glow, his silence a testament to their victory.

Quarterdeck

The Storm Crown pulsed in Killian's grasp, lightning bending to their will. Desylva's fingers grazed his, her voice a steel-wrapped vow. "Storm and crown — we command both." His hook rested near her hand, catching the lantern's light. "Aye. And together, we'll bend the sky."

The Jolly Roger cut through the sea, sails a banner of victory, hull humming with conquest.

A few hours later

The ship drifted into gentler waters, the last shivers of Killian and Desylva's dueling tempests fading into a soft drizzle that pattered across the deck. The sky, once split by lightning and wild with their storms, settled into a velvet sweep of thinning clouds, starlight threading through the gaps like silver seams.

The sea eased beneath the hull, its earlier fury smoothing into long, rolling breaths that carried the ship toward a quieter horizon. Runes along the planks glowed faintly, knitting the storm-torn wood with slow, steady pulses of blue, each thrum echoing the crown's distant hum below deck.

Salt-wet ropes swayed from the rigging, lanterns dripping rain as their amber light flickered across the mended scars of battle. The air held the lingering tang of ozone, a ghost of the storms the pair had conjured, now dissolving into the night like smoke.

The Tempest Isles lay far behind, swallowed by darkness, their jagged silhouettes erased by distance and calm. Ahead stretched open sea — wide, deep, and waiting — its surface glinting with fractured starlight as the Roger glided forward, a lone vessel slipping from chaos into quiet.

The ship breathed with them, timbers settling, sails easing, the night wrapping around her like a long-earned reprieve.

A few more hours later

The Jolly Roger dropped anchor in a sheltered cove, the chain rattling through the hawsepipe with a muted clatter before settling into the glassy water below. The sea lay still as polished obsidian, lapping gently against the hull in soft, rhythmic breaths that contrasted sharply with the chaos they had left behind. Starlight fractured across the surface, glittering like scattered diamonds drifting atop the tide.

Mist clung to the treetops along the wooded shore, thinning into silver veils that drifted between towering pines and cedar. Their earthy scent rolled across the cove, mingling with the salt-rich air. Fireflies blinked among the branches like tiny lanterns, their warm glow flickering in lazy arcs that mirrored the lantern-light swaying from the Roger's rigging.

Sails drooped slack, their storm-torn edges swaying faintly as the last traces of Killian and Desylva's tempest duel dissolved into the night. The timbers creaked softly as the ship settled, a weary warrior easing into rest after the Tempest Isles' wrath. Runes along the hull pulsed with a gentle blue glow, finishing their mending work with slow, steady breaths of magic that stitched the final splintered scars left by serpent coils and storm-born fury.

Below deck, the Storm Crown rested in the enchanted oak chest, its golden glow muted behind runed wards that hummed faintly in the quiet. The chest's sigils shimmered like starlight caught in woodgrain, containing the crown's lightning-charged pulse and shielding the ship from its restless power. The hum echoed through the hold like a distant heartbeat — subdued, watchful, waiting.

The cove embraced the Roger in stillness, the world narrowing to the soft lap of water, the whisper of wind through cedar boughs, and the faint glow of fireflies drifting like sparks of peace. After storms, serpents, wrecks, and wild magic, the night finally offered calm — a quiet harbor carved from darkness and starlight.

Main Deck

Smee sparked a fire in the battered iron brazier near the mainmast, coaxing flame from damp kindling until it caught with a crackle that blended with the cove's gentle hush. Golden light spilled across the planks, shadows dancing over the deck's enchanted runes as they shimmered to mend a storm-worn crack left by the Tempest Isles' fury. The brazier's warmth pushed back the lingering chill of rain, its glow flickering across salt-slick ropes and drying sails.

Rum flowed sharp and free from a weathered cask, its oak stained dark by years of spirits. Mugs clinked as the crew unwound, their laughter rising in rough, easy bursts — a brine-forged chorus that settled into the cove's stillness like a long-earned reprieve. The night air carried cedar and pine from the shore, mingling with smoke and salt to wrap the deck in a warm, earthy calm.

One-Eyed Jack sprawled against a cannon, salt-flecked beard bristling as he launched into a tale, voice booming with a grin that bared yellowed teeth. "Fought a drake once — bigger'n today's beast — nearly chewed me leg off 'fore I gutted it!" he crowed, firelight glinting in his eye. Black Tom sat cross-legged on a coil of rope, wiping his harpoon with slow, steady strokes, the barbed blade flashing in the flames. His scarred face remained calm, but his faint nod marked approval — or amusement — at Jack's embellishments.

Billy plucked his lute, its worn strings humming true beneath his fingers. A haunting tune drifted through the murmurs, threading between laughter and crackling fire, weaving the crew's triumph into melody. The notes curled like smoke, soft and steady, settling the last tremors of storm and battle.

Quarterdeck

Killian leaned against the helm, black coat unbuttoned, its torn leather revealing claw marks crusted with dried blood — a testament to the tempest drake's fury. Rum dulled the sting of his wounds, but the warmth in his chest came from something else entirely. Desylva. Her wild pulse beat in his blood, His blue eyes soaked in the crew's easy rhythm, the glow of firelight catching on their faces, their scars, their grins. They were alive. They were together. They had won.

Across the deck, Desylva's storm-gray eyes found his. Her cloak's hem still shimmered faintly with dried rain, her dark hair falling loose around her pale cheeks, catching the brazier's glow like embers in the night. Her cursed mark pulsed a soft blue beneath her sleeve — not wild, not dangerous, but steady, echoing the crown's muted hum below deck. A spark passed between them, wordless and sure, a vow woven in firelight and storm-forged trust.

Killian raised his mug, lips curving into a roguish grin. "To you, love — the fiercest storm I've ever weathered." Desylva's answering smile was small, sharp, and warm — a storm's edge softened by victory.

A few hours later - Main Deck

The deck had settled into a patchwork of snores, murmurs, and fading laughter. Smee's rum-thick snores rumbled from his perch on a barrel, a gruff counterpoint to One-Eyed Jack's occasional guffaws as he whittled away at a

stick with lazy strokes. Black Tom's silence anchored the night, his steady presence a quiet pillar beside the mainmast. Billy's melody drifted soft and slow, curling through the air like smoke, each note a gentle lift that soothed the edges of the long day.

Desylva sat by the brazier, its fire burned low now, embers glowing like molten gold beneath the iron grate. Her leather cloak's hem shimmered faintly, catching the flames' glow like a tide's ripple. Storm-gray eyes danced with the firelight, her cursed mark pulsing a steady blue beneath her sleeve — not wild, not dangerous, but alive, a quiet echo of the tempest she'd unleashed hours before. Its rhythm matched the distant hum of the Storm Crown below deck, muted behind runed wards yet still present, still watching.

She sipped her rum with slow grace, the mug tilting in her hand as she leaned back against a coil of rope. Her dagger rested at her hip, its blade ichor-free but scarred from the wreck's wraiths, the metal catching the ember-light in faint, jagged glints. The night breeze teased strands of her dark hair loose, brushing them across her cheek like a soft tide.

Killian crossed the deck, boots thudding soft on the planks, the lantern-light catching on the curve of his hook. His coat hung open, torn leather revealing claw marks crusted with dried blood — the tempest drake's parting gift. Rum dulled the sting, but the warmth in his chest came from the sight of her alone by the brazier, storm-touched and steady.

He tipped the cask over her mug, rum splashing amber in the firelight. "You've earned a double, storm-witch," he murmured with a teasing lilt in his tone, mischief glinting in his blue eyes. Her fingers brushed his as she took the pour, lips curling into a wicked grin. "Careful," she drawled, "might drink you under the table and steal that crown while you snore."

Smee stirred, rubbing his eyes with a groggy chuckle. "Thick as rum, them two — crown's just the start!" he muttered before slumping back into sleep. One-Eyed Jack, whittling a stick, winked over the glint of his knife. "She's his edge," he said, voice low and amused. "Keeps him sharp."

Desylva's laugh slipped out — rare, bright, cutting through the night like a bell. "Takes one to sharpen one, Jack."

Billy's tune softened further, curling around them like a lover's sigh as Killian settled beside her. The heat of her presence sank into his bones, warm as the brazier's glow. His hook rested near her hand, its cool curve grazing her knuckles. Her gray eyes locked with his — fierce yet warm, storm-bright yet steady.

She leaned in, lips brushing his knuckles in a fleeting claim, soft as a whisper. "Calm or chaos," she murmured, breath warm against his skin, "you're mine in both."

Killian's grin deepened as he leaned closer, his voice a low rumble. "And you've marked me deeper than any crown."

A distant flicker of lightning winked on the horizon — a soft echo of their prize. The crew's snores and murmurs wove into the night. Her storm pulsed steady in his chest, a rhythm he'd learned to crave.

A few more hours later

The cove cradled the Jolly Roger in a hush so deep it felt carved from moonlight. The sea's gentle lap brushed the hull in slow, even breaths, a lullaby beneath the stars. Mist drifted low along the pine-scented shore, thinning into silver ribbons that curled between cedar trunks, their silhouettes standing watch over the quiet anchorage. Danger lingered only as a faint hum beyond the treeline — distant, muted, irrelevant for now.

The brazier's embers glowed low, casting a soft amber halo across the deck.

Killian and Desylva slipped toward the companionway, moving through the ember-lit quiet with a shared, unspoken intent. Her storm-gray eyes shimmered with a silken promise, her dark hair swaying like a tide in the night breeze, her cloak trailing faintly behind her. Heads lifted as they passed, the shift subtle but unmistakable.

One-Eyed Jack tilted his head, ember-light catching his eye as the pair disappeared below. His whittling knife paused mid-stroke. “Cap’n’s takin’ his lass for a quiet dip,” he hummed, voice low and sly. “Sea’s in for a whisper tonight.”

Black Tom leaned on his harpoon, dew slicking his scarred arms. A knowing nod broke his silence, his dark eyes following the couple’s descent with the steady calm of a man who’d seen storms rise and fall. Billy’s torch burned steady beside him, its flame a small, unwavering beacon. His murmur drifted over the deck, soft as the tide. “They’ll stir the deep gentle-like.”

Smee, slumped against the cask, roused with a snort. He rubbed his eyes, blinking blearily at the empty companionway. “They’ll spark a squall below, soft or not,” he mumbled.

One-Eyed Jack pushed himself upright and doused the brazier with a bucket of seawater. The hiss rose sharp and brief, fading into the night as steam curled upward like a ghost. “Below deck, ye lot,” he growled with a smirk. “Those two’ll tease a soft squall afore long.”

The crew obeyed, drifting below one by one, leaving the deck quiet and still. The cove held the Roger in its gentle grasp, moonlight brushing her timbers as she settled deeper into rest.

The Jolly Roger lay silent beneath the starlit sky, her sails a pale banner against the night, the world narrowing to calm water, cedar-scented air, and the soft hush of a ship at peace.

Killian & Desylva’s Cabin

The cabin door clicked shut, the Jolly Roger swaying as a wave nudged the hull with a deep, resonant thud, the enchanted oak timbers humming faintly. The air hung warm and thick, steeped in the polished scent of oak, its grain smoothed by centuries at sea, laced with the wild spice of Desylva’s skin, jasmine and salt weaving a siren’s call that quickened Killian’s pulse.

The lantern’s amber glow swayed from a beam, casting shadows that danced across the cabin’s walls, their edges etched with faintly glowing runes that pulsed to mend a cracked windowpane, its glass knitting together with a soft shimmer. They kicked off their boots, the leather thudding onto the plank floor, salt-crusted soles leaving faint trails of brine.

Killian pulled Desylva close, his hand sliding to the small of her back, pressing her curves against him, her heat searing through his torn leather coat. His hook curved at her hip, its polished steel cool against her fevered skin, teasing a shiver that rippled down her spine. Her storm-gray eyes caught the lantern’s flicker, softening like moonlit waves, a tempest’s depth swirling within. He grinned, voice a low purr, blue eyes glinting with roguish hunger. “Caught you, lass, I’ll plunder this treasure slow and deep.” Her lips quirked, a spark flaring in her gaze, her voice husky with defiance. “Plunder away, pirate.”

His mouth brushed hers, a teasing nip blooming into a ravenous kiss, tongues tangling with fervent need, her silken moan vibrating against his lips as her dark hair spilled over his shoulder, snagging on his coat’s rough leather. He shrugged off the coat, its tattered weight slumping to the floor, revealing claw-marked skin, blood crusted over scars that gleamed in the lantern’s glow.

The lantern’s light bathed the furs strewn over the bed, the pelts gleaming, shadows rippling with the ship’s gentle rock. Runes along the bed’s oak frame glowed faintly, mending a splintered slat with a soft crackle, the wood knitting seamlessly. His fingers hooked under her cloak, peeling it from her shoulders, its damp weight falling with a whisper, revealing her tunic clinging to her curves, nipples taut against the fabric. He tugged the tunic over her head, her arms lifting as the cloth grazed her skin, exposing the smooth expanse of her torso, her cursed mark pulsing blue, a beacon in the dim. His smirk deepened as he knelt, fingers tracing her hips, unfastening her pants with deliberate slowness, the leather sliding down her thighs, pooling at her ankles to reveal the soft curls at her apex, glistening faintly with anticipation. “Disarmed and divine,” he murmured, lips brushing her navel, tongue flicking the sensitive skin, drawing a gasp.

Her storm magic stirred, a sultry breeze slipping through the mended window, tugging the air with a playful hum as the ship rocked like a lover’s sigh. Her fingers danced over his open shirt, tracing the hard planes of his chest, scars

tingling under her touch as she purred, “Rugged shores, pirate. Let me map every inch.” She unbuckled his belt, the leather snapping free, then tugged his pants down, the fabric rasping as it joined the pile, revealing his arousal, thick and straining, the lantern’s glow catching the sheen of his desire.

They stood naked, bodies bared, her gray eyes raking over him, a wicked grin curving her lips. “Board me, Captain, make the seas weep with envy.” He growled, “Oh, I’ll storm your gates, lass,” guiding her to the bed, his hook grazing her waist, its cold steel a tantalizing contrast to her heat as he eased her onto the furs, the pelts yielding with a lush creak.

Their lips crashed together, hunger softening into tenderness, his hand threading into her hair, fingers tangling in its damp strands, while his hook rested beside her, brushing the fur with a faint scrape. Her fingers roamed his back, nails grazing his scars, her touch a silken fire that drew a low growl from his throat. She slid her hand to his hook, caressing its smooth curve, her cursed mark flaring as she sent a warm current of storm magic through the steel, a tingling pulse that shot through him, his arousal twitching with heightened need. “Gods, lass,” he groaned, blue eyes darkening, “you’re playin’ with fire.” She smirked, stroking the hook again, another current sparking, “Burn, then, I want you wild.”

He shifted over her, his body poised, muscles taut with deliberate intent. “Ship’s ready to enter port,” he murmured, voice rough with desire, his tip brushing her slick folds, teasing her entrance with agonizing slowness. Her eyes fluttered, a moan escaping as she arched, “Dock deep, Captain, claim me.” He entered her slowly, his thick length stretching her, her molten heat enveloping him, walls clenching with each inch, a silken vise that drew a ragged groan from his chest. Her moan was a velvet cry, echoing in the cabin, her hips lifting to meet him, urging him deeper, the bed creaking as runes glowed to mend a straining joint. The sea’s roll synced with their rhythm, each thrust a deep, languid caress, her gasps threading through the air, the ship tilting with a rising swell, planks groaning softly.

Her hands roamed, fondling his shoulders, nails biting into his flesh, then sliding to his chest, teasing his nipples with a flick that made him hiss. “Steady, lass,” he teased, lips tracing her neck, tongue lapping at her pulse, “or I’ll make you ride this storm ‘til dawn.” She laughed, breathy and wild, “Ride it hard, I’m no tame harbor.”

Her magic pulsed, a warm mist swirling from her cursed mark, wrapping them in a jasmine-scented shroud, the cabin thick with their sweat and her essence, oak and spice a heady brew. She flipped him with a sudden twist, straddling his hips, her thighs clamping his waist, her hands pinning his shoulders as she slid onto him, impaling herself with a slow, deliberate grind, her walls gripping him tightly, a moan tearing from her throat. “My turn, pirate,” she purred, rocking her hips, her breasts swaying with each motion, as she rode him hard, pushing down with fierce intent, her slickness coating him.

His hand gripped one hip, his fingers digging into her flesh, guiding her rhythm, while his hook rested on her other hip, its cool steel teasing her skin as he thrust up, meeting her descent with deep, powerful strokes, their bodies slapping together, the bed creaking louder, runes flaring to mend. “Gods, you’re a maelstrom,” he growled, blue eyes locked on hers, her gray gaze half-lidded with ecstasy.

She leaned forward, her hair cascading over his face, and caressed his hook again, sending a searing current through it, the electric pulse surging through him, his heat throbbing inside her. He reacted with a hard upward thrust, driving deeper, her cry sharp and wild as she ground into him, her hips circling, walls clenching with desperate need. “More, Killian!” she gasped, nails raking his chest, leaving red trails.

He flipped her with a swift roll, pinning her to the bed. Her wrists trapped above her head in his grip. Her body arched beneath him, breasts heaving. Her cursed mark glowing like a storm’s heart. He paused, blue eyes drinking her in, hair splayed across the furs, lips parted, gray eyes blazing with hunger. “You are mine,” he growled, then thrust back in, hard and fast, his length plunging deep, her walls fluttering around him, a slick, pulsing embrace that drew a primal moan from her. He rode her relentlessly, hips snapping, each thrust a fierce claim, the bed rocking, runes shimmering to mend a splintered frame.

“Don’t stop, Killian!” she begged, voice raw, legs wrapping his waist, heels digging into his back to pull him deeper. “No plans to stop, love,” he rasped, lips crashing into hers, tongue plundering as he pounded into her, their bodies slick with sweat, the sea’s waves crashing outside in rhythm with their frenzy.

Her touch grew frantic, hands caressing his arms, fondling his back, nails scoring his skin as she climbed higher, her magic flaring, a gentle current weaving through the mist, the lantern's flame leaping wild. The ship rocked harder, a swell lifting it as if tasting her power. His hand cupped her breast, thumb teasing her nipple, drawing a shudder as he growled, "You're a storm I'll never tame." She arched, hair clinging to her damp brow, a wicked grin breaking free. "Tame me? … You crave the chase." Their need surged, waves outside roaring, matching their crescendo.

Her release was a shattering cry, her body convulsing, walls clamping him in a pulsing grip, her essence flooding around him, jasmine mist swirling as she shuddered under him, gray eyes blazing through the haze. Killian's breath seized, his thrusts faltering as his own release erupted, a guttural groan tearing free, his seed spilling deep, hot and thick, his body trembling as he sank into her, the bed creaking under their weight, runes glowing to mend a final crack.

Her fingers traced his chest, a tender glide over his pounding heart as she nestled against him, her voice a playful murmur. "You're my anchor, keeps me from blowing away." He chuckled, blue eyes warm as he tucked a strand of her hair behind her ear, his hook resting beside her, catching the lantern's fading gleam. "And you're my gale, keeps me sailing sharp."

The cabin settled, the ship swaying gently as the air cooled, teak and jasmine softening into the night. Her body fit against his, a perfect harbor forged by battles and love, the Jolly Roger cradling them in its embrace, the world beyond a distant whisper.

Crew Quarters
(*Simultaneous with the Cabin Scene)*

The quarters hummed with the clink of tin cups and the briny scent of fish stew, the air cool with sea mist seeping through the planks, the Roger's gentle sway a lover's cradle stirred by soft waves. Lanterns swung from beams, their amber glow casting shadows over crates and hammocks, the oak walls etched with runes that shimmered faintly, mending a cracked beam with a soft glow, echoing the cabin's magical repairs.

One-Eyed Jack leaned against a crate, his eye glinting as he smirked, salt-flecked beard bristling. "They're lovin' soft tonight, Cap'n's got her sighin' like a breeze," he drawled, voice low and sly, the faint creaks a tender murmur. Black Tom sat silent, scarred arms resting on his harpoon, a nod as the planks sighed with the lovers' gentle sway.

Billy, torch glowing, grinned wide, freckled face alight. "She's got the sea hummin' soft, and Cap'n's makin' her heart sing sweet!" Smee, slumped on a barrel, wiped rum from his chin, his patched coat damp with mist, chuckling nervously. "They're rockin' the ship gentle-like! Hope the bed don't mind!"

The crew chuckled, cups clinking, the waves' lapping teasing their banter, the sea's pulse syncing with the cabin's tender start. Billy strummed his lute, voice clear and playful.

Billy
Oh, the lass with tides so sweet and still,
She rocks the ship with a lover's will,
The waves do hum, the breezes glide,
For Cap'n's gentle heart's her guide!

Her sighs do rise, the seas do sway,
His passion lifts her night and day,
Their bed it creaks, her storm's the song,
Their love shakes the ship all night long!

The ship's sway surged with rising swells. One-Eyed Jack's smirk widened, his eye gleaming with mischief, "Now they're lovin' fierce, Cap'n's got her storm roarin' like the sea!" Black Tom's nod deepened, his harpoon shifting as the deck shuddered.

Billy's grin turned wild, torch flickering with the ship's tilt. "She's got the waves crashin', and Cap'n's makin' her heart thunder wild!"

Smee gripped the barrel, his chuckle edged with awe. “They’re shakin’ the ship hard! That bed’s takin’ a beatin’!” The crew roared with laughter, the waves’ roar drowning their clinking cups, the sea’s fury matching the cabin’s tempest. Billy plucked his lute harder, voice bold and bawdy.

Billy
Oh, the lass with tides so fierce and free,
She rocks the ship with a lover’s spree,
The waves do crash, the breezes wail,
For Cap’n’s fiery heart’s her sail!

Her cries do rise, the seas do roar,
His passion shakes her to the core,
Their bed it groans, her storm’s the song,
Their love rocks the ship all night long!

(After the Cabin Scene)

The quarters hushed as the breeze faded, the air settling with the scent of wet oak, the ship’s rocking easing to a gentle pulse, runes along the walls glowing to mend a splintered plank. Lanterns dimmed, their glow soft over the bunks the crew’s murmurs blending with the sea’s tender lap.

One-Eyed Jack stretched, his eye half-closed. Black Tom propped his harpoon by his bunk, scarred arms slack, a faint nod of relief, his dark eyes catching the lantern’s fade. Billy doused his torch, its hiss mingling with the crew’s snores, and grinned, “Aye, sea’s restin’, Cap’n’s fire hushed her sweet.”

Smee, sprawled on a crate, roused with a yawn, rubbing his eyes, his voice groggy but sly. “They’ve rocked the ship still! Bet their hearts are spent, and her song’s all sung!”

The crew chuckled, hammocks creaking as they settled, the night’s peace a soft gift after the tide’s caress. Billy plucked his lute, voice low and playful.

Billy
The sea’s gone tame, the waves don’t fight,
Their love’s a spark in the quiet night,
The ship does sway, so soft, so slow,
Their hearts entwined where breezes blow.

Her fire’s a storm, his heart’s the sail,
They loved soft and hard, no strength to fail,
Their bed near broke, their sighs did soar,
Their passion left the sea wantin’ more!

Billy’s final note lingered in the air, the lute’s string humming softly before fading into the ship’s gentle creaks. The crew chuckled one last time, the sound low and tired. Smee’s head sagged against the barrel. One-Eyed Jack stretched and tossed the last of his rum into his mouth. Black Tom settled into his bunk, silent as ever.

Main Deck

The stars burned bright and clear, reflected in the glass-smooth water beyond the rail. The Jolly Roger rocked gently at anchor in the sheltered cove. The sea whispered against her hull, calm at last.

Below, the Storm Crown rested within its runed chest in the hold, its golden pulse muted and contained, waiting for whatever storm tomorrow might bring.

For tonight, the seas were quiet, the storms behind them. The treasure was theirs. And the Jolly Roger slept beneath the stars.

Interlude: A Breath Between Storms (Day 245)

First Month (Day 245-275)

The Jolly Roger swayed gently, sails tight against the masts as she drifted across a silver sea that shimmered like polished steel. The air hung crisp with the bite of salt and the faint, earthy promise of winter creeping over the horizon, a chill that prickled the skin and sharpened every breath. Desylva's storm-touched presence had woven itself into the ship's very grain, as familiar as the groan of her timbers or the snap of her rigging in a gale.

Main Deck

On this sun-dappled afternoon, the deck transformed into an arena. Killian stood at its center, his black leather coat swaying with the ship's rhythm, his sharp jaw set beneath a roguish grin, his piercing blue eyes glinting with a challenge older than his years. His hook gleamed in the light, a wicked curve against the hand that gripped his cutlass. Desylva faced him, her leather cloak fluttering faintly, her dark hair loose and wild as the wind tugged it, her gray eyes narrowing with a fire that matched the faint blue pulse of her cursed mark beneath her sleeve. Her dagger twirled in her hand, a slim blade catching the sun as she squared her stance, her mark a low hum beneath her skin, stirring the air with a whisper of ozone. The crew gathered, their rum tankards glinting as they settled in for the show.

The sparring began with a clash. Killian lunged first, his cutlass slicing an arc through the air, the blade singing as it met Desylva's dagger with a sharp ring that echoed across the deck. Smee perched atop a barrel, his stout frame leaning forward, as he hollered, "Give 'im hell, lass, show 'im what ye've got!" his voice rough with excitement and a touch of rum. One-Eyed Jack lounged against a cannon, his grizzled beard split by a wide grin, his eye twinkling as he muttered to Black Tom beside him, "She'll have 'im yet, mark me." Black Tom, silent as ever, stood with arms crossed, his scarred face unreadable but his dark eyes fixed on the duel, a harpoon resting against his shoulder like a sentinel's staff. Billy, wiry and eager, clung to the rigging above, his freckled face flushed as he shouted down, "Go, Cap'n, don't let her win easy!"

The crew's laughter rolled like a wave, tankards clinking as they sipped, the scent of rum mingling with salt and sweat. Killian parried Desylva's thrust with a flick of his wrist, his hook flashing as he feinted left. Her storm sparked, a faint breeze swirling around her, rustling her cloak as she dodged, her dagger darting for his side. His grin widened, his blue eyes locked on her gray ones, a dance of steel and defiance unfolding under the sun.

The fight intensified. Desylva spun, her boots scuffing the planks, her dagger slashing upward. Killian blocked, his cutlass sparking against her blade, the force pushing her back step by step. His laughter rang out, a low, rich sound that mingled with the creak of the ship and the crew's growing cheers.

Smee clapped his hands, "That's it, Cap'n, keep her movin'!" One-Eyed Jack whistled through his teeth, "She's quick, ain't she?" Billy swung lower on the ropes, his voice cracking with excitement, "Watch her, Cap'n!" Black Tom's lips twitched, a rare flicker of amusement.

Killian's blade twisted hers aside with a deft turn, and with a sudden, fluid step he drove her back against the mast. Its rough wood pressed into her spine, the faint scent of oak and tar sharp in her nose as her breath hitched. Her gray eyes flared with mock indignation, her voice snapping over the crew's hoots, "You're cheating. Playin' dirty!" His wink was pure mischief, his face close enough that she could feel the warmth of his breath, his voice dropping to a playful purr, "I'm a pirate, love, what'd you expect?" His hook rested lightly at her hip, his cutlass poised, the crew's roars peaking as they sensed the shift. Desylva's lips twitched, a smile breaking through her scowl, her storm magic crackling faintly in the air around them.

The moment hung. Desylva's hand shot up, her fingers curling into the collar of his black coat, the leather cool and worn beneath her grip. She yanked him forward, closing the scant distance. Her lips crashed into his, fierce and unyielding, tasting of salt and the faintest hint of storm, a kiss that silenced the deck for a heartbeat before the crew erupted.

Smee nearly fell off his barrel, clapping wildly, "That's our Cap'n, caught 'im good!" One-Eyed Jack whistled long and loud, "Blimey, she's a fire!" Billy whooped from the rigging, "Took 'im down, she did!" Black Tom's smirk widened, a nod of approval as he raised his tankard.

Killian grinned against her mouth, his blue eyes sparking as he kissed her back, his hook sliding to her waist, anchoring her against the mast. Her storm surged, a warm breeze swirling around them, lifting her hair and tugging at his coat. Their blades clattered to the deck, forgotten. The crew's cheers washed over them like a tide, rum sloshing as they toasted. Smee bellowed, "Best show yet!" Desylva pulled back, her gray eyes glinting, her voice a low tease, "Gotcha." Killian's laugh was a rumble, "Aye, lass, you do."

The deck thrummed with leftover chaos, a wild hum in the air. Killian's black coat flung open like a rogue's banner, sweat gleaming on his brow as he swiped it away with a grin that could outshine the sun. Desylva slid her dagger home with a flourish, her cloak snapping around her like a storm's tail, and shot him a playful scowl over her shoulder, "Next time, I'll have you pinned flat!"

His laughter roared over the silver waves, a rich, rolling thunder, "Bring it on, love, I need the edge!" She slid close, her breath a hot tease against his ear, "Tonight, in our cabin, we'll dance that dance. Let's see who's pinning who, eh?" He leaned in, voice a husky growl, "Swear it, love, or am I dreamin'?" Her grin flashed wicked as she winked, "Oh, it's a vow, Captain, got the guts for it?" His eyes locked on hers, smoldering with mischief, "Bloody hell, aye, countin' the seconds!"

Smee waddled over, interrupting their moment. His tankard sloshing, his round face split by a grin, "You two'll be the death of us, sparkin' like that, heart can't take it!" One-Eyed Jack ambled up, clapping Killian's shoulder, "Keeps us warm, don't it? Better'n a fire" Black Tom resumed cleaning his harpoon, his silence a steady presence. Billy dropped from the rigging, landing with a thud, his freckles bright against his flushed cheeks, "Best fight I've seen, teach me that trick, Cap'n!" The sea stretched calm around them, a rare lull after months of chaos.

Killian's blue eyes lingered on Desylva as she moved to the railing, her wild hair catching the fading light. Time had carved her into his world, her storm a tide he couldn't resist. Her kiss lingered on his lips, a promise woven into their sparring dance.

The crew settled into their rum and banter, their captain and his storm a heartbeat in the quiet, the Jolly Roger rocking gently beneath them.

Later that night – Killian & Desylva's Cabin

The Jolly Roger shuddered under a merciless storm's wrath, monstrous waves slamming the deck, their frothy crests breaching the rails. Rain hammered the ship in a relentless barrage, a cannonade of icy torrents roaring against the blackened planks. The air hung thick with brine's sting, wet leather's acrid bite, and a primal musk clinging to Killian and Desylva's drenched forms, their breaths sharp in the chaos. The ship tilted, its runes flaring to mend the hull's strain.

Killian and Desylva staggered into the cabin, the door crashing shut with a thunderous bang, its runes flaring briefly to mend a splintered gouge from the impact, sealing the iron latch with a clatter like a gunshot. Lightning cracked outside, illuminating the cabin in stark white. Winds tore through the rigging with a banshee's shriek, the storm's fury clawing the ship as the walls' runes glowed, healing scratches from debris. The stern window, its enchanted glass etched with runes, trembled under rain's assault, a faint crack from a wave's force knitting itself shut, the glass glowing to pierce the fog. The lantern swung wildly from a beam, its amber flame casting jagged shadows across the cabin, illuminating the desk, its runes mending a gouge from a fallen quill, charts fluttering to the wet planks in a chaotic cascade.

His hand seized her hip with ravenous hunger, fingers digging into her soaked leather cloak, its creak mingling with the storm as he yanked her against him. His hook flashed, grazing her arm with a cool scrape, exciting a shiver as he tore the cloak free, its wet weight slapping the floor, revealing her drenched shirt clinging to her curves. Her fingers clawed at his black leather coat, peeling it off with a slick rasp, the sodden fabric pooling at their feet as waves roared, his shirt following in a frantic tug, exposing his sweat-slicked chest. Their boots thudded to the planks, the gritty rasp of salt underfoot sharp the ship lurching as they pressed together, skin fevered against the storm's chill.

His lips crushed hers in a molten kiss, a collision of rum-soaked heat and storm-charged fire, their tongues dueling with feral urgency, ragged breaths fogging the air as thunder boomed. His growl, a low, primal roar, vibrated through

her chest as he bit her jaw, drawing a sharp moan, her storm-gray eyes blazing with need. The ship lurched, a wave's thunderous crack tilting the deck, and Killian drove her back, pinning her against the wall beside the window, its icy glass biting her shoulder blades, fogging under her heat. His hook gouged the wall, its runes healing the splintered crunch as her fingers curled into his hair, tugging hard, her cursed mark flaring electric blue, pulsing with lightning beyond.

"I want you," he groaned, his voice slicing the storm's cacophony, blue eyes burning with animal lust, stubble scraping her cheek raw. His hand raked her side, tearing her soaked shirt free, searing her chilled skin, tracing her ribs with a bruising grip. The ship pitched violently, timbers creaking as a wave exploded against the hull with a hollow roar. His hand tore at her leather pants' laces with a frantic yank, the wet hide peeling down her thighs to slap the floor in a sodden heap.

Her fingers dug into his shoulders, nails piercing muscle, pulling a ragged sigh as she ripped at his leather pants' laces, the wet hide peeling down with a slap, his belt buckle clanking as the winds wailed. He kicked them aside, adding them to the growing puddle. Her hands grazed his hook, sending electric currents through its metal, a searing jolt that fueled his fire, his deep gasp of pleasure, eyes darkening, arousal surging, her moan thrilled by the pulse.

"I need you," she gasped, her voice a husky cry, trembling with desperation, her thighs snapping around his waist, heels grinding into his back. The ship bucked as waves slammed against the hull. His hips surged forward, entering her with a deep, shuddering thrust, his heat filling her with a searing jolt that drew a raw moan from her throat, her body arching to meet him, her sighs sharp with ecstasy, his feral growl resonating, their burning connection intensified by the storm's bucking.

His hips driving with a bruising force that rocked her against the wall. Fast and passionate, a storm of flesh and fire. Each thrust a deep, shuddering jolt that slammed her into the wood, its runes glowing to mend cracks. Her body arched to meet him with equal ferocity, ragged gasps tearing from her lips as her nails carved red furrows down his back. His hook pressed against the wall beside her, its cold curve biting into the oak as he braced himself. His feral growls, resonating with her gasping cries, ripped free, raw and wild, as he pounded into her

The deck tilted, the window rattled under the rain's relentless assault, its glass trembling, runes healing a crack, as thunder crashed outside, a deafening boom. The lantern swung like a mad pendulum, shadows twisting across the cabin. Her storm surged, her cursed mark pulsing brighter, a blue flame that cast eerie light across his sweat-slicked chest. Their rhythm syncing with the ship's wild bucking,

Lightning flared, bathing them in stark whites as their release shattered, a tempest of ecstasy. Desylva's cry a piercing wail, her body convulsing with waves of pleasure, her mark blazing. Killian's roar a guttural thunder, his muscles tensing as he spilled into her, their quaking forms clutching tightly, breathless. The bed's enchanted oak frame nearby glowing faintly, its runes ready to heal any strain. The ship steadied, the waves eased, the window's glass knitting a faint crack, its runes shimmering.

His chest heaved, sweat and seawater beading on his brow, his dark hair plastered to his forehead in wet, tangled strands as he scooped her up, his hand clamping her thigh, her legs still clamped around him, trembling with aftershocks, her weight a warm anchor against his frame. He staggered across the swaying cabin, his hook scraping the wall for balance, its runes healing the screeching mark, and laid her on the bed, its frame, carved with subtle waves, creaking under their weight, its mattress damp with storm's breath, runes glowing to mend a gouge from his hook.

They sank into the furs, her head nestled against his chest, his heartbeat a fierce, erratic thud beneath her ear, syncing with the sea's restless pulse, rain softening to a patter. His hook traced slow, possessive arcs across her hip, the cool metal sending shivers across her fevered skin, while his hand combed through her wet hair, fingers catching in the knots with a gentleness that softened the edges of his roguish fire. Their bodies entwined in a long, tender snuggle. Her breath warmed his neck, her fingers tracing his scars with a soft touch, his lips brushing her forehead.

The lantern's amber haze bathed the cabin, the desk's runes healing a fallen tankard's dent, the door's runes sealing a splinter. Their sanctuary a warm cocoon amidst the storm's fading wail, moonlight glinting through the healed window.

Her gray eyes sparked with a wicked gleam as she shifted with fluid grace, rolling atop him, her thighs straddling his hips, knees sinking into the bed's furs, its frame glowing faintly, runes healing a scratch, as rain lashed the window, its runes mending a crack. With one hand, she pinned his wrist above his head against the damp pillow, her other hand seizing his hook. She caressed its curve with a slow, deliberate stroke, sending electric currents through the metal, enticing him. A tingling pulse surged through him, drawing a sharp moan of pleasure. His eyes blazed with intense arousal, hips twitching, fire fueled. The hook vibrated in her hand, its charge thrilling her, a sigh escaping her lips. Her dark hair fell in a dripping veil, framing their faces, the cabin's walls shimmering as runes mended storm-induced cracks. The hull groaning under a wave's crash.

"Now I've pinned you," she purred, her voice a sultry growl, lips brushing his with teasing heat, reigniting his fire as the winds shrieked. His grin was sharp, blue eyes glinting with longing, "Aye, love, I'm yours, do with me as you wish," his wrist flexing beneath her grip, a playful test. The deck tilted as thunder rumbled. She smiled, fierce and radiant as a breaking dawn, and claimed his mouth in a slow, soul-deep kiss. Her tongue danced with his, tender yet fierce, a contrast to the storm's fury. Her fingers threaded through his sweat-slick hair, tugging gently. The lantern glowing, enchanted glass unmarred, walls' runes healing storm cracks.

She positioned herself over him, her storm-gray eyes locked on his, her breath hitching as she slid down onto him, taking him in with a slow, searing plunge, her moan a husky cry of pleasure, his ragged sigh mingling with hers as he filled her, their connection a burning ecstasy, the ship rocking with waves' roar. She rocked on him, her hips rolling in a deliberate, lingering rhythm, each movement a deep, pulsing grind that drew soft gasps from her lips, his low groans resonating with the ship's creaks.

Her hand guided his hook to her chest, placing its cool curve under her breast, gently cupping its curve as she rocked, the metal's chill against her skin sparking shivers of delight, her sighs intensifying, his moans growing deeper as the current sent to his hook pulsed through him, stoking their fire. His hand slid to her lower back, guiding her with steady pressure, his hook moved to rest against her thigh, its curve a cool caress as quiet gasps slipped from their lips. His thrusts meeting her rhythm, a hard, passionate dance that stretched long, their bodies swaying with the storm's muted symphony, rain lashing the window, its runes healing a faint crack.

They made this ride last, their pace building slowly, her grinding harder, his thrusts deeper, "Killian… harder, love…" she gasped, her voice a throaty plea, his response a feral growl, "Aye, lass, for you." Their moans quickened. The bed's runes glowing to mend a strained creak. The storm swelled, the hull shuttering as thunder boomed, rain lashing the ship, winds shrieking, waves pounding, the door's runes healing a splintered latch, the walls' runes sealing cracks.

The lantern swung like a mad pendulum, shadows twisting across the walls, their runes healing scuffs as the ship bucked. Her cursed mark flared electric blue, casting eerie light across his sweat-slicked chest, her hips rolling with relentless need, each grind a searing pulse that stoked their fire, his thrusts driving deeper, muscles taut with primal urgency. Their rhythm swelled, her breath hitching in sharp, needy gasps, his growls turning to guttural roars, the bed's enchanted frame trembling, runes healing a splintered edge.

As they reached their tender, shattering release, the cabin seemed to pulse with their ecstasy, a cataclysmic blaze that rivaled the storm outside. Her cry was a wild, piercing wail, her body convulsing in violent shudders, muscles clenching around him with a fierce, rhythmic grip, her cursed mark surging with electric currents that amplified her climax, sending waves of molten pleasure crashing through her, her thighs quaking, sweat and rain mingling on her skin, her eyes blazing with storm-born fire.

His roar was guttural, a primal bellow that shook the air, his release a searing, torrential flood, muscles trembling as he spilled into her, each pulse a fiery eruption that burned through his core, his hook gripping her thigh, currents tingling back through him, intensifying the white-hot ecstasy, their shared climax a prolonged, quaking blaze, their bodies locked in a shuddering embrace, nerves alight with aftershocks, the bed's runes healing a fresh gouge from their thrashing, the window's glass healing a jagged crack as rain sprayed in, the door and walls glowing with runes to mend dents and scuffs, leaving them breathless, collapsing into the damp furs, their sanctuary restored by enchanted magic.

They snuggled tightly, limbs entwined in a lover's knot, her head resting on his shoulder, her breath warm and uneven against his neck, her fingers tracing his chest with trembling tenderness. His hook traced slow, possessive arcs along her spine, sending shivers across her fevered skin, his hand cradling her cheek, brushing away beads

of sweat and rain, their breaths mingling in soft, contented sighs. They lingered, bodies pressed close, whispering soft vows, the bed's runes healing scratches, the walls' runes mending scuffs, the door and window restored, the storm outside fading to a distant wail, the Jolly Roger's enchanted oak cradling their smoldering bond.

But their blaze refused to die.

His breath steadied only to hitch again, his hunger surging like a rogue wave. He rolled onto her with a predator's snarl, his weight pinning her deep into the bed's furs, its frame glowing, runes healing a scratch, the mattress and linens cradling her, the hull groaning as waves crashed. His blue eyes blazed with a wild, untamed ferocity, stubble raking her throat, his lips kissing her fiercely, leaving a faint red mark, drawing a needy gasp from her lips that echoed the thunder's boom.

His breath gusted hot against her pulse, a scorching wave as he growled, low and savage, his hand clawing down her thigh, fingers bruising with a fierce claim as he lifted her leg high over his hip. The cabin's walls shimmering, runes healing storm cracks, the door's runes mending a splintered hinge, rain lashing the window, its runes healing a spray's crack.

"Is my pirate still cravin'?" she taunted, her voice a low throaty challenge laced with storm-born fire. Her fingers raking his chest hair, tugging to pull a ragged groan from his throat, her gray eyes daring, stoking his beast. "Aye, love, always," he rasped, his tone a guttural snarl, thick with primal need, the hull creaking. His lips trailed down her collarbone, teeth grazing her skin, drawing soft moans, her body arching, her hands roaming his back, nails digging lightly, sending shivers through him.

Her gray eyes locking with his, dark and daring, stoking the beast she alone could unleash, and touched his hook, sending a strong current through it, a blazing jolt turning him on, his wild moan, arousal spiking, eyes darkening, the deck shuddering. Her sigh of excitement mingling with his low moan, the metal's pulse a shared thrill, the window's enchanted glass healing a crack from a wave's spray.

His grip tightened as he pressed himself harder against her, his hook clamping around her waist with a possessive edge, its metal biting into her skin just enough to send a shiver through her. "Then stop starin' and take me for a wild ride," she commanded, her voice dropping to a seductive, velvet-edged growl, her storm raging in her eyes, the window glowing as lightning flashed. She touched his hook, sending a strong current though it that ignited his fire. Her body arched beneath him with a fierce invitation, her storm raging in her eyes, a tempest begging to be set free, and he was her lightning, her thunder, the spark that sent her soaring.

He grinned, a feral flash of teeth in the storm-lit gloom, and crushed his lips to hers in a bruising, devouring kiss. His tongue plunging deep, claiming her as his hips pressed closer, his heat teasing her entry, drawing a sharp gasp, her thighs tightening in anticipation. He entered her with a slow, powerful thrust, a searing, shuddering jolt that filled her completely, her moan a wild cry, his growl raw, their bodies trembling with burning connection. His hips slammed forward, each thrust a deep, passionate drive, that rocked her into the bed, its runes glowing to mend a splintered headboard crack, the walls' runes healing storm-induced gouges.

She met him thrust for thrust, legs locked tighter, heels bruising his back as she pulled him deeper, her nails clawing his shoulders, drawing thin blood lines, his growls turning to guttural roars, as his hand gripped her hip with bruising strength, lifting her to meet his relentless pace. Her cries wild, her cursed mark blazing blue. His hook slid to her lower back, its curve pressing into her spine as he angled her closer. Her gasps intensifying. The ship bucked, a wave's spray dousing them through a window crack, instantly healed by runes.

Their pace quickened, harder, faster, passionately, fiercely, clashing with a brutal intensity that shook the cabin. Their burning connection shaking the bed. Their gasps became wild cries, her storm surging to a screaming peak under his savage fire, his animal unleashed in her tempest's embrace. Thunder split the sky with a cataclysmic crack, the ship lurching as they exploded together in a shattering, earth-rending climax, a union of storm and beast that left the cabin trembling in their wake. Her wail a storm's scream, her body convulsing with torrents of ecstasy. His bellow a thunderous roar, his frame shuddering as he spilled, the bed's runes healing a strained creak, hull steadying, rain softening.

Their trembling forms collapsed, breathlessly, into the furs, sweat-slicked, pulses racing. Their bodies a tangle of bruised limbs and racing pulses, the air heavy with the scent of rain-soaked leather, spent passion, and the faint

ozone of her fading magic. Her head buried in his neck, her breath hot and uneven against his skin as her fingers traced the fresh welts on his shoulders with a tender caress. His hook clamped around her waist, possessive and unyielding, its cool edge grounding her. His hand cupped her face, fingers rough but tender as they brushed her cheek, wiping away a bead of sweat and rain, his blue eyes softened, the feral blaze dimming to a warm, steady glow as he pressed his forehead to hers, their breaths mingling in the stillness.

The storm outside ebbed, winds dying to a mournful wail, waves settling into a low, rhythmic lap against the hull. The ship's groans softened, its battered frame cradling them as the chaos receded. Her storm-gray eyes flickered open, meeting his, a quiet strength shone through the haze, her voice a hoarse whisper, "You're my tempest, Killian, wild and unbroken." He smirked, a faint curve of his lips, "And you're my fire, lass, burnin' me to the bone."

She completed him. Her wildness drawing out the primal animal that roared in his soul. He completed her, his fire lifting her storm to towering heights. The window's glass, fully mended, framed a sliver of moonlight piercing the clouds, casting a silver sheen across their sanctuary, where the sea's wrath and their passion had forged an unbreakable bond, the Jolly Roger swaying gently cradling their unbreakable bond.

A few days later

The night hung heavy and still, the tang of salt and smoke thick in the air as the crew sprawled around a crackling campfire on a jagged shore. The ship loomed offshore, swaying with the tide under a star-pricked sky. Flames danced across their faces.

Billy, his beard bristling like sea moss, One-Eyed Jack with a smirk sharp as a cutlass, Smee twisting his hat in his hands, Desylva, her storm-gray eyes catching the glow, and Killian lounging with his hook glinting on a driftwood stump. Rum sloshed in tankards, laughter rumbling over the snap of burning logs. One-Eyed Jack leaned in, his voice a sly rasp cutting through the din. "Oi, ye salty dogs, I've got a ditty brewin' 'bout that weaselly cur, Rumpelstiltskin." He hawked and spat into the fire, his voice dripping with scorn.

One-Eyed Jack
You're a sly one, Rumpelstiltskin,
A weasel in the night,
With a grin that twists like rigging,
And a heart that's cold with fright,
Rumpelstiltskin—you're a gilded eel with schemes so tight!

You're a trickster, Rumpelstiltskin,
Your deals are steeped in woe,
Spinning gold from straw's your racket,
But your soul's a dark tableau,
Rumpelstiltskin—you're a cursed imp we'd love to overthrow!

You're a foul one, Rumpelstiltskin,
Your laughter's sharp as steel,
With a dagger in your shadow,
And a pact no man can heal,
Rumpelstiltskin—you're a rotten knave with fate to steal!

Oh, the crew would sing your ruin,
If we caught you in our snare,
Rumpelstiltskin, you're a wretched fiend,
We'd sink you then and there!

The crew hooted and cackled, Billy slamming his tankard on a stone. "Aye, that's the slimy bastard! Slip through a squall, he would!" One-Eyed Jack flashed a crooked grin, tipping his head as the fire spat sparks.

Billy hauled himself up, knuckles popping like cannon shot. "Right, ye lot, time to sing the Cap'n's praises proper." His growl rolled out, brimming with swagger as he belted his shanty.

Billy
Make way for Captain Hook
Say aye to Captain Hook!
He's fierce with hook and blade in hand,
A pirate bold and grand,
He sails the seas with thunder's cheer,
The Jolly Roger's king right here!
With swagger none can withstand!

Captain Hook, mighty is he,
once Killian Jones,
Sails with a storm and a crew so free,
that's Killian Jones,
Raise up your grog, give a hearty cheer,
For the pirate lord we all revere!

He's faced the dark with steel so bright,
Our Captain Hook,
Cut through the foes in dead of night,
Our Captain Hook,
His hook's a flash, his heart's a flame,
A legend carved in every name,
The sea's own chosen knight!

So hail our Captain Hook!
The rogue who rules the tide,
With charm and grit, he leads us true,
Our pirate king with pride!

The crew roared, tankards clashing in a messy salute. "To Hook!" they bellowed, Killian tipping his rum with a devilish smirk, his hook catching the fire's gleam.

Desylva's lips curved, her gaze softening as it lingered on the flames. "Alright, you scurvy rogues, I've a tale to sing." Her voice rose, clear as a bell and edged with storm, weaving her shanty with quiet power.

Desylva
Look at this sea, isn't it grand?
Saved from the dark by a pirate's hand,
Wouldn't you think I'd flee dry land for good?
Out of the waves, broken and torn,
A hook pulled me up, a new life was born,
Rescued by rogues who'd misunderstood.

Part of the crew, part of your crew,
I chose to stay where the wild winds blew,
Accepted here… by scoundrels so true!

Look at her deck, timbers so fine,
Cap took me in, said, 'Lass, you're mine,'
Wouldn't you think I'd found where I belong?
Storms in my veins, magic to wield,
A family forged on this briny field,
Singing with pirates, my heart grew strong.

Part of the crew, part of your crew,
Learning their ways as the tempests grew,
Fell for a man… with a hook so true!

Up where they sail, up where they fight,
Killian's gaze lit my soul in the night,
His steel and smile, I'm lost in his sight!
Out of the deep, into his world,
Storm and pirate, our fates unfurled,
I'll stay right here… his tempest-sworn girl!

Silence settled, broken only by the fire's crackle as her voice faded. Billy grunted, swiping at his eye with a gruff chuckle. "Bloody fine one, lass."

Killian's stare met hers, a flicker of warmth softening his usual edge. She jabbed him with her elbow, her tone sharp but playful. "C'mon, Cap, don't skulk there all smug. Sing us yours." Killian arched a brow, then let out a low laugh, his voice rumbling like distant thunder.

Killian
Oh, the Roger's my lass of the deep,
Her sails catch the wind where the tempests sweep,
With a hull that's weathered a hundred fights,
She's my pride in the dark of the pirate nights.

Her cannons sing when the foe draws near,
A thunderous hymn that the seas all fear,
With a deck that's danced 'neath the storm's wild play,
She's my faithful steed on the watery way.

Through gales and squalls, she's held me tight,
Her timbers groan in the moon's pale light,
A ship of rogues, a haven bold,
Worth more to me than a chest of gold.

The Jolly Roger, my heart's first flame,
Carved out my path, gave me my name,
With hook and hand, I steer her true,
A pirate's soul in her briny blue.

But then came a storm with a lass so rare,
Desylva's eyes like the lightnin's glare,
Her magic calls, her tempests sing,
A wilder love than my ship could bring.

Now the Roger's my home, but she's my sea,
Her thunder's the pulse that beats in me,
With hook and heart, I'm hers to claim,
Desylva's storm, my eternal flame.

The crew sat rapt, firelight painting their awe. Killian leaned back, his hook tapping the stump with a faint clang, a ghost of a grin tugging his lips as Desylva's hand brushed his. Every eye swung to Smee, who flinched, "Oh, blimey, not me. I ain't got the knack. Billy's the one with the pipes." Desylva fixed him with a steady look, her voice firm yet kind. "Give it a go, Smee. We ain't here to judge."

The crew rumbled agreement, and Smee sighed, scrubbing his hands together. "Alright, but if it ain't good, ye keep yer traps shut." His voice wobbled at first, then steadied as he sang.

Smee
Yo ho, yo ho, the Roger's our home,
Her timbers creak as the wild seas foam,
We sail with Hook, our Cap'n so grand,
A pirate's life on the briny strand!

Yo ho, yo ho, a pirate's life for me,
With crew so bold and the winds so free,
Raise the flag, let the cannons roar,
A pirate's life forevermore!

The crew's a band of scoundrels true,
We loot and fight 'neath the sky so blue,
Cap'n leads with his hook of steel,
A pirate's heart is the life we feel!

Yo ho, yo ho, a pirate's life for me,
With grog in hand and the boundless sea,
Sail with pride, let the legends grow,
A pirate's life is the way we go!

So here's to Hook and the ship we ride,
The Jolly Roger, our joy and pride,
Yo ho, yo ho, 'til the tales are spun,
A pirate's life 'neath the moon and sun!

The crew burst into rowdy cheers, One-Eyed Jack clapping Smee hard on the shoulder. "Ain't half bad, ye old barnacle!" Smee ducked his head, a shy grin breaking through. "Well, I gave it a stab." Desylva lifted her tankard, her voice ringing out. "To the Roger and all us misfits!"

The crew echoed her, their shouts rising over the fire as the night stretched long, steeped in song and the sea's wild call.

2 weeks later

The Jolly Roger sliced through a choppy sea under a bruised afternoon sky, her sails taut against a rising wind. The deck thrummed with the crew's restless energy. Billy heaved a cannonball into place with a grunt, Smee scurried with a bucket of tar, sloshing it over his boots, One-Eyed Jack sharpened a cutlass with a rasp that cut the air. Black Tom leaned against the mast, twirling a dagger in silence.

Desylva stood near the rail, her storm-gray eyes scanning the horizon, her coat snapping as her magic stirred a faint breeze. Killian manned the helm, his hook glinting as he gripped the wheel, his dark gaze fixed ahead, a smirk playing on his lips.

The crew's chatter had turned to boasts. One-Eyed Jack claiming he'd gutted a kraken single-handed, Billy scoffing he'd wrestled a whale. The air crackled with the need for a song to bind them. Billy stomped his boot twice, thump-thump, and clapped. The beat echoing across the deck like a cannon's call.

"Oi, ye scurvy dogs, let's give the sea a tune she won't forget!" he bellowed, his beard bristling. Smee clapped along, nearly dropping his bucket, "Aye, Billy, somethin' fierce!" One-Eyed Jack joined in, his eye glinting, "Make it sharp, lads, sharp as me blade!" Black Tom thumped the mast twice with his fist, a rare grin breaking his silence.

Desylva turned, her voice cutting in, "Let's shake the waves, then, give me a rhythm!" Killian glanced down from the helm, chuckling low, "Aye, sing it loud, ye lot, or I'll have ye swabbing 'til dusk!"

The crew laughed, the beat building, thump-thump-clap, voices rough and wild. Billy stepped forward, his gravelly voice booming over the deck as he stomped and clapped, the crew falling in behind him, thump-thump-clap.

Billy
Matey, ye're a rogue with a hook so grand,
Steerin' through the squalls with a pirate's hand,
Blood on yer blade from a fight ye won,
Cap'n o' the Jolly, ye're the devil's own son!

He punched the air, mimicking Killian's swagger, then pointed at the helm with a grin.

Smee hopped in place, "That's 'im, our Cap'n Hook!" clapping off-beat 'til Billy shoved him straight. One-Eyed Jack swung his cutlass in a mock salute, growling, "Aye, blood and steel!" Black Tom thumped the mast again, nodding as the rhythm held, thump-thump-clap.

The crew roared together, voices rising like a gale, stomping and clapping in unison, thump-thump-clap.

All
We will, we will sail you!
We will, we will sail you!

Desylva spun from the rail, boots joining the beat, storm magic sparking faint lightning overhead. Killian leaned over the helm, his baritone weaving in, "Sing it, ye curs, make the sea tremble!"

Billy bellowed back, "Aye, Cap'n, we'll rock the bloody brine!"

The ship swayed as their voices shook the air, thump-thump-clap. Smee stumbled forward, bucket sloshing, his high voice cracking as he sang, the crew keeping the beat, thump-thump-clap.

Smee
Stormy lass, ye're a gale with a spark so bright,
Crackin' up the sky in the dead o' night,
Winds at yer call with a cursed blue gleam,
Rulin' the tempest, ye're a pirate's dream!

He waved his arms like swirling winds, splashing tar on One-Eyed Jack, who cursed, "Watch it, ye clumsy git!" Smee yelped, "Sorry, Jack, meant no harm!" Billy laughed, "Keep singin', ye fool, ye're on the mark!"

Desylva grinned, her mark glowing faintly as she clapped, "Aye, Smee, ye've got me pegged!" Black Tom thumped twice, his smirk widening, thump-thump-clap.

They continued, louder, the deck vibrating, thump-thump-clap.

All
We will, we will sail you!
We will, we will sail you!

One-Eyed Jack leapt onto a barrel, slashing the air with his cutlass, roaring, "For the storm and the hook!" Smee danced a jig, tripping over his bucket and sprawling with a laugh. Billy hauled him up, "Up, ye daft sod, keep the beat!"

Desylva's breeze whipped stronger, her voice soaring, while Killian's growl anchored the sound, thump-thump-clap. One-Eyed Jack stepped up, his growl cutting through, their boots stomping, thump-thump-clap.

One-Eyed Jack
Crew o' the Roger, we're a wild, rough band,
Lootin' through the seas with a blade in hand,
Fightin' through the dark, we'll take our due,
Roger's our home, and we'll sail her true!

One-Eyed Jack spun his cutlass, nearly nicking Smee, who ducked with a squeak, "Oi, Jack, mind me head!" Black Tom twirled his dagger, tossing it high and catching it, his grin sharp as the blade. Billy clapped One-Eyed Jack's shoulder, "That's us, ye one-eyed bastard!"

Desylva laughed, "Aye, rough as they come!" Killian called down, "True words, lads, you're a pack o' devils!" Thump-thump-clap. Their voices a thunderclap. Thump-thump-clap.

All
We will, we will sail you!
We will, we will sail you!

Billy stomped so hard a plank creaked, Smee clapped ‘til his hands reddened, One-Eyed Jack leapt off the barrel, landing with a thud, and Black Tom thumped the mast like a drum.

Desylva raised her hands, lightning flashing once, her voice fierce, while Killian’s baritone rolled like waves, thump-thump-clap.

Killian stepped down from the helm, striding to Desylva as the crew kept the beat, thump-thump-clap. He sang, his voice a low vow, her alto weaving in.

Killian and Desylva
Hook and storm, we’re a fearsome pair,
Sailin’ through the night with a pirate’s glare,
Take on the world, we’ll never fall,
Jolly Roger’s ours, we’ll conquer all!

He pulled her close, his hook at her waist, her hands on his chest as they finished together, thump-thump-clap.

All
We will, we will sail you!
We will, we will sail you!

The crew erupted, Billy whooping, “That’s the spirit, Cap’n, storm and all!” Smee clapped wildly, “Best shanty yet, aye!” One-Eyed Jack growled, “Bloody right, we’re unstoppable!” Black Tom thumped thrice, grinning wide.

Desylva laughed, “You lot are mad!” Killian smirked, “Mad and loyal, love. Best crew on the seas.”

The Jolly Roger surged forward, the sea churning as their song faded, the beat lingering. Thump-thump-clap. A pirate anthem etched into the wind.

Second Month (Day 276-305)

The second month crept in under a steel-gray sky, the Jolly Roger anchored off a rugged coast where waves crashed against black rocks with a rhythmic growl. The air carried the sharp scent of pine from the shore, mingling with the ever-present tang of salt that clung to the ship like a second skin.

Main Deck (Day 279)

The crew turned to the quiet labor of housekeeping, a rare pause that settled over them like a fog, their hands moving in a familiar dance of repair and renewal. Smee, mid-deck, took charge of the sails, his stout frame hunched over a pile of canvas spread across the deck, scrubbing, his gruff voice muttering, “These need a good washin’.” The sails fluttered faintly as they were washed, their edges curling like wings under the gray light.

Desylva joined the effort, her leather cloak, swaying as she knelt beside Smee, her dagger gently flicking off dried salt with a precision that belied her wild nature, her gray eyes stayed steady, scanning the canvas, her cursed mark pulsing faintly beneath her sleeve as a soft breeze stirred around her, aiding the work with a whisper of storm magic.

Killian watched from the helm, his black coat dusted with salt, his hook tapping the wheel’s frost-worn grain in a slow, thoughtful rhythm. His blue eyes glinted with a faint grin as he called out, “Keep ‘em taut, lads, those sails’ve carried us far, and we’ll need ‘em strong for what’s ahead” his voice carried the weight of command softened by pride.

Smee glanced up, wiping sweat from his brow, “Aye, Cap’n, she’ll sail true!” Billy tied off a knot, his skinny arms trembling with effort, “Tougher’n ever now!” The ship creaked beneath them, hull groaning as if in agreement. The deck hummed with the rustle of cloth, the Jolly Roger’s sails anew, a banner of defiance cleansed by its crew.

One-Eyed Jack and Black Tom labored over the aft-most cannons, their runed surfaces gleaming under a lantern’s flicker, slung from a rigging knot. The enchanted oak deck’s runes glowing faintly to heal scuffs, hummed beneath their boots, the hull’s pounded steady. One-Eyed Jack’s grizzled hands scrubbed a cannon’s barrel, crusted with salt and powder’s black residue, his eye squinting as he growled, “Smee’s scrubbin’ sails like a nursemaid, but these guns’ll roar louder!” His beard bristled with each swipe, the rag darkening with grime, his voice carrying over the deck toward the bow’s sail-washing crew. Black Tom worked beside him, his scarred arms flexing as he polished with silent focus, dark hair falling over his brow. His harpoon, runed and healing a nick, leaned against the gunwale, a dented rum tankard sloshing between them. One-Eyed Jack took a swig, his chuckle rough, “Keep ‘em shiny, Tom, for the next fright!” Black Tom’s nod was curt, his silence a steady counterpoint. The cannons shone, their iron frames primed for battle, runes pulsing to repel corrosion.

Killian’s hook tapped the rail in a thoughtful rhythm, blue eyes sharp, barked, “Clean ‘em good, lads, next blast’s gotta count, aye?” The hook glinted in the lantern’s glow, his command a spark in the chill air. Desylva approached, her leather cloak swaying, her gray eyes steady as she stepped near the aft cannons, her cursed mark pulsing faintly beneath her sleeve. A soft breeze, laced with her storm magic’s ozone hum, swirled around her, carrying her calm, edged voice, “They’ll fire true, always do.” One-Eyed Jack chuckled, wiping sweat from his brow, “Aye, with your thunder behind us, lass!” Black Tom’s lips twitched, a rare smirk, as the cannons’ shine reflected their labor.

Killian nodded to Desylva, his grin faint, then turned, his boots thumping on the runed deck, moving forward along the starboard cannons with Desylva at his side, her storm magic humming softly. They passed each barrel, Killian inspecting their gleam, their steps heading to where Smee’s crew tended the sails. The air buzzed with the clank of metal and Desylva’s storm, the Jolly Roger’s teeth bared anew, her enchanted heart ready to roar.

<u>Week 2</u>

Main Deck

After months at sea, their stores had dwindled, barrels of rum and sacks of flour nearly spent. Killian tossed a heavy coin pouch to Smee, his roguish grin flashing, “Stock her full, lads, keep us sailin’!” The coins clinked as Smee caught it, nodding eagerly. The crew descended the gangplank, its silvery veins glowing faintly to ward off rot from the drizzle.

Port

The dock was a chaos of creaking wood and shouting voices, fishmongers’ cries mingling with blacksmiths’ clangs, gulls screeching over rotting nets, cobblestones slick under urchins darting for dropped coins.

Smee led the bartering, waving a meaty hand at a vendor, “Ten barrels o’ rum, no less, don’t skimp me, ye scurvy dog!” his voice booming, coins clinking as he struck a deal. One-Eyed Jack bartered for cannon shot, his growl sending a nervous vendor scrambling, “Best ye got, or I’ll test ‘em on ye!”

Desylva scouted the town’s edge, her cloak blending with shadows, her storm magic crackling to mask her steps in the drizzle. Her gray eyes caught a thief eyeing their spoils; she pinned him to a wall, dagger flashing at his throat, her voice a low hiss, “Try again, and ye’ll regret it,” ensuring the haul’s safety. Killian’s sharp gaze swept the dock, his hook glinting as he nodded to a merchant, “Double the shot, mate, or we sail light,” his voice cutting through the din.

Later: Main Deck

Billy hauled sacks of flour up the gangplank, his skinny arms straining, boots slipping on the wet oak, teasing Smee, “Ye haggled so fierce, she’ll curse yer rum!” Smee’s laugh roared, “Let her try, lad!” Black Tom loomed behind, his silent bulk hefting crates of salted fish, their briny scent sharp.

The day waned as they stowed their haul in the hold. Rum barrels rolled into place, their oak stained dark and fragrant, flour sacks piled beside crates of fish and dried meat, the air below deck thick with salt and provisions. Smee clapped Billy's back, his round face beaming, "We're set, Cap'n, full belly and full guns!" One-Eyed Jack secured the cannons, his rag tossed aside, "Ready for a scrap now!" Black Tom stacked the last crate, his harpoon gleaming, its runes healing a nick.

Desylva stood at the main deck railing, wiping her dagger, her storm magic a faint hum. Killian joined her, his hook resting near her hand, "Good haul, lass, kept us sharp." Her grin was slight, "Always do."

The Jolly Roger gleamed under the steel sky, its scars tended by enchanted runes, its belly full of provisions, storms and steel ahead. The crew, a family bound by labor and loyalty, stood ready, their ship a fortress for the wild unknown.

Week 3

The Jolly Roger rode a restless sea under a sky streaked with crimson and amber, the sun sinking low like a bloodied coin tossed into the waves. Her sails snapped sharp in a brisk wind, the hull groaning as it carved through white-capped swells, a faint mist curling off the water to kiss the deck. The air thrummed with the tang of salt, the distant rumble of thunder a promise of storm lurking beyond the horizon. Lanterns swung from the rigging, casting golden pools that danced with the ship's sway, illuminating a crew itching to shake off the day's toil.

Main Deck

Billy lounged against a cannon, his pipe puffing smoke as he whittled a splintered plank, grumbling, "Bloody squalls comin', feel it in me bones." Smee darted past, hauling a coil of rope that snagged his ankle, sending him stumbling with a yelp, "Oh, not again!"

One-Eyed Jack perched on a barrel, flipping a dagger end over end, its blade glinting as he smirked, "Keep trippin', Smee, ye'll be fish bait yet." Black Tom leaned silent against the mast, sharpening a hook with a slow rasp, his scarred face shadowed but his eyes glinting with quiet amusement.

The deck buzzed with their rough chatter, curses flung like cannonballs, laughter cutting through the wind, as the crew shed the weight of hauling nets and scrubbing planks. Desylva stood near the rail, her storm-gray eyes tracing the darkening sea, her coat flapping as a faint breeze of her own making stirred the air, her cursed mark glowing faintly beneath her sleeve. Killian manned the helm, his hook gleaming as he gripped the wheel, his dark hair tousled, his leather coat creaking with each turn.

The crew's restlessness crackled like static before a lightning strike, and Billy's voice boomed over the din, "Oi, Cap'n, give us a tune afore the storm eats us whole!" Smee piped up, "Aye, somethin' to lift me spirits, me knees're shakin' already!" One-Eyed Jack snorted, "Ye've got no spirits to lift, ye sod," but clapped his barrel, adding, "Sing, Cap'n, let's hear it!" Black Tom thumped the mast once, a rare call to action.

Killian glanced down, his smirk sharp as his hook, "A tune, eh? Right then, brace yerselves, ye mangy curs. Here's one I've been workin' on." He activated the Starward Compass and stepped down. His boots thudded on the planks as he strode to the center of the deck, the crew parting like the sea before a prow. He swept his coat back with a flourish, his hook catching the lantern light, and planted his feet wide, his hand resting on his cutlass hilt.

"This one's for ye lot, and her," he growled, nodding at Desylva, who turned with a grin, leaning on the rail to watch. His baritone rose.

Killian (bold and brassy)
Oh-oh-oh-oh, aye-aye-aye,
I'll sail you down with a hook and a grin,
Oh-oh-oh-oh, aye-aye-aye,
I'll take the sea and I'll always begin!

He clapped twice, stomping the deck, thump-thump. The crew picked up the beat. Billy slamming his fist on the cannon, Smee clapping off-rhythm 'til One-Eyed Jack elbowed him straight.

Killian
I've got a ship of black, my Roger's my pride,
A blade in my hand and a storm by my side,
I'll loot the gold, I'll fight the fray,
No one can read me, I'll win the day!

(She's my spark, aye!)

She cracks the sky with a thunderous cheer,
A tempest lass, but I've no fear,
I'll play my hand, I'll steer her true,
Her storm's the thrill I'm sailin' to!

Killian swaggered forward, swinging his hook in a wide arc as if slashing foes, then spun his cutlass from its sheath, twirling it with a flourish before slamming it back. He pointed at Desylva with a wink, his grin wicked.

Billy roared, "That's the Cap'n, lootin' and lovin'!" Smee giggled, "Aye, he's got her number!" One-Eyed Jack growled, "Play that hand, Cap, win 'er over!" Black Tom thumped the mast, nodding as Killian paced.

Killian
Can't read my hook, can't read my grin,
I'm a pirate rogue with a heart o' sin,
Oh-oh-oh-oh, I'll take the win,
She's my storm, and I'm reelin' her in!

(Hook and a grin, hook and a grin!)

Can't read my hook, can't read my grin,
Through the squalls, I'll always begin,
Oh-oh-oh-oh, I'll take the win,
She's my storm, and I'm reelin' her in!

He stomped twice, thump-thump, and clapped, striding to the rail and leaping atop a crate. His coat flaring as he thrust his hook skyward. The crew joined in, stomping and clapping. Billy bellowed, "Reel 'er in, Cap'n!" Smee swayed, "Oh, it's catchy, hook and a grin!" One-Eyed Jack swung his dagger in time, "Aye, unreadable as the devil!" Black Tom's thumps echoed, his smirk sharp.

Killian
I've danced with death on a blood-red deck,
A cutlass flash and a foe's last wreck,
My luck's a bluff, my fate's a dare,
But with her gale, I've no despair!

(She's my spark, aye!)

Her lightning strikes, her winds do roar,
I'll chase her wild from shore to shore,
No curse can hold, no chain can bind,
She's my ace, the queen I find!

Killian leapt down, spinning mid-air to land with a thud, his hook slashing the air like lightning, then tapping his chest as if daring the fates. He stalked toward Desylva, his eyes locked on hers.

Billy clapped, "Dance with death, eh? That's our rogue!" Smee squeaked, "He's chasin' her storm, look at 'im go!" One-Eyed Jack grunted, "Bloody ace, she is, queen o' the seas!" Black Tom thumped twice, his rhythm steady as Killian neared her.

Killian
Can't read my hook, can't read my grin,
I'm a pirate rogue with a heart o' sin,
Oh-oh-oh-oh, I'll take the win,
She's my storm, and I'm reelin' her in!

(Hook and a grin, hook and a grin!)

Can't read my hook, can't read my grin,
Through the squalls, I'll always begin,
Oh-oh-oh-oh, I'll take the win,
She's my storm, and I'm reelin' her in!

He stopped before Desylva, spinning his hook in a taunting circle, then bowed low with a roguish grin, thump-thump-clap.

The crew erupted. Billy whooped, "That's the spirit, Cap'n!" Smee clapped wildly, "Best tune yet!" One-Eyed Jack growled, "Aye, reeled 'er good!" Black Tom thumped once, smirking.

Desylva laughed, stepping forward, "Reelin' me in, are you? Let's see you try, pirate." Her challenge hung in the air, her grin daring as she grabbed Killian's hand, pulling him to the deck's center. "Not done yet, love, sing with me," she said, her voice a spark igniting the wind. Killian's smirk widened, "Aye, lass, a duet to shake the timbers."

The crew hooted. Billy bellowed, "Give us a storm, ye two!" Smee clapped, "Oh, this'll be grand!" One-Eyed Jack leaned forward, "Make it wild, Cap'n, wild as her!" Black Tom thumped the mast twice, eyes glinting.

They faced each other, Desylva's coat flaring, Killian's hook raised, their voices weaving a fierce harmony.

Both
Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh-oh,
caught in a wild sea romance,
Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh-oh,
caught in a wild sea romance,
Ra-ra-ra-ra-ra, storms and steel,
Ra-ra-ra-ra-ra, hook and zeal!

They circled each other, Desylva stomping the beat, Killian clapping, stomp-clap-stomp. The crew picking it up, Billy thumping the cannon, Smee swaying with his bucket.

Killian
I want your fire, your thunder's might,
Your stormy soul in the dead o' night,
Lass, you're a tempest, wild and free,
I'm hooked on you, eternally!

He lunged forward, swinging his hook like a dance partner, then spun to face her, his hand brushing the air near her face. Billy roared, "Hook's got 'er, aye!" Smee giggled, "Thunder's might, crack!" One-Eyed Jack growled, "Wild lass, that's her!"

Desylva
I want your hook, your roguish grin,
Your pirate heart full o' glorious sin,
Love, you're my captain, fierce and bold,
I'll sail with you 'til the tale's told!

She stepped in, her hands sparking lightning as she mimed grabbing his hook, then spun away, her coat whipping. Smee yelped, "Look at that spark!" Billy clapped, "Fierce and bold, our Cap'n!" Black Tom thumped, nodding.

Killian
You're my storm, I'm your sea,
Bound in chaos, wild and free,
Through the gales, we'll never part,
A pirate's vow, a reckless heart!

They clasped hands, spinning in a tight circle, then broke apart, Desylva raising her arm, Killian his hook. One-Eyed Jack muttered, "Reckless hearts, aye, fits 'em!" Smee swayed, "Never part, oh, it's beautiful!"

Both
Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh-oh,
caught in a wild sea romance,

Desylva
Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh-oh,
I want your hook and your dance,

Both
Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh-oh,
caught in a wild sea romance,

Killian
I want your storm, you my steel,
my love, my wild sea romance!

They leapt onto crates, facing off. Desylva stomping, her magic flaring a gust, Killian clapping, his hook slashing the air.

Billy whooped, "Shake the deck, ye mad bastards!" Smee danced, "Wild sea, aye!" One-Eyed Jack roared, "Storm and steel, cut 'em deep!" Black Tom thumped twice, grinning.

Killian
I'll fight the tides, I'll brave the squall,
For your wild spark, I'd risk it all,
Your lightning burns, your winds do call,
Lass, you're my rise, my glorious fall!

He jumped down, striding to her crate, swinging his hook like a challenge. Billy growled, "Risk it all, damn right!" Smee clapped, "Glorious fall, oh, Cap'n!" One-Eyed Jack nodded, "Burns like lightning, she does."

Desylva
I'll crack the skies, I'll rule the waves,
With you beside me, no chains, no graves,
Your hook's my anchor, your heart's my flame,
Love, we're a tempest, none can tame!

She leapt off, landing before him, her hands sparking as she thrust them skyward, a crack of thunder rolling. Smee squeaked, "Crack the skies, look out!" Billy roared, "None can tame 'em, aye!" Black Tom thumped, eyes wide.

Killian
You're my storm, I'm your sea,
Bound in chaos, wild and free,
Through the gales, we'll never part,
A pirate's vow, a reckless heart!

They circled again, closer, Desylva's breeze tugging Killian's coat, his hook tracing her arm. One-Eyed Jack growled, "Chaos and free, bloody perfect!" Smee sniffled, "Reckless, oh, me heart!"

Both
Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh-oh,
caught in a wild sea romance,

Desylva
Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh-oh,
I want your hook and your dance,

Both
Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh-oh,
caught in a wild sea romance,

Killian
I want your storm and you my steel,
my love, my wild sea romance!

They faced the crew, stomping in sync, stomp-clap-stomp. Desylva raising sparking hands, Killian slashing his hook. Billy bellowed, “Wild romance, tear it up!” Smee clapped, “Best yet!” One-Eyed Jack roared, “Aye, hook and storm!”

Both
Storm and steel, hook and gale,
Sail forever, we’ll prevail,
Love me fierce, love me true,
Wild sea romance, my and you!

Killian
(I want your storm!)

Desylva
(I want your steel!)

Both
(Wild sea romance, it’s real!)

Killian grabbed a rope, swinging onto the rail, Desylva leaping beside him, her lightning flashed, his hook gleamed. Billy whooped, “Prevail, ye devils!” Smee swayed, “Fierce and true!” One-Eyed Jack growled, “Real as blood!” Black Tom thumped thrice.

Both
Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh-oh,
caught in a wild sea romance,

Desylva
Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh-oh,
I want your hook and your dance,

Both
Ra-ra-ra-ra-ra, storm and steel,
Ra-ra-ra-ra-ra, hook and zeal,
Wild sea romance, me and you!

They jumped down, Killian pulling her into a fierce kiss, her hands sparking as they gripped his coat.

The crew erupted, Billy roaring, “That’s the stuff o’ legends!” Smee clapping, “Wild and grand!” One-Eyed Jack grunting, “Bloody wild sea, aye!” Black Tom thumping twice, smirking.

The Jolly Roger rocked, the storm nearing, their song a defiant roar against the coming dark.

Third Month (Day 305-335)

The third month dawned cloaked in fog, the Jolly Roger drifting through a silver shroud that muffled the sea's restless murmur. The air hung damp and cool, heavy with the scent of salt and the faint musk of seaweed stirred by a sluggish tide.

Main Deck

At first light, Killian and Desylva stood together at the prow, the deck slick beneath their boots, his black leather coat brushed her cloak, its edges crusted with salt from months at sea, his hook traced the rail's wood, as he tilted his head, his blue eyes glinting under the fog's gray veil. "Still wild as the day you came aboard," his voice was a low rumble, teasing yet warm.

Her gray eyes met his, sharp as storm clouds, a flicker of amusement dancing within, "Wilder, you've not tamed me yet," her cursed mark pulsed faintly blue beneath her sleeve, her storm magic stirring the mist into a gentle swirl around them.

His grin flashed, roguish and unguarded, "Good, wouldn't have you any other way." He stepped closer, his hand finding her waist. Her lips met his, soft at first, then fierce, tasting of salt and the electric edge of thunder. Their kiss deepened as her storm rumbled, a gust lifting the fog in fleeting spirals, waves danced beneath the prow, echoing their rhythm.

The crew's voices drifted forward. Smee's chuckle broke the quiet, "They're at it again, lads, Cap'n's caught proper!" One-Eyed Jack's gruff laugh followed, "Aye, she's got 'im pinned." The fog hid Killian and Desylva from sight, but their silhouettes blurred against the mist.

Killian pulled back, his breath a warm huff against her cheek, his blue eyes alight, "Mine, lass." Her smile was sharp, her fingers lingering on his coat, "yours, pirate." Her thunder rolled low, a private promise as the fog thickened anew. The moment stretched, a stolen calm amid their wild life.

Smee's tankard clinked somewhere aft, "Best leave 'em to it." Billy's lute plucked a faint note, "Reckon they'll spark all mornin'." Black Tom's silence held its own weight. The Jolly Roger rocked gently, its bow cutting through the silver haze.

Killian's hand lingered at her side, her storm a warm breeze against his skin, steel and tempest. Their love a fire kindled in the quiet, burning fierce beneath the crew's knowing grins. A bond as unshakable as the ship beneath them.

A few days later

Billy stood by the mainmast, boots tapping the deck in quick rhythm as the Jolly Roger pitched beneath a brewing storm. Killian held the wheel on the quarterdeck above, Desylva beside him, her storm-gray eyes catching flashes of lightning as her magic stirred faintly in the air. One-Eyed Jack braced himself at the starboard cannon, tankard sloshing with each swell. Black Tom stood at the port rail, harpoon resting against his shoulder, steady as an iron post. Smee hovered near the rum cask mid-deck, swaying with the ship's roll.

Billy's gravelly voice rang out sharp and sly, a grin splitting his face as he launched into the shanty, the wind whistling through the rigging like a chorus of ghosts.

Billy
One leap ahead of the cannon's roar,
Gotta dodge the steel, keep sailin' free,
One jump ahead of the navy's lore,
That's the pirate's life for me!
Through tempest's howl and lightning's glare,
Her storm's the queen of sea and air!

A gust swept across the deck, rattling the rigging. Lightning flickered faintly behind the clouds, as if answering the verse. One-Eyed Jack stomped in time, tankard sloshing. Black Tom's harpoon tapped the rail in rhythm. Smee bobbed with the beat, eyes wide as the wind picked up. The Roger rolled with the swell, enchanted runes along her planks glowing faintly as she braced. Desylva's magic stirring the air as if summoned by the song.

Billy
Riffraff! Sea rat!
Scoundrel? Aye, that's that!
Call me what you will, I'll take my chance,
One leap ahead with a pirate's dance!

Rain began to patter across the deck, light at first, then steadier — a playful echo of Desylva's power. One-Eyed Jack barked a laugh. Black Tom nodded once, approving the rhythm. Smee raised his tankard in salute, nearly spilling it as the ship lurched. Lanterns swung in wide arcs, casting gold across the wet planks.

Billy (wink)
One leap ahead of the kraken's maw,
Gotta swipe the gold 'fore shadows fall,
One jump ahead of the cutlass' law,
Hook and storm, they claim it all!
She cracks the sky, he carves the fight,
Together they rule the stormy night!

Billy mimed Killian's hook slashing the air. Lightning flashed in the distance, perfectly timed with Billy's flourish. A low rumble of thunder rolled across the waves. One-Eye Jack whooped, slamming his tankard against the cannon. Black Tom's harpoon angled slightly upward, catching the lightning's glow. Smee clapped along, off-beat but enthusiastic.

The Roger pitched sharply, sails snapping taut as the wind surged. Waves slapping the hull as they swayed, caught in the rhythm.

Billy
Gotta run, gotta flee,
From the gallows' tree,
Her thunder's my shield,
His blade sets me free!

Through whirlpools and wrecks,
We'll plunder the decks,
One leap, one bound,
We're never pinned down!

The tempo quickened. A sudden gust swept across the deck, whipping Billy's hair sideways. Rain intensified, soaking coats and cloaks. One-Eyed Jack braced himself, laughing through the spray. Black Tom planted his boots, steady as stone. Smee yelped as a wave slapped the hull, splashing his boots.

The Roger groaned, timbers flexing as she rode the rising swell. Billy's voice rising over the growing gale.

Billy
Riffraff! Sea rat!
Scoundrel? Aye, that's that!
Call me what you will, I'll take my chance,
One leap ahead with a pirate's dance!

Thunder cracked overhead — deep, resonant, perfectly timed. Fists pounded the rails. One-Eyed Jack's laughter boomed. Black Tom's nod sharpened. Smee nearly toppled over but kept singing. The Roger surged forward, cutting through the waves like she was part of the storm. Billy's voice soaring over the storm.

Billy (throw head back)
One leap ahead of the hangman's noose,
Gotta keep the wind, let cannons loose,
With Hook's sharp grin and her stormy ruse,
We're one leap ahead. Set free!

Billy finished with a flourish, slamming his fist on the rail as the crew erupted in cheers.

A final crack of lightning split the sky — bright, sharp, then fading into drizzle. The deck erupted in cheers. One-Eyed Jack slammed his fist on the cannon. Black Tom gave a rare, faint smile. Smee hollered triumphantly. The Roger steadied, sails easing as the storm bowed to the song's end.

Billy tipped his hat, grinning at the soaked, rowdy lot. "That's our tale, lads. Killian and Desylva, one leap ahead o' fate!"

Two days later

The fog peeled back, unveiling a crisp night where a crescent moon sliced through a velvet sky, stars scattered like spilled treasure. The Jolly Roger bobbed at anchor, sails tucked tight, the sea a glassy mirror catching the moon's silver gleam. Aft, the crew sprawled over barrels and rope coils, their shadows dancing in the flicker of a small fire

Smee had nursed to life on an iron slab, he sat atop a crate as he spun his tale, voice booming over the crackling flames. "Caught sight o' a whale once, bloody beast, big as this ship! Swear it gave me a cheeky wink 'fore it plunged!" His hands flailed, rum splashing from his tankard, sloshing onto the deck.

One-Eyed Jack snorted, his grizzled beard twitching with disdain. "Horsefeathers, ye daft codger! Ye'd be wettin' yer britches 'fore it even breached!" His deep, gravelly laugh rolled out, shaking the air. Nearby, Billy's wiry fingers danced over a battered lute, striking up a jaunty tune, his freckled face splitting into a grin. "Belt it out, Jack. Give us a proper ditty!" One-Eyed Jack didn't hesitate, launching into a rough, hearty growl, "Oh, the sea's me wild lass, free as the wind!" Black Tom, usually dour, tapped a scarred hand on his knee, a rare spark of amusement lighting his dark eyes. Rum flowed from grip to grip, the fire snapping as embers spiraled skyward.

Smee leapt up, his legs wobbling as he kicked into a clumsy jig. "C'mon, ye salty dogs, dance with me!" he hollered, nearly toppling into the ropes. Billy sprang down, twirling with a cackle, his lute still humming. One-Eyed Jack's bellows rattled the planks, and even Black Tom's smirk stretched wider. Their voices swelled into a rowdy chorus, punching through the night's stillness. But as the fire dwindled to glowing coals, the revelry softened, the crew sinking into a warm, hazy lull.

From the helm, Killian and Desylva watched, her cloak draped loose over her shoulders, his arm resting easy nearby. Her gray eyes roamed the stars, storm magic a faint buzz in the air. "They're a fine bunch," she murmured, voice low and fond. Killian's grin softened, a rare warmth in it. "Aye, love. Ours, through and through."

The Jolly Roger creaked beneath them, the sea's gentle lap a lullaby, binding their ragtag family in blood and song, a fragile peace cradling them under the vast night.

Week 2

That calm held until mid-month, when a squall roared in from nowhere, shattering the stillness. The sky bruised black, clouds churning as wind tore at the sails, setting them flapping like mad wings. The ship bucked, waves smashing over the deck with a growl that swallowed Smee's startled yelp. "Blimey, what devil spat that up?!" he squawked, clutching his hat.

One-Eyed Jack lunged for a cannon, roaring, "I'll blast the bugger back to hell!" Black Tom snatched his harpoon, eyes narrowing. Billy, soaked to the bone, wrestled ropes into submission, his skinny frame swaying. Killian's voice cut through the chaos, sharp and steady, "Brace her, lads, hold fast!" Desylva surged forward, cloak whipping as she scaled the mast, boots skidding on slick wood. Her gray eyes burned into the storm, her cursed mark blazing bright blue against her skin.

Her storm magic erupted, thunder snapping like a whip as rain lashed down in sheets. Lightning streaked the sky, jagged and fierce, her power surging to meet the squall head-on. The wind faltered, buckling under her will, the tempest's fury crumbling as she roared it down. The Jolly Roger steadied, riding the swell as she slid back to the deck, landing beside Killian with a thud. Her hair clung dark and wild, breath heaving through the drizzle. His grin flashed, bold and bright. "My storm goddess, eh?" She met his gaze, steady despite the chill. "Yours, always will be." A final thunderclap rolled out, a victorious shout, and the crew erupted, drenched but alive.

Smee shook water from his hat, beaming. "A bloody wonder, she is!" One-Eyed Jack fired a cannon into the retreating storm, bellowing, "Chew on that, ye sodden beast!" Black Tom drove his harpoon into a wave's shadow, a grim nod of approval. Billy whooped, fists pumping, "She's our savior, lads!" Killian pulled Desylva close, his hook resting at her back, blue eyes glinting with pride. "Bloody brilliant, lass." Her gray eyes sparked, a wry edge to her smile. "Keeps us on our toes, don't it?"

The deck gleamed wet under the fading rain, the air sharp and clean. The crew rallied, voices rising anew. The sea sprawled ahead, untamed and eager, their saga alive in every gust.

Week 3

The Jolly Roger swayed gently beneath a velvet sky pierced with stars, the sea lapping at the hull with a soft, rhythmic hush, the air cool and sharp with the briny tang of salt, mingling with the faint musk of oak and the distant whiff of tar from the rigging. The deck glowed under a scattering of lanterns, their golden pools dancing across the planks, casting jagged shadows that flickered with the breeze.

Killian strode to the center, leaping atop a barrel near the helm with a flourish, his black leather coat billowing faintly, its edges frayed from countless storms, his hook glinting like a crescent moon as he raised it high, his hand clapping a crisp beat against his thigh. His blue eyes sparkled with roguish mischief as he called out, "Time for a tune, lads, let's show the sea what pirates we be!"

Desylva leaned against the starboard rail, her hair loose and shimmering under the starlight, her storm gray eyes glinting with a playful dare. She snapped her fingers, summoning a gust of wind that tugged at the sails and ruffled the crew's coats, a prelude to her magic's dance, her storm-mark pulsing faintly beneath her leather cloak.

The crew gathered round … One-Eyed Jack at the wheel, his eye a glinting ember. Black Tom near the mast, harpoon in scarred hands. Billy with his torch aloft, its flame spitting sparks. Smee fidgeting with his hat, his boots scuffing the deck … stomping in unison as Killian launched into a song his voice a rich, swaggering bellow that rolled over the waves like a cannon's echo.

Killian
Well, hoist the sails and hear me sing,

Killian belted, leaping off the barrel with a theatrical spin, his hook slashing upward as if hauling an invisible halyard, the crew echoing with a hearty, "Aye, Cap'n!" Desylva grinned, her fingers flicking to whip up a swirling breeze that snapped the Jolly Roger's flag taut, the wind whistling in time.

Killian
I'm the Cap'n, sea's my ring.

He strutted forward, boots thumping the planks, his hook tapping his chest with a metallic clink.

Killian
With a hook for hand and a grin so sly,

He winked at Desylva, she smirked, conjuring a faint crackle of lightning that arced overhead, illuminating his grin in a flash of stark white, the air buzzing with ozone.

Killian
I'm the rogue who'll never say die!

Killian roared, spinning his cutlass in his hand, its blade catching the lantern light. One-Eyed Jack thumped the helm with a growl. Killian mimed a noose with a rope, ducking dramatically as Billy twirled his torch.

Killian
I've sailed the storms, I've dodged the noose,
Cutlass sharp and rum's my juice!

Black Tom raised an imaginary jug, stomping in rhythm, while Smee clapped off-beat, nearly dropping his hat.

Killian
So clap your hands and bend your knee!
Aye, you've never met a pirate like me!

Desylva's wind surged, rocking the ship.

Killian
Rulin' waves from sea to sea,
I'm the scourge o' kings, the ocean's spree,

Billy hoisted his torch like a flag.

Killian
Aye, you've never met a pirate like me!

Killian pivoted toward Desylva with a sweeping bow.

Killian
I've got a lass with storm in her eyes,

He outstretched his hand as if offering a dance. She stepped forward, her hair whipping wildly as she unleashed a gust that tilted the deck, her storm gray eyes flashing with mock menace, mouthing, The crew hooted.

Killian
Desylva's winds'll make you rise.
She'll whip a gale to sink your foe!

Billy piped as he mimed a ship sinking, dipping his torch low, while Desylva added a rumble of thunder that rolled across the sky, the sound vibrating through the timbers.

Killian
A tempest's dance, a pirate's show!

Killian spun her into a quick dip, his hook glinting as it steadied her. One-Eyed Jack pounded the wheel.

Killian
One-Eyed Jack, he steers true,

One-Eyed Jack wrenched the helm to port as if dodging cannon fire. Killian's coat flapped as Desylva's drizzle misted his face, glistening on his cheek.

Killian
With a growl and a cannon's spew,

One-Eyed Jack growled, kicking a barrel as if it were a cannon, the crew cheering. Killian grinned.

Killian
So take a swig and join my spree,

Killian snatched a real rum jug from Smee, who yelped, “Oi, Cap’n!” then laughed, clapping along as Killian raised it high.

Killian
With a hearty crew and a ship so free,

Black Tom thrust his harpoon skyward, the drizzle catching its tip.

Killian
We’ll plunder gold and dance with glee,

The crew stomped in a circle.

Killian
So raise the flag and shout with me,

Smee fumbled an imaginary flagpole.

Killian
You’ve never met a pirate like me!

Killian belted, clapping Black Tom’s shoulder.

Killian
Black Tom’s mute but his spear’s a fright,

Black Tom spun his weapon in a swift, silent arc, its tip slicing the air with a faint whistle. The crew roared as Desylva summoned a sharp crack of thunder to punctuate.

Killian
He’ll skewer foes by mornin’ light,

The sound rattled the lanterns, their flames flickering wildly.

Killian
And Billy’s song’ll lift your soul,

Billy twirled his torch like a baton, his boots tapping a jig across the deck as he sang, the flame flaring brighter with a gust from Desylva’s hand. Smee whooped, clapping his hands red.

Killian
A shanty’s fire to keep us whole!

Killian strutted on.

Killian
With hand or hook, I’ll carve my way,

Killian slashed his cutlass through the air in a flashy arc, his hook braced against the mast with a dull thunk as lightning flashed again, casting his shadow long and jagged.

Killian
Through navy hounds and stormy fray,

One-Eyed Jack bellowed, miming a sword fight with an invisible foe, his eye glinting fiercely.

Killian
Aye, you’ve never met a pirate like me!

Desylva's storm effects swelled, a swirling wind and misty veil wrapping the deck.

Killian
Rulin' waves from sea to sea,

Billy spun his torch.

Killian
I'm the scourge o' kings, the ocean's spree,

Black Tom stomped a fierce beat.

Killian
Aye, you've never met a pirate like me!

The crew's voices a tidal roar under her electric sky.

Killian
Say, 'Cap'n, what's your wish today?'

Killian sauntered to the ship's edge, his hook raised as if summoning a vision. The crew chanted, "Cap'n! Cap'n!"

Killian
I'll snatch the loot from worlds away!

Desylva flicked her wrist, a burst of lightning illuminating the horizon, the sea glinting like a chest of gold.

Killian
A chest o' gold? A storm to ride?

Killian spun back with a grin, his hand sweeping wide as the drizzle thickened, soaking his coat. One-Eyed Jack growled.

Killian
I'll hook it all with pirate pride!

Killian hooked an imaginary prize with his arm.

Killian
The Jolly Roger's my domain,

Killian boasted, climbing the rigging a few steps, his hook glinting as he gestured grandly.

Killian
Through squall and fire, I'll reign,

Desylva's thunder booming low.

Killian
No king nor law can hold my sea!

Billy roared, waving his torch like a beacon.

Killian
Aye, you've never met a pirate like me!

The crew circled Killian, stomping and clapping.

Killian
Rulin' waves from sea to sea,

Smee tripped over a rope laughing.

Killian
I'm the scourge o' kings, the ocean's spree,

Black Tom twirled his harpoon.

Killian
Aye, you've never met a pirate like me!

Desylva's wind peaked, lightning flashing thrice as Killian roared.

Killian
No, never met a pirate, Aye, never met a pirate like me!

The crew echoing the triple flourish, their voices a triumphant crescendo, the deck a stage of pirate revelry under her stormy spotlight. The shanty's final note hung in the air, the crew panting and grinning, their boots still tapping the planks as Desylva let her storm effects fade.

The wind softened to a breeze, the drizzle ceased, and the lightning dimmed to starlight, the air cooling with the scent of wet wood and rum.

Killian leapt down, his hook gleaming as he clapped Billy's shoulder, "A fine reel, Cap'n!" One-Eyed Jack rasped, "Bloody good show, Cap'n," wiping drizzle from his brow, while Black Tom nodded, his harpoon resting easy, and Smee giggled, "Near lost me hat, but worth it!"

The deck buzzed with their laughter, the night alive with the shanty's echo, a pirate's tale spun in song and storm.

Later Killian & Desylva's Cabin

The cabin door banged shut behind Killian and Desylva, the Jolly Roger's gentle sway a hushed counterpoint to the deck's fading revelry, the air thick with the warm scent of cedar, rum, and the faint tang of ozone from her storm magic. The lantern swung faintly, casting a golden glow over the furs strewn across the bed, its frame carved with waves, runes pulsing softly to mend a fresh scratch from the night's fervor.

He tossed his damp coat over a chair, its leather creaking, his hook clinking as he turned to her, his blue eyes ablaze with the shanty's fire, a ravenous edge in his grin. He stepped toward her, boots scuffing the worn planks, his voice a low growl. "You turned my tune into a tempest, love," he said, admiration laced with want. She stood by the stern window, her hair damp and tangled from her drizzle, storm-gray eyes tracing faint lightning flickering outside, her lips curving into a smirk. "Had to match your bluster, pirate," she teased, her sultry hum brushing his ear as she flicked her wrist, a gust rattling the enchanted glass, her storm-mark pulsing brighter beneath her cloak. His hand gripped her waist, pulling her against him, her breath catching as her fingers grazed his chest through his open, mist-soaked shirt, sparking a distant rumble of thunder. "Keep that up, and the sea'll be jealous," he murmured, his lips hovering near hers. Their shared triumph, the shanty's rhythm, igniting a smoldering need.

They lingered, savoring the electric tension, her fingers tracing his jaw, his hand caressing her cheek, a soft sigh escaping her lips. "You tease me, lass," he whispered, his hook glinting as it slid along her cloak's edge, the cold metal grazing her collarbone, sending a shiver through her. She gasped, her storm-mark flaring, a gust howling outside as she sent a tingling current of storm magic through his hook, the sensation jolting him, his eyes darkening with desire. "Feel that, pirate?" she purred, her voice a velvet challenge, the current pulsing in time with her heartbeat, making his breath hitch. He pressed her against the wall, the enchanted oak cool against her back, its runes glowing to heal a scrape from his hook's fervent scratch. "Oh, I feel it," he rasped, his lips brushing her ear, his hand fondling the curve of her hip, drawing a moan as she melted into him.

Their undressing was a ritual of desire, unhurried yet urgent. He tugged at her cloak, the leather thudding to the floor, revealing her linen shirt and pants. He kicked off his boots, the leather thumping against the planks, and she followed, her boots tumbling aside. Her fingers, deft and teasing, traced the open V of his damp shirt, her storm-gray eyes glinting as she yanked it open, buttons scattering across the planks with soft pings, her nails raking his bared chest, drawing a sharp hiss from him, his skin tingling under her touch. She unbuckled his belt, the leather slapping free, then shoved his trousers down, her hands exploring his thighs, a low moan escaping him as he stepped free, fully bared. She unlaced her tunic, her breath quickening. He grasped her shirt with his hand, his hook steadying her waist, and pulled it over her head, her dark hair spilling free. His hand fondled her bare breasts, her sigh mingling with the rain's patter as she arched into his touch, her storm-mark glowing faintly. He tugged her pants down, letting them fall to the floor, his hand caressing her inner thigh, eliciting a gasp as she stood naked before him. The ship lurched, a wave crashing against the hull, her magic flaring with their heat, lightning bathing the cabin in stark whites and blues.

She shoved him toward the bed, her hands fierce on his shoulders, the furs sinking beneath them as they fell, the bed's runes mending a gouge from his hook's eager brace. Their foreplay stretched, a dance of caresses and whispers. His lips trailed her neck, hot and deliberate, his hand fondling her breast, her moans soft as she arched into him. Her fingers roamed his back, nails digging lightly, sparking gasps as his hook slid down her spine, the metal's edge teasing her skin, a shuddering sigh escaping her. "Gods, Killian," she breathed, her storm-gray eyes blazing, sending another current through his hook, the electric pulse racing through him, his groan deep as he pressed himself closer. "You'll unravel me, lass," he growled, his lips capturing hers, their tongues entwining, the kiss deepening as rain lashed the deck above, the ship creaking under the storm's growing fury.

He positioned himself above her, their breaths ragged, the lantern swinging wildly, shadows leaping across her sweat-slick skin. Her hands guided his hips, her eyes locked on his, a silent plea. With a slow, deliberate thrust, he entered her, her warmth enveloping him, tight and pulsing, a sharp gasp tearing from her throat as lightning cracked outside, the hull trembling. "Killian," she moaned, her voice a tempest's edge, her legs wrapping around him, drawing him deeper. He moved with measured intensity, each thrust a surge of heat, her sighs and gasps syncing with the waves' rhythm, the bed groaning, timbers creaking, runes glowing to heal a splintered edge. The ship rocked violently, sails straining as wind tore through them, her storm magic fueling the chaos, waves battering the Jolly Roger with relentless force.

His hand gripped her hip, fingers digging into her skin, his hook braced against the bed, teasing her thigh with its curve, drawing a shuddering moan. She sent currents through the hook, each pulse a spark that tightened his grip, his growls mingling with her cries, the air electric with her magic. "Don't stop, love," she gasped, her nails clawing his back, leaving red trails that stung with salt, each thrust stoking her storm, thunder roaring as the sea churned. The window rattled, its enchanted glass cracking under a wave's impact, runes flaring to seal the fissure, restoring clarity.

They shifted, Desylva rising above him, her hair a tangled halo catching the lantern's golden glow, storm-gray eyes fierce with unrestrained desire. She straddled him, her thighs pressing against his hips, her hands braced on his chest, nails grazing his skin, sparking a low growl from Killian. Slowly, deliberately, she lowered herself, sliding down onto him, her warmth enveloping him inch by sensual inch, tight and pulsing, a shuddering gasp escaping her as she took him fully, her storm-mark flaring with a burst of ozone that crackled in the air.

"Gods, love," he rasped, his hand gripping her hip, his hook teasing the curve of her thigh, the cold metal drawing a moan as he pushed upward, meeting her descent, their bodies locking in a searing rhythm. The Jolly Roger lurched, waves crashing against the hull, the enchanted oak bed creaking, its runes glowing to mend a splintered edge from their fervor.

Her movements began slow, a tantalizing sway, each rise and fall a deliberate tease, her hips rolling as she savored every sensation, her sighs soft but growing sharper, the ship's gentle sway mirroring her pace. His hand caressed her curves, fingers tracing the dip of her waist, fondling the swell of her breasts, his hook grazing her hip, sending shivers through her, his groans deepening as she tightened around him. "You're torturin' me, lass," he growled, his eyes locked on hers, pushing into her with controlled thrusts, each one stoking the storm outside, rain lashing the deck, thunder rumbling in time with her breath. Her storm-gray eyes blazed, a smirk playing on her lips. "Patience, pirate," she purred, leaning forward to kiss him, her tongue teasing his, her slow grind intensifying, the air humming with her magic.

Their pace quickened, her restraint unraveling as she rode him with fierce abandon, hips snapping faster, each descent a jolt of heat, taking him deeper, her moans louder, raw and unrestrained, echoing the wind's banshee wail tearing at the sails. He matched her intensity, thrusting upward with relentless force, his hand digging into her hip, hook grazing her side, sending shivers through her, her cries mingling with the thunder's roar. The ship rocked violently, waves battering the hull, the stern window rattling, its enchanted glass cracking under a wave's impact, runes flaring to seal the fissure. Her storm magic surged, lightning striking the sea, jolting the Jolly Roger, the bed's timbers groaning, runes mending a cracked beam as their rhythm became a frenzied echo of the sea's chaos.

Their release built slowly, a prolonged crescendo of ecstasy, stretching the moment into an eternity of sensation. Her movements grew desperate, her body trembling, hips grinding with primal need, her warmth pulsing around him, each thrust drawing gasps that broke into cries. His breaths were ragged, his growls primal as he pushed into her, his hand anchoring her, hook sending a final spark through her skin.

Her climax hit first, a shattering wave, her cry tearing through the cabin, body convulsing, tight and pulsing around him, storm-gray eyes wide as thunder split the night, waves battering the hull in a furious climax. His release followed, a searing torrent, his groan deep and guttural as he spilled into her, his body arching, the cabin trembling, the bed's runes glowing to mend a splintered frame. Their shared ecstasy lingered, bodies locked, gasps and moans intertwining, lightning flickering outside as the storm held its breath, the ship's lurching easing into a swaying dance, their shadows flickering in the lantern's swaying light.

They collapsed into the furs, breathless and trembling, the storm outside easing as her magic faded, wind dropping to a mournful moan, rain softening to a patter, the sea calming to a gentle swell. The air cooled, scented with wet wood and their mingled musk.

His hook rested beside her head, glinting faintly, his hand tracing the curve of her side, a tender caress. Her hair splayed across the pillow, storm-gray eyes softening as she met his gaze, a quiet intensity beneath the fire.

"That lot'll be singin' 'til dawn," he murmured, voice hoarse, kissing her deeply, tasting the salt of her storm. "Good, keeps 'em dreamin', pirate like you," she whispered, her fingers threading through his damp hair, pulling him closer, a smirk playing on her lips. "Think the sea'll forgive us?" he teased, his lips brushing her jaw, a soft chuckle shared as the ship's sway cradled their entwined forms.

The storm's aftermath, etched in the night's quiet, was a vow of their bond, the cabin glowing with the heat of their love, its enchanted oak and runes a steadfast witness to their passion.

Crew Quarters

(Simultaneous with the Cabin Scene)

The quarters shuddered with the sudden storm's fury, the planks groaning under the ship's wild rocking, the air thick with the reek of damp hemp and the sour tang of rum-soaked fear, lanterns swinging wildly as thunder crashed overhead, shaking the hull. One-Eyed Jack braced against a bunk, his eye narrowing as he growled, "Bloody hell, they're at it again. Cap'n and her stirrin' the sea!"

Black Tom gripped his harpoon, its haft thudding against the floor, his scarred arms tense as the wind's howl seeped through the cracks, his silent grimace deepening with each lurch. Billy clutched his doused torch, laughing nervously, "She's makin' a tempest out o' that shanty, reckon they're dancin' a different reel now!"

Lightning flashed through the slits, illuminating Smee's pale face as he yelped, "It's like the Roger's gonna split!" The crew flinched with each wave's crash, the storm's chaos a clear echo of the cabin's passion.

(After the Cabin Scene)

The quarters stilled as the storm subsided, the air cooling with the scent of rain-soaked oak and the faint whisper of settling timbers, the ship's sway softening to a gentle breath. One-Eyed Jack slumped onto a bunk, his eye drooping as he rasped, "Cap'n's tune set her off, storm's spent now, thank the sea." Black Tom leaned his harpoon against the wall, his scarred arms slackening, a rare half-smile curling his lips as he nodded.

Billy grinned, setting his torch aside, “Cap’n’s ‘Pirate Like Me’ turned into a gale! They’re somethin’, them two.” Smee clutched his hat, chuckling shakily, “Aye, long as I don’t get washed overboard next time.”

The crew bunked down, the lantern’s glow dimming, the night’s revelry and storm a warm memory, their spirits lifted by Killian’s song and Desylva’s tempestuous love.

Week 4

The Jolly Roger anchored in a sheltered cove as the third month waned. Stars gleamed sharp against a velvet sky, the sea hushed to a glassy calm beneath them. The air carried the faint tang of salt and the cool breath of night, a stillness settling over the ship like a blanket.

Killian ordered a rest, his voice a low rumble over the deck, “Take your ease, lads. Three months o’ calm’s earned us this.”

Smee lit a fire on a slab of iron, its crackle mingling with the gentle lap of waves against the hull, rum flowed into dented tankards, the crew sprawling across barrels and ropes. One-Eyed Jack spun a tale. Black Tom sat silent, cleaning his harpoon with steady hands, its blade glinting in the firelight. Billy strummed a battered lute, his tune soft and lilting, a sailor’s lullaby under the stars.

Killian leaned against the helm, his black coat unbuttoned, his hook resting idle, his blue eyes softened, tracing the crew’s shadows. Smee’s snores began, One-Eyed Jack’s voice rumbled, Black Tom’s quiet held.

Desylva sat apart on a coil of rope, her leather cloak draped over her knees like a shield. Her gray eyes caught the firelight, flickering with the wildness that had carried her. Her cursed mark pulsed faintly beneath her sleeve, a blue glow dancing with the flames. Her hands rested on her dagger, its hilt worn smooth by use. Killian approached, a tankard in his hand, “Rum, love?” Her fingers brushed his as she took it, her voice dry but warm, a grin flickered across her lips, a spark in her storm-touched gaze. He sat beside her, his shoulder brushing hers.

Smee’s sleepy mutter drifted. One-Eyed Jack winked from across the deck. Rum blurred the edges of the night. Billy’s tune wove a cocoon around them.

A few hours later (Night)

The night deepened, the fire sinking to embers, stars pierced the velvet sky, sharp and endless. Smee slept, his hat tipped over his face, a soft snore rumbling. One-Eyed Jack whittled a shard of bone, his knife scraping in time with Billy’s fading lute. Black Tom stared at the sea, his dark eyes reflecting the starlight, his harpoon a shadow at his side. Billy’s music hushed, his fingers stilling.

Killian and Desylva stood at the helm. He traced the wheel’s grain with his hook, Desylva sipped her rum, her gray eyes met his, a shared fire. His hook rested near her hand, their silence a pact. Her gaze flicked to his, a spark of shared fire.

The Dragon’s Hoard: A Quest for Hidden Treasure (Day 340)

The Jolly Roger rocked gently on a silvered sea under a sky streaked with the last embers of dusk, sails furled against a breeze that carried the faint, acrid scent of ash and molten stone. The air hummed with a distant rumble, a whisper of something ancient stirring beyond the horizon, where the water shimmered with a heat haze that blurred the edge of the world.

Quarterdeck

Killian stood at the helm, his black leather coat swaying with the ship’s rhythm, his hook gleaming silver as he traced the wheel’s grain with a restless energy, his gaze fixed on the crew gathered below on the lantern-lit deck. Smee leaned against a barrel as he spun a yarn in his gravelly voice, “Heard tell of a dragon’s hoard, Cap’n. Gold piled high as a mast, gems glitterin’ like stars, guarded by a beast with scales hard as iron and breath hot enough to melt a man’s bones.”

Main Deck

One-Eyed Jack snorted over a cannon he was polishing, his rag pausing as he growled, “Old wives’ tales. Bet it’s just bones and ash, not worth the sweat.” Black Tom sharpened a harpoon with slow, deliberate strokes, his dark eyes glinting with quiet intrigue. Billy, hung from the rigging like a monkey, his voice bright with excitement, “They say it’s cursed. None come back alive, Cap’n!” The deck buzzed with their voices, legends weaving through the salt air like threads of a tapestry, stirring Killian’s pirate heart with a hunger that had slept too long.

The tales took root as the lanterns cast flickering shadows across the crew’s faces. Smee’s hands gestured wildly, his rum-stained fingers tracing shapes in the air, “A merchant swore he saw it. Caverns deep in a fire-rimmed isle, treasure glowin’ like the sun itself, coins spillin’ over the edges, and the dragon’s breath meltin’ steel afore he fled.”

One-Eyed Jack rolled his eye, his voice a rough bark, “If it’s real, it’s death, dragon’d roast us afore we touched a single coin, and I ain’t keen on bein’ cinders for a fairy tale.” Billy swung lower, his boots dangling, his freckled face alight, “Heard a lass saw a sapphire big as her fist. Blue as the deep sea. Cursed to blind ya if you stare too long, but oh, the shine of it!” Black Tom’s harpoon paused mid-stroke, a rare spark flaring in his gaze as he gave a slow nod, his silence a weight that lent the boy’s words credence.

Quarterdeck

Killian leaned forward, his hook tapping a steady rhythm against the wheel. His blue eyes narrowing as the stories spun. Gold and gems piled high, a dragon’s wrath as old as the seas he’d sailed, a tale that whispered of danger and glory. His mind raced, not just for the wealth, though the gleam of it tugged at his pirate’s soul, but for the thrill of facing a beast few dared challenge, the defiance of claiming what others feared to touch.

Desylva stood nearby, her leather cloak rustling faintly as she leaned against the railing, her gray eyes catching his in the lantern glow. A storm’s edge simmered in her gaze, her dark hair loose and tousled by the breeze. She tilted her head, her voice low and teasing, “Sounds like trouble. Your kind of trouble, I reckon,” her words a challenge that lit a fire in his chest, her lips quirking in a way that made his heart thud.

Rum flowed from a dented keg, the crew’s laughter rising like a tide, their legends a map to a destiny he could taste on the wind.

Main Deck

The crew’s chatter swelled, each voice layering the hoard with myth. Smee swigged rum, his cheeks ruddy, “They say the dragon sleeps on it. Centuries old, scales blacker’n night, eyes like embers. Wakes only when fools get too close.” One-Eyed Jack spat over the side, “Fools like us, maybe. But I’d wager it’s a pile o’ slag, not gold. Still, I’d blast it for the tale.”

Billy’s eyes widened, “A sailor I met swore the hoard’s magic. Gems that whisper secrets, gold that burns if you’re greedy. Cursed or not, it’s there!” Black Tom set his harpoon down, his scarred hands folding as he met Killian’s gaze, a silent vote cast in favor of the hunt. Rum sloshed in tankards, the air thick with anticipation and the tang of the sea.

Quarterdeck

Killian’s hook ceased its tapping, his posture straightening as he absorbed their words. Time with this crew, with her, had honed his instincts, danger was their trade, treasure their blood, and this hoard, real or myth, sang to him like a siren’s call, gold to line their pockets, gems to dazzle, a dragon to defy His thoughts flickered to Desylva, her storm a match to his fire, and a sapphire’s gleam took shape in his mind. Not just loot, but something more, a spark of intent forming.

He stepped to the helm’s edge, his shadow falling over them, his voice a low rumble, “Legends or not, it’s out there. Gold, gems, a dragon’s den. And I’ll be damned if we don’t claim it. Any objections?” Silence fell, their eyes on him. Smee gulped, One-Eyed Jack grinned, Billy whooped, Black Tom’s nod sealed it. Desylva’s gray eyes held his, a storm’s promise in their depths. He smirked, “Thought not.”

Killian's decision crystallized, his voice cutting through the night like a blade, "Enough tales, lads. It's real, and it's ours. I'll not let a dragon keep what we can take!" Smee's jaw dropped, his tankard sloshing, "Cap'n, you're mad. Dragon's fire'll crisp us!" One-Eyed Jack's grin widened, "Aye, mad enough to win. Count me in." Billy cheered from the rigging, "To the hoard, Cap'n. Let's make 'em talk of us!" Black Tom's harpoon gleamed as he rose, a rare glint of eagerness in his stance.

Killian turned to Desylva, his blue eyes locking with hers, "What say you, lass? Fancy a dragon's den with me?" Her grin was sharp as her dagger, "I've faced worse. Let's see if it roars louder than me," her storm magic pulsed faintly beneath her sleeve, her cursed mark flickering blue in the lantern light. Time had forged them into a unit, her wildness a mirror to his sea, her defiance a spark that fueled his own.

He clapped Smee's shoulder, "Chart it. Every whisper, every rumor. Fire-rimmed Isle. Deep caverns. We sail at dawn!" The crew erupted. One-Eyed Jack slammed a fist on the cannon, "Load 'er up!" Black Tom checked the lines with a steady hand. Billy scrambled to the ropes, his voice a shanty's start. The Jolly Roger groaned as if eager, sails unfurling in Killian's mind, ready to chase the dawn.

The deck thrummed with purpose. Smee scurried to the charts, muttering, "Fire-rimmed isle. Madness, but I'll find it." One-Eyed Jack hauled powder kegs, his laughter rough, "Dragon or no, I'll blast its scales off." Billy's shanty rose, "To gold and fire, we sail higher!" Black Tom coiled rope, his silence a steady anchor.

Killian stood at the helm, his hook resting on the wheel, his gaze drifting to Desylva as she sharpened her dagger against a whetstone, the scrape a quiet counterpoint to the crew's clamor. Her gray eyes flicked up, catching his, and she tilted her head, "You're smilin' too much. What's brewin' in that head?" he leaned closer, his voice a conspiratorial murmur, "A hoard's not all I'm after, lass. wait and see," his grin roguish, a sapphire's promise glinting in his thoughts. Her laugh was soft, rare, "Trouble it is then."

Rum tankards clinked. The crew's voices a roar. The Jolly Roger trembled, the hull alive with their intent. The hoard loomed on the horizon, danger and treasure entwined. Killian's heart thudded, revenge a shadow ever-present, but her storm a light piercing through, romance simmered beneath the hunt, a gem's gleam shaping a plan, a treasure for more than gold, a vow unspoken as the night deepened and the sea whispered of fire.

A few hours later

The Jolly Roger dropped anchor off a fire-rimmed isle under a sky choked with smoke and embers, sails casting long shadows across a sea that shimmered with an unnatural heat. The island loomed, its shores jagged with obsidian cliffs veined with glowing red fissures, molten rivulets hissing as they met the waves in clouds of steam that stung the eyes and coated the throat with a bitter tang. She rode low in the shallow, steaming waters, its deck looming high above the ash-strewn beach, the gangplank useless against the jagged drop where molten waves lapped far below the waterline.

Quarterdeck

Killian stood at the helm, his hook gleaming as he pressed the rune-etched disc beside the wheel, activating the Aegis. The medallion, secured in its gyroscopic cradle within the Aegis Vault below the captain's cabin, hummed to life, its Aetherheart crystal flaring with frost and starlight. A shimmering veil of cold magic enveloped the ship, its azure glow cooling the air and shielding the enchanted oak hull from the molten waves' searing touch.

The crew gasped as the deck chilled beneath their boots, the sails untouched by the ashen wind, the Jolly Roger standing resolute against the isle's fiery wrath. "Hold fast, lads," Killian called, his voice steady, "The Aegis'll keep her safe. Now, to the hoard!" The control panel glowed softly, its runes a beacon of their invulnerability, Billy's low whistle echoing in awe.

Killian moved to the rail, his black leather coat snapping in the searing wind, his blue eyes scanning the shore's blackened sand, cracked like brittle bone under the cliffs' red glow.

He turned to Desylva, her leather cloak singed at the edges, gray eyes blazing with a storm's defiance. "The deck's too high for the plank, love. Conjure us a way down?" Her lips curved into a sharp grin, "Aye, Captain, hold fast."

She raised her hands, storm magic crackling as her cursed mark flared blue beneath her sleeve, a gust weaving into a shimmering ramp of wind and mist that stretched from the deck to the sand, its translucent surface pulsing with faint lightning, stable yet alive with her power.

Shore

Killian led the way, boots thudding on the ethereal ramp, its surface firm beneath him as he descended, Desylva at his side, her dagger drawn and gleaming. Smee followed, his stout frame wobbling as he muttered, “Blimey, Cap’n, walkin’ on air’s no sane man’s path!” One-Eyed Jack growled, clutching his flintlock pistol, “Better’n roastin’ up here, move it!” Black Tom stepped lightly, his harpoon glinting, his silence steady. Billy bounded down, torch flaring, “She’s a beauty, this ramp, Cap’n!”

The crew reached the beach, the ramp dissolving into a swirl of mist behind them, ash crunching under their boots as the hot wind roared from the cliffs above.

Smee stumbled after, his stout frame hunched against the heat, sweat beaded on his ruddy face, “Hotter’n a forge down here, Cap’n, me lungs are roastin’ already!” One-Eyed Jack followed, his grizzled features twisted in a scowl as he gripped his flintlock pistol, grumbling, “Pistol’s all I’ve got on this slag heap, dragon’ll laugh afore it fries us.” Black Tom stepped ashore, his scarred hands clutching a harpoon, its steel tip glinting ominously in the reddish glow, his silence a calm anchor. Billy darted ahead, a torch clutched in his wiry hands, his voice cutting through the wind, “It’s close, Cap’n, feel that rumble?”

Desylva stepped beside Killian, her leather cloak already singed at the edges, her gray eyes narrowing as she scanned the cliffs, her dagger drawn and gleaming in the flickering light. Her cursed mark pulsed faintly beneath her sleeve, a blue shimmer against the heat, her storm magic stirring as the ground trembled beneath them. Killian’s blue eyes met hers, a wild grin tugging at his lips, “Into the fire we go, keep sharp!”

They climbed, ash swirling around them like a shroud, the air thick with sulfur and the promise of peril. Desylva’s voice sliced through the haze, crisp and commanding, “Eyes up, something’s watching!” A deep, guttural roar rolled down from the cavern mouth high above, shaking loose pebbles that rattled past. The dragon was awake, and its hoard called.

The cavern yawned before them like the maw of some ancient beast, its entrance framed by stalactites that dripped molten stone onto the ash-dusted floor, each drop sizzling as it cooled into blackened pools. The interior glowed with a fierce, golden light that spilled from heaps of treasure piled against the wall… coins stacked in precarious towers, goblets encrusted with gems, swords with hilts of twisted silver, all shimmering as if lit from within by a fire that refused to die.

Killian paused at the threshold, his breath catching in his throat as the sight washed over him. Gold enough to sink a fleet, jewels that sparkled like captured stars. His hook gleamed as he flexed his hand, his pirate’s heart pounding with hunger.

Smee shuffled beside him, his eyes wide, his voice a hoarse whisper, “Blimey, Cap’n, it’s real, more’n any tale I spun!” One-Eyed Jack lingered at the rear, his eye squinting into the glow, his pistol ready, his growl barely audible over the cavern’s hum, “Too pretty, means trouble.”

Black Tom stood poised, his harpoon raised as if sensing the weight of the air, his dark eyes scanning the shadows. Billy edged forward, his torch casting jittery shadows across the hoard, his freckled face alight with awe, “Look at it, gold forever!”

The cavern seemed endless. Every step revealed another fortune. A rusted crown half-buried beneath coins. A silver shield blackened by age. A sword taller than Billy lodged between two mounds of treasure. Broken banners. Ancient armor. Relics from kingdoms none of them recognized.

Smee stooped and lifted a jeweled goblet. The thing sparkled brilliantly. "Cap'n... this might be worth more than the Roger." One-Eyed Jack snatched it from him. Examined it. Then casually tossed it over his shoulder. It landed somewhere in the treasure with a distant clatter. "There are twenty more." Smee looked horrified.

Billy darted between treasure piles. "Look at this!" He unearthed a golden mask. Then a ruby necklace. Then a gemstone bigger than his head. Every discovery seemed impossible. Black Tom crouched beside a pile of ancient weapons. His fingers brushed an engraved spear buried by centuries of gold. Even he looked impressed.

Desylva knelt beside a cluster of amethysts. Violet light danced across her face. "Generations." Her voice barely carried. "Maybe centuries."

Killian nodded. That's when he noticed something. The treasure wasn't random. It was arranged. Curved. Flowing. Almost as though every pile spiraled toward a central point deep within the cavern. Toward darkness. Toward the greatest mound of treasure. Toward something hidden. And suddenly every instinct screamed. This wasn't abandoned. This wasn't forgotten. This was a throne room. And somewhere within it sat a king. The deeper he stared into the cavern, the less it felt like treasure and the more it felt like a lair.

Desylva moved with Killian, her storm magic crackling faintly, her gray eyes darting to the cavern’s depths where shadows coiled. Her dagger twirled in her hand, a restless dance as she murmured, “It’s guarded, feel that heat?”

The heat thickened. Not the sharp heat of fire. The slow, suffocating heat of something alive.

Killian frowned.

A massive mound of treasure dominated the cavern's center. Enough gold to buy kingdoms. Enough jewels to tempt kings and ruin fools. Yet something felt wrong. Too still. Too quiet.

Billy took another step forward, torch raised high. "Cap'n..." he whispered. "Does gold usually breathe?"

Silence. Then the treasure shifted. A low scraping echoed through the cavern. Metal sliding against metal. Coins rolling. An entire section of the hoard slowly rose.

Smee froze. One-Eyed Jack lowered his pistol. Black Tom stopped breathing entirely. Billy's torch trembled in his hands. At first Killian thought it was another mound of treasure.

Then a single ember-red eye opened. The cavern seemed to shrink around it. The pupil narrowed. Watching. Judging. Ancient. A rumble vibrated through the cavern. Not a roar. A growl. The sound rolled across the gold and through the crew's bones.

Smee swallowed hard. "Cap'n..."

"Don't," Killian muttered. "Cap'n, I think we've made a mistake," Smee whispered. "Aye." For once, Killian sounded utterly serious.

The eye blinked. Then the dragon moved. Gold cascaded from its vast shoulders. Thousands of coins poured across black scales. Entire treasure piles slid from its back. The creature slowly lifted its head. And kept lifting. And lifting. Until its horned crown nearly touched the cavern roof.

Billy's jaw dropped. "Bloody hell." One-Eyed Jack stared. Then barked a laugh. "Now that's a dragon."

Heat washed over them as the beast inhaled. Smoke curled from its nostrils. Its molten eyes fixed upon the intruders. Upon the pirates. Upon Captain Hook.

Killian's grin slowly returned. Of course it did. Because fear and excitement were separated by only the thinnest line inside him. "Well then." His cutlass slid free with a metallic whisper. "There's our dragon."

Beside him, lightning crawled across Desylva's fingers. Her smile mirrored his. "Big one," she admitted. Killian's grin sharpened. "Think we can take it?" Her storm crackled brighter. "Only one way to find out."

The dragon's chest expanded. Once. Twice. Then it roared. The sound was a living thing. A furnace blast. A mountain breaking. A storm trapped beneath stone.

The cavern convulsed beneath the force of it. Gold avalanched from the hoard in glittering cascades. Ash exploded into the air.

The dragon spread its wings. The membranes unfurled with a thunderous snap, stretching from wall to wall, stirring ash into a choking whirlwind. Its scales black as midnight, rippling with a sheen of molten red where the light struck. Its eyes burned with ancient fury, as heat rolled over the pirates like a physical blow. Then the beast lunged.

Killian's grin widened, his cutlass flashing free, "Not yet, beast, not takin' my crew!"

Rumpelstiltskin's cackle echoed from nowhere. A blaze curse ignited the air. Flames erupted in arcs of searing orange, licking at their heels. Smee yelped, diving behind a mound of treasure. "We're cooked!" The dragon's jaws snapped shut where Killian had stood only moments before. The fight was on.

The gold glinted under the dragon's fire as Killian charged, his cutlass slashing through the heat haze, flames roared past, singeing his coat, the leather smoldering as he ducked a claw that raked the air where his head had been, blood seeped from a shallow gash on his arm where a scale's edge caught him, the sting sharpening his focus.

Smee scrambled, his voice a panicked wail, "Bloody hell, we're done for!" Desylva darted forward, her storm magic surging as Rumpelstiltskin's blaze curse fueled the dragon's breath. Her thunder cracked, a jagged bolt splitting the air to slam into the beast's flank, scales cracking with a sound like breaking stone, her cursed mark flared bright blue, illuminating her determined face as she shouted, "Move, Hook, hit it hard!"

Rain followed, a sudden downpour hissing against the flames, steam billowing in thick clouds that obscured the dragon's ember eyes. Killian rolled free, his hook sinking into a scale with a wet crunch, ichor spraying black and hot across his hand, he roared, "Not today, overgrown lizard!" One-Eyed Jack fired his pistol from the cavern's edge, the shot pinging off scales with a spark, his curse echoing, "Blast it, hold still!"

Black Tom hurled his harpoon, the steel burying deep into the dragon's shoulder, a bellow shaking the cavern. He yanked the harpoon free, ichor dripping as he readied it again, his steady hands unwavering. Billy waved his torch, shouting over the din, "She's holdin', Cap'n, the ship's safe!" Desylva's gray eyes locked with Killian's, her rain dousing a stray blaze that licked at his boots. "Keep swingin', lass!" he grinned, his voice rough with adrenaline. Their rhythm flared, a dance of steel and storm against the dragon's fury, gold scattered underfoot, coins clinking as the hoard trembled.

Amid the chaos, Killian's gaze snagged on the treasure. A mound of gems spilled from a cracked chest, emeralds and rubies glowing like embers, but one caught his eye… a sapphire, fist-sized and deep blue as the sea at twilight, its facets refracting the dragon's fire into a prism of light that danced across the cavern walls. His heart skipped, a sudden vision flashing… that gem, carved into a ring, on her finger. Her storm beside him crystallized in that moment, a plan forming as he darted forward, his hook slashing to clear a path.

Regina's venom curse struck then. Desylva gasped, her arm burning as green tendrils snaked from her cursed mark, her rain faltering, her gray eyes widened, pain etching lines across her face as she stumbled, her dagger slipping. Killian whirled, his cutlass cleaving through a claw aimed at her, "Not her, you bastards!" his voice a roar. Her rain surged back, purging the venom with a hiss, her lightning blasting the dragon's snout, ichor sprayed, thick and scalding.

Smee peeked from his hiding spot, "She's fightin', Cap'n!" One-Eyed Jack reloaded, "Hold the line!" Black Tom hurled his harpoon again, the steel sinking into the dragon's flank. He retrieved it swiftly, wiping ichor on his trousers, his dark eyes locked on the beast.

Killian reached the sapphire, his hand closing around it, the cool weight a promise against the heat. He pocketed it, murmuring, "For later," his blue eyes flicked to her, her storm a shield as she steadied, her voice cut through, "Keep that thing, don't die for it!" He grinned, "Not plannin' to!" The dragon thrashed, its roar shaking stalactites loose. The hoard's heart pulsed, danger and love entwined. Killian's intent burned brighter than the flames.

The dragon's roar reverberated through the cavern, a sound like thunder trapped in stone, shaking loose a shower of molten stalactites that crashed to the floor in bursts of searing orange, coins skittered from their precarious piles,

goblets toppled with hollow clangs, and the air grew thick with ash and the acrid sting of sulfur as the beast lunged forward, its black scales glinting with a molten sheen.

A flame wraith materialized from the haze, its form a swirling mass of fire and shadow conjured by Regina's dark magic, its eyes glowed like twin suns, its wail a piercing cry of despair that clawed at the mind. Desylva staggered, her gray eyes clouding as memories of captivity surged unbidden, her cursed mark flickering erratically beneath her singed sleeve. Her dagger slipped from her grasp, clattering against a pile of gold.

Killian whirled, his black coat trailing ash as he tackled her clear of a flaming tendril, his hook pinning the wraith's vaporous form to the cavern wall with a hiss, "Stay with me, lass, don't let it in!" his voice cut through her haze, rough with urgency. Her thunder answered, a jagged bolt splitting the wraith's core, rain following in a torrential burst that doused its flames, steam billowed, the curse shattering as her mark flared bright blue.

Smee peeked from behind a toppled chest, "Blimey, Cap'n, that was close!" One-Eyed Jack reloaded his pistol with trembling hands, his growl fierce, "Hold the bloody line, ye fools!" Black Tom yanked his harpoon free from the dragon's flank, ichor dripping as he readied another throw, his steady grip unyielding. Billy darted among the treasure, his torch flaring as he shouted, "Deck's still ash, but she's holdin' offshore!"

Killian steadied Desylva, his blue eyes locked on hers, "Tougher than the fire, aye?" Her grin flickered, faint but fierce, "You too, let's end this." Their rhythm pulsed anew, her storm a shield as he turned back to the dragon, gold gleamed beneath the chaos, the sapphire warm in his pocket, a vow unspoken amid the fight.

The dragon reared, its massive wings beating a gale that whipped ash and embers into a stinging storm. Killian slashed with his cutlass, the blade sparking against scales as he ducked a claw that gouged the cavern floor, sending up a spray of molten rock. His coat smoldered where embers caught, blood trickling from his arm as he roared, "Down, you scaly bastard, stay down!" Its tail lashed, a whip of jagged spines that sent Desylva diving, her cloak tearing as she rolled clear, her lightning cracked, a bolt searing through the dragon's wing, membrane sizzling as ichor sprayed black and scalding.

Smee scrambled to his feet, clutching a dented goblet as a shield, "It's mad, Cap'n, mad as you!" One-Eyed Jack fired his pistol again, the shot ricocheting with a metallic ping, "Blast it, someone pin the beast!" Black Tom hurled his harpoon, the steel sinking deep into the dragon's throat. He retrieved it with a swift tug, ichor staining his hands as he prepared another strike.

Rumpelstiltskin's voice slithered through, a collapse curse buckling the ground, stalactites plummeted, one grazing Killian's shoulder as he stumbled, stone dust clouding his vision. Desylva's gusts surged, a wall of wind that caught the falling rock and flung it back at the dragon, her rain washing the dust away. Her gray eyes blazed, "Up, Hook, now!" He broke free, his hook slashing upward to pierce the dragon's throat, ichor gushing hot. Her thunder roared, a final strike splitting scales wide.

The beast thrashed, its roar fading to a gurgle as it crashed, the cavern trembling with its fall, gold scattered, gems rolled. Killian's grin was wild, "That's it, lads, we've got it!" Their bond blazed, her storm his anchor, the hoard's heart within reach.

The cavern stilled, the dragon's lifeless bulk sprawled across the treasure, its scales dimming as the molten glow faded, gold coins glittered beneath its claws, emeralds and rubies spilling from cracked chests like a jeweled tide. Killian sheathed his cutlass, his hand scooping a fistful of coins that clinked with a satisfying weight.

Smee emerged, his soot-streaked face splitting into a grin, "We're rich, Cap'n, richer'n kings!" One-Eyed Jack kicked a goblet aside, his laughter rough, "Aye, and alive, better'n I reckoned!" Black Tom retrieved his harpoon from the dragon's throat, wiping ichor on his trousers with a nod of quiet triumph. Billy darted among the hoard, piling gems into his shirt, his voice a whoop, "Look at this, enough for a fleet!"

Desylva leaned against a stalagmite, her breath steadying as she wiped her dagger clean on her torn cloak, her gray eyes sweeping the treasure, her cursed mark pulsed faintly, her storm calming as she met Killian's gaze, "Enough to call it quits?" He smirked, tossing a coin in the air, "Plenty, lass, more'n enough," his hand brushed the sapphire in his pocket, its cool weight a secret promise, her by his side fueled the spark.

Rumpelstiltskin's giggle echoed faintly, a lingering taunt, "Fools, you'll pay." A fireball arced from the shadows. Desylva's thunder answered, blasting it apart, her rain dousing the embers.

One-Eyed Jack fired his pistol from the cavern's mouth, "Not today, ye imp!" Her gusts cleared the smoke, the crew's shouts rising. Killian's blue eyes softened, "Let's haul it." The hoard was theirs, danger retreating, romance simmering beneath the victory.

The crew rallied, their hands swift as they gathered the treasure, gold coins clinked into sacks hauled from the Jolly Roger, gems rattled in Billy's makeshift pouch, goblets and swords piled high. Smee huffed as he dragged a sack. One-Eyed Jack hefted a ruby-crusted chalice. Black Tom worked in silence, stacking loot with a precision born of years at sea. Billy darted back to the ship.

Killian steadied Desylva as they retreated, his hook catching her elbow as ash crunched underfoot, "Hold fast, lass, almost home." Her breath was ragged but sure, "Always, don't drop me now," her gray eyes held his, a flicker of warmth beneath the storm, her cursed mark glowed softly, her magic settling as the cavern's heat receded.

Rumpelstiltskin's voice faded, Regina's shadow lifting. The dragon's roar was silenced, its bulk a dark monument. Desylva's thunder rumbled one last time, a warning to unseen foes.

One-Eyed Jack fired his pistol again, sealing the cavern mouth with a cascade of rock. Billy waved from the ship, "All aboard, let's go!" Black Tom hauled the last sack. Killian's hand lingered on the sapphire, his grin softening, "Well fought, lass, well won."

The Jolly Roger waited, sails a beacon. The hoard was theirs, danger fading, a sapphire's promise glowing brighter than the gold.

A short while later - Departure (Quarterdeck)

The Jolly Roger carved its way free of the fire-rimmed isle, sails swelling beneath a sky melting into a star-strewn velvet shroud. Killian pressed the rune-etched disc beside the helm, deactivating the Aegis, its azure veil fading as the Aetherheart's hum softened in the vault below the captain's cabin, the ship's enchanted oak hull now safe from the isle's molten wrath.

The cavern's dying embers smeared a faint crimson streak on the horizon, fading as the silver sea unfurled below, its waves whispering against the hull in a rhythm that swept away the sulfur's bite, replacing it with the bracing tang of salt air.

Killian stood tall at the helm, his singed coat flapping, patched with ash and bloodstains, the leather scorched from the dragon's wrath. His blue eyes blazed with a victor's pride as he gripped the wheel, his hook resting easy on its edge, the sapphire's cool heft in his pocket a quiet thrill amid the glow of triumph. Below deck, gold coins clinked, and gems rattled, a hoard singing of riches and renown.

Main Deck

The crew erupted into life aft, their voices a jubilant clamor. Smee thumped Billy's shoulder, soot streaking his round face, "Thought we'd be charred to cinders, yet here we stand, alive and kickin'!" One-Eyed Jack lounged against a cannon, his grizzled jaw cracking into a rare, rumbling chuckle. "Next time, I'll send that scaly bastard to the deep 'fore it can twitch, mark my words!"

Black Tom lingered by the rail, wiping dragon ichor from his harpoon with a scarred hand, his nod a silent seal on their victory. Tankards clashed as rum splashed free, the crew's cheers bouncing off the timbers.

Quarterdeck

Killian's voice thundered over the din, "We've slain a beast and earned our grog!" He pivoted to Desylva, who leaned against the helm's shadow, her leather cloak tattered and charred, gray eyes snaring the starlight like twin moons. The faint blue pulse of her cursed mark shimmered beneath her sleeve, an echo of the power she'd unleashed.

“You’re a blaze wrapped in thunder, lass, kept us from frying,” he said, his grin sharp-edged with admiration. She tilted her head, a smirk tugging her lips, voice laced with a playful jab, “Aye, love, better keep that spark of yours lit, I’m not done with ya yet.” Her wild spirit surged through him, a current stoking the romance beneath their hard-won glory. A dragon felled, a treasure seized, their legend forged in fire and gold.

Main Deck

The ship sliced through the waves, the hull groaning under sacks of coin that thudded below, gems jingling in Billy’s rough pouch, a ruby-encrusted chalice glinting as it rolled with the swell under Smee’s swaying lantern. “That blaze is history now, no more toastin’ for this old sea dog!” Smee crowed, bustling about. Billy’s voice soared, clear and bold.

Billy
“To stars and gold, our tale unfolds,
dragon’s dust, our fortune’s thrust!”

One-Eyed Jack slapped his knee, roaring, “Sing it loud, boy, we’re filthy rich!” Black Tom coiled rope with steady hands, his dark gaze fixed on the shrinking isle, a quiet anchor amid the revelry. Killian flipped a worn gold coin, its weight a solid thrill, and lobbed it to One-Eyed Jack, who snatched it midair with a toothy grin.

Quarterdeck

Desylva perched nearby, wiping her dagger on her trousers, its blade flashing like a shard of moonlight. She scanned the horizon where stars kissed the sea, her storm magic settling into a low hum. “What’s our next dance, Captain? Another scrap to test us?” she asked, her grin a wild mirror to his own.

His fingers brushed the sapphire in his pocket, a secret weighting his thoughts, he muttered under his breath, “You’re worth more than all this…” Her brow arched, catching the mumble. “What’s that you said?” He leaned in with a roguish grin, voice dropping to a husky tease, “Just thinkin’ you look too damn fine in that starlight, c’mere.”

He cupped her face with his hand, pulling her into a fierce, fleeting kiss that left her smirking against his lips. She pulled back, eyes glinting, “Careful, pirate, don’t start a blaze you can’t handle!”

Their laughter tangled, sharp and warm, the crew’s fading cheers a lively backdrop. Rumpelstiltskin’s sneers and Regina’s hexes flickered as distant threats, but her fire outshone his old revenge.

The night thickened, lanterns casting golden pools over the deck where loot gleamed in chaotic piles. The Jolly Roger pressed onward, sails a defiant banner against the dark, the sea’s murmur blending with the creak of straining wood. The horizon stretched boundless, a silver seam of sea and sky.

A few hours later

The Jolly Roger eased into a tranquil cove, the night draping the sea in a glassy veil as stars stabbed through the heavens like scattered diamonds, the victory’s fire cooling into a quieter glow. The water lay smooth, a silver mirror cradling the sky’s shimmer, its gentle ripples kissing the hull in a hush that softened the echoes of battle. Killian’s voice rolled across the deck, warm with a rare gentleness, “That dragon earned you all a breather.”

Main Deck

Near the mast, Smee struck a match, coaxing a brazier to life with shore-scavenged driftwood, flames leaping to paint the planks in amber hues. Rum gushed from a keg One-Eyed Jack had cracked open, its bite cutting through the salt air as tankards met in tired hands.

One-Eyed Jack sprawled against a cannon, his grizzled voice weaving a yarn, “That beast’s eye was a bloody moon, I gave it a shot to remember!” His triumphant laugh boomed, shaking the night.

Black Tom sat cross-legged, polishing his harpoon’s steel tip until it gleamed like a star, his scarred fingers steady and sure. Billy plucked a slow tune from his battered lute, the notes drifting soft and clear.

Billy
To flame and hoard,
we've struck accord,
The dragon's ash,
our tale's flash.

The shanty spun a thread of calm through the stillness.

Quarterdeck

Killian leaned against the helm beside Desylva, his coat open revealing a linen shirt marred by ash and blood. The dragon's sapphire now locked/hidden in a chest below, its gleam a faint, pulsing flicker seeping through the floorboards like a heartbeat trapped in stone. His blue eyes softened, sweeping over the crew's firelit faces … this band of rogues, this ship, her storm … his heart glowed, vengeance a faint flicker against her pull, the cove's peace a soothing balm.

Later that Night

The night stretched deep, the brazier's flames sinking to a dull pulse, embers glowing like the dragon's last glare. The cove's stillness swaddled the deck, the sea's sigh a cradle rocking the ship.

Main Deck

Desylva perched on a rope coil by the rail, the edges of her cloak frayed from the dragon's heat. Her gray eyes caught the fire's dance, mirroring its flicker as she stared out at the star-dusted sea, her cursed mark pulsing a faint blue beneath her sleeve, a quiet remnant of the tempest she'd wielded. She cradled a dented tankard, brushing ash from its rim.

Killian nudged her shoulder with his own, offering a fresh mug with a lopsided grin, "Truce offering, lass, reckon you earned it." She snagged it, her rough fingers brushing his, and shot back with a dry smirk, "Only if you stop playin' soft, pirate, don't think I missed that stumble in the cave." He chuckled, settling closer, the night's chill melting against their shared warmth.

Smee's drowsy chuckle floated from the fire, "Them two'll be sparkin' like flint 'fore long!" One-Eyed Jack paused his whittling, winking broadly, "Cap'n's got a proper glow for her, he does!" The crew's jibes softened into Billy's lullaby, the tune a gentle hum.

Killian's blue eyes locked with Desylva's gray, sea meeting storm, the rum blurring the edges of the world. He thought of the sapphire and the secret he held close, he muttered low, "Worth more than all that gold…" Her brow arched, catching the whisper. "What was that?" He grinned, dodging with a playful lilt, "Nothin', love. Fancy takin' this below?"

She smirked, nodding, "Aye, let's stir somethin' else." He took her hand with a roguish tug, her laugh bold and free as they headed toward the companionway.

Killian & Desylva's Cabin

Killian guided Desylva into their cabin, the walls pulsing faintly with runed light, their silvery veins glowing as if sensing the storm to come. He nudged the door shut with his shoulder, the latch clicking sharp against the ship's low groan, a wave thudding the hull with a hollow boom that reverberated through the timbers. The air inside thickened, heavy with the musk of oiled wood, the tang of salt-crusted leather, and the wild, electric scent of her skin, sharp as ozone before a strike, curling into his senses like a siren's call.

His blue eyes burned with hunger as he turned to her, his fingers deftly unbuckling his black leather coat, letting it slide from his shoulders to pool on the floor with a soft thud, revealing the taut lines of his chest beneath a linen shirt stretched tight. He kicked off his boots, the leather scuffing the tarred floor, his gaze never leaving her. Her storm-gray eyes smoldered, a defiant spark in their depths as she mirrored him, unlacing her boots with deliberate

slowness, each tug of the cords a tease that made his pulse quicken. Her cloak fell next, his hand brushing her shoulders to ease it free, the singed leather whispering against her skin as it dropped, her dark hair spilling wild, catching the lantern's amber glow like a cascade of midnight waves.

His fingers worked the laces of her leather shirt, his knuckles grazing the warm curve of her breasts as he tugged the fabric open, peeling it slowly to expose the smooth expanse of her torso, her skin flushed with heat. Her breath hitched as he tossed the shirt to the floor, her hair a cascade of ink against the lantern's glow. Her storm-gray eyes smoldered, molten with a dragon's heat, smoke and embers swirling in their depths. She met his gaze, her lips parting with a defiant curl, a challenge that set his blood ablaze.

Her fingers yanked at his shirt with a fierce tug, nails scraping his chest as she tore it free, the fabric ripping with a snarl, exposing the hard lines of muscle and jagged scars etched from realms uncounted. Her touch lingered, caressing the planes of his abdomen, fondling the taut skin with a possessive reverence that drew a low growl from his throat. His hand slid to her trousers, unfastening them with a rough pull, his fingers brushing the sensitive skin of her inner thighs as he stripped them away, his hook steadying her hip, leaving her bare, her curves glistening with a faint sheen of sweat in the lantern's light. She reciprocated, her hands deftly undoing his breeches, pushing them down to reveal his straining arousal, her fingers grazing him with a teasing stroke that made him shudder, his blue eyes darkening with want.

They stood naked before each other, the air crackling with their shared hunger, the ship's gentle rock a counterpoint to the storm brewing within. His hand caught her wrist, pulling her toward the bed with a pirate's urgency, his hook glinting as it grazed the bedframe, a metallic rasp cutting the stillness, the runes in the oak flaring briefly to mend a faint scratch left by its curve. He pressed her down onto the bed, its frame creaking beneath her weight, the mattress yielding softly.

The Jolly Roger swayed, waves slamming the hull with a restless thud, the stern window rattling as the sea growled, mirroring her stirring storm magic. He leaned in, his kiss crashing against hers, deep and claiming, his tongue delving to taste the salt and fire of her, his hand tracing the curve of her ribs, fingers splaying to cup her breast, kneading the soft flesh with a rough tenderness that drew a moan from her lips. Her legs hooked around his waist, pulling him tight, her thighs a vice of heat and strength, her heels digging into his lower back. He growled against her lips, low and feral, "You're fire, love, burnin' me alive," his voice a gravelly rasp as his hook trailed down her side, its cool curve teasing the sensitive skin of her hip, sending a shiver through her that made her gasp, her eyes flaring with desire.

Her smirk flashed, sharp and wicked, "Better stoke the flames, pirate, don't want the fire to go out," her voice a sultry challenge as she sent a faint current of storm magic through his hook, the electric pulse tingling against her skin, a delicious spark that made her arch, her breath catching as it danced along her nerves, enticing her further. The current surged through the metal, a prickling jolt that raced up his arm, igniting his nerves with a white-hot thrill, like lightning coiling in his veins, amplifying his hunger and drawing a ragged growl from his chest, her magic a siren's call that tethered him to her storm. His grin widened, his hook gliding up her thigh, the cold metal tracing slow, deliberate circles, teasing the tender flesh until she writhed beneath him, her fingers digging into his shoulders with a desperate need. His hand gripped her other thigh, rough and possessive, spreading her wide as his hook braced against the bed's edge, its curve biting into the enchanted oak, the runes glowing faintly to mend a gouge carved by its pressure.

The cabin's air thickened, heat coiling tight as the ship tilted, a wave crashing against the stern with a hollow boom that shook the beams, the deck shuddering as her storm woke with his hunger, the window's enchanted glass rattling fiercely, its runes pulsing to heal a crack from the violent lurch. Outside, the wind roared to life, the sea churning into a maelstrom of frothing whitecaps. Her breaths came sharp, a dragon's snarl rasping from her throat as her hair tangled in the linens, strands catching on her sweat-slicked neck. Her storm magic ignited, clouds blackened beyond the window, lightning splitting the sky with a jagged flash that painted the cabin in stark whites and shadows, her cursed mark pulsing blue like a vein of fire beneath her skin.

His hand slid to her center, fingers stroking her slick folds with a slow, torturous precision, fondling her with a reverence that made her hips buck, her moans rising to meet the thunder's roar. He positioned himself, his arousal pressing against her entrance, and with a fierce, deliberate thrust, he entered her, the tight, molten heat of her enveloping him in a blaze of sensation, her walls clenching around him like a storm's embrace. He groaned, the sound raw and primal, his thoughts consumed by the exquisite fire of her.

She's a tempest, gripping me like the sea itself, every pulse a wave crashing through my soul, her heat my anchor, her storm my salvation.

Her gasp was a dragon's cry, her body arching as he filled her, her thoughts a whirlwind of sensation.

He's a tide breaking inside me, his hardness a fierce claim, each thrust a spark that sets my blood aflame, binding us in this chaos.

The bed creaked, its runes flaring to mend scratches etched by their fervor, the enchanted oak steadying their rhythm.

He set a relentless pace, each thrust deep and unyielding, his hips driving with a primal urgency, the slick friction a fire that burned through them both. Her hands clawed the linens, nails raking the fabric as her body rocked with his, the hull groaning in protest as her power surged, an inferno blooming in the air, the cabin's walls trembling with the ship's lurch. Thunder rolled, a deafening crack that shook the beams, the Jolly Roger pitching as waves smashed the bow, seawater spraying through the window's edges, only to be repelled by the glowing runes. Her voice hissed his name, "Killian!" a thunderous growl that reverberated through the cabin, her storm-gray eyes blazing with embers as she arched beneath him, her spine bowing like a bowstring drawn taut. Her magic pulsed wild, the wind shrieking through the window, flinging maps from the desk in a chaotic swirl, papers spiraling like ash in a gale.

His deepened his rhythm, slowing to savor her, each thrust a deliberate claim, his hand sliding to her hip, fingers digging into the soft flesh as his hook scraped the bed's frame, a metallic screech underscoring their passion, the runes mending the gouge with a soft glow. His lips bruised her shoulder, teeth grazing the skin, his breath hot and ragged against her ear, "Take it, lass, give me your storm," his voice thick with want as he caressed her breast, thumb circling her nipple, coaxing a shudder from her. Her storm-gray eyes flared, pupils blown wide as she met his thrust for thrust, her hair a wild mane whipping across her face, her thoughts a blaze.

He's relentless, each plunge a lightning strike, filling me until I'm nothing but heat, his love a storm I crave.

His mind roared with her.

Thrusting into her is like sailing through a squall, her tightness a current pulling me deeper, her passion a fire that could sink me, yet I'd drown gladly.

The sea boiled into chaos, waves surging high, crashing over the deck with a thunderous roar, the ship tilting hard as if aflame, timbers groaning.

Her fingers sent another current through his hook, the electric jolt sparking against her thigh, a tantalizing pulse that made her moan, her body trembling with the added sensation, enticing her to the edge. The current hit him like a thunderbolt, a searing buzz that vibrated through his hook and into his core, a molten spark that tightened his muscles and set his blood ablaze, her magic a primal force that deepened his need, urging him to claim her with every fiber of his being.

His hook responded, tracing her collarbone, the cold metal dipping to tease the swell of her breast, circling her nipple until she gasped, her hips bucking to meet his thrusts, their intensity building with every touch. Her nails dragged down his back, a fiery scrape that pulled a snarl from his chest, leaving red welts that stung with delicious heat, her legs tightening around him, her body a furnace beneath his, yielding yet fierce. The weather mirrored their blaze, clouds darkening to pitch, lightning crackling over the sea in a dance of jagged scales, the Jolly Roger pitching, the deck slick with spray.

He slowed his thrusts, drawing out each movement to savor her gasps, her body trembling beneath him as he fondled her curves, his hand roaming her thigh, her waist, her breasts, each caress a spark that fueled their hunger. Her legs wrapping higher, allowing him deeper, their bodies locked in a primal waltz that lasted through another surge of her storm, the ship lurching as thunder roared, the window's runes glowing to mend another crack from the violent sway. Her storm-gray eyes locked on his, burning through the haze as she neared her peak, her cry building, a dragon's roar swallowed by the wind's howl. Her magic erupted, a gust slamming against the window with a bang, the air sizzling with static, the cabin's runes flaring to mend a splintered gouge in the bedframe.

She shattered first, her climax a cataclysm, her body convulsing as waves of pleasure crashed through her, her walls pulsing around him in a molten grip, her cry a primal scream that echoed the thunder's crack, her storm-gray eyes blazing with embers as her cursed mark flared bright blue, illuminating the cabin in a sapphire glow. Her release was a tempest, her hips bucking wildly, her nails digging into his shoulders, drawing pinpricks of blood, her breath ragged as the storm outside peaked, waves surging with a dragon's fury that rocked the ship bow to stern.

He held her tight, his hand clutching her waist, his hook pressed against her side, its cool edge grounding her as he drove harder, chasing her climax with his own. His release tore through him, a shuddering eruption that flooded her with heat, his growl raw and primal, his body trembling as he spilled into her, the sensation a fire that consumed him, his thoughts a blaze.

She's my storm, her heat consuming me, this union a treasure worth more than any hoard.

Her thoughts mirrored his.

His release is a tide breaking within me, his heat a claim that binds us, this fire our eternity.

Their climaxes lingered, a prolonged blaze of shared ecstasy, their bodies quaking as they rode the waves of pleasure, the cabin trembling with the ship's violent lurch, the runes mending a final scratch on the bedframe's enchanted oak.

They collapsed into each other, their breaths ragged, her kiss a fiery clash, lips bruising, tongues tangling as her hands gripped his hair, pulling him closer, her storm-gray eyes flickering with fading embers, her hair clinging to her sweat-drenched brow. The storm cooled, the wind dying to a low moan, clouds parting to reveal a sliver of moonlight glinting through the window, the glass steady as the Jolly Roger eased into a gentle sway, waves lapping the hull like a dragon's exhausted sigh.

He cradled her against his chest, his hand sliding up her back, fingers tracing the damp curve of her spine, caressing the soft skin with a tenderness that belied their ferocity, while his hook rested beside her, its curve catching the lantern's dimming glow, still warm from her currents. Her hair spilled over his arm, strands sticking to her flushed skin as her storm-gray eyes softened, tracing his jaw with a tender gaze, her fingers fondling his chest, mapping his scars with a lover's reverence.

The seas calmed to a gentle roll, the ship's creaks softening as the enchanted oak walls pulsed faintly, their runes dimming with the storm's retreat, the air clearing of its electric hum. He pressed a kiss to her temple, his lips lingering, warm and steady, "You're a tempest, love, near sank us both," he murmured, his voice rough but laced with a rare gentleness, his hand brushed her cheek, thumb stroking the edge of her lips with a caress that made her shiver. She grinned, a teasing purr rumbling in her chest, "You're the rogue who lit the fuse, reckon you tamed the beast this time." He smirked, his blue eyes glinting as he pulled her closer, her fingers grazed his chest, mapping the scars with a soft reverence, her body nestling into his like a tide finding its shore, their love a fire that burned brighter than the dragon's wrath.

The cabin settled, the air cooling to a blend of salt and her wild essence, the Jolly Roger steady as if her storm had burned itself out, the enchanted timbers sighing with relief, the runes' glow fading as the night reclaimed its calm. Outside, the moonlight bathed the deck, the dragon's fire spent in their fierce embrace, their love a treasure claimed amidst the wreckage of the night, the sapphire's glow pulsing faintly below, a distant spark dwarfed by the hoard of their union.

Quarterdeck (Next Day)

Dawn unfurled over the cove, a golden filament threading the silver sea with light. Killian and Desylva stood at the helm, her hands steady on the wheel, his arms encircling her waist from behind, his chest warm against her back as the rising sun painted the horizon in amber hues.

He dipped his head, lips brushing her ear, his whisper a low rumble, "You steal the dawn's fire, lass, reckon it's jealous." She tilted her head, a soft laugh escaping as she murmured back, "Keep talkin' sweet, and I'll steer us straight into it."

For a fleeting moment, they were alone, the world hushed save for the sea's gentle sigh, His heart hammered beneath his singed coat, once a drumbeat of vengeance, now thrumming with her wild pulse. The sapphire weighed heavy on his mind, a silent vow, unvoiced but certain, taking shape. Then boots thudded on the deck, the crew spilling up from below, shattering their quiet cocoon with yawns and grumbles.

Interlude: Captain's Praises 2 (Day 345)

The evening sky draped the Jolly Roger in deep sapphire, the last embers of sunset fading into a canopy of stars that glittered like scattered doubloons. Lanterns hung from the rigging, their golden light swaying across the enchanted deck, where silver runes pulsed softly in the black oak planks, humming with the ship's ancient magic. The air was crisp with salt, tinged with the smoky bite of Smee's pipe and the sharp sweetness of rum wafting from a half-empty barrel. The Roger rocked gently on a calm sea, her furled sails creaking, the hull whispering against waves that lapped like a lover's sigh.

Killian sat on a crate near the mainmast, legs stretched out, his black leather coat unbuttoned, hook resting on his knee as he nursed a mug of rum, his blue eyes catching the lantern glow with a roguish spark. Desylva leaned against the rail nearby, her leather cloak loose, dark hair tumbling wild in the breeze, her storm-gray eyes tracing the horizon as she twirled a dagger absently.

Smee sprawled on the deck, pipe puffing clouds that curled like specters, his ruddy cheeks flushed from rum. One-Eyed Jack perched on a cannon, sharpening his dagger with a rhythmic scrape, his grizzled beard flecked with salt. Black Tom stood near the foremast, a silent titan, harpoon propped against his shoulder, dark eyes fixed on the stars.

Billy sat cross-legged on a coil of rope, his freckled face alight as he tuned his battered lute, fingers plucking a lively, swaggering tune that danced over the deck, stirring the crew's blood and setting Smee's pipe to bobbing. Smee leapt to his feet, pipe clenched in his teeth, and launched into a shanty, voice booming with rum-soaked pride, his cutlass waving like a conductor's baton.

Smee
Gosh, it stirs the blood to sail with Hook, me lads,
With his hook a-flash and his devil-may-care grin!

Smee stomped the deck, rum sloshing from his mug. Billy, recognized the tune Smee was using, strummed along on his lute.

Smee
No pirate's matched his steel or his roguish fads,
He's the king o' the seas where the storms begin!
He's faced the gods, their wrath, and their cursed traps,
Through realms of fire and shade, he's never lost his way.
With Desylva's gales, they've torn through fate's own maps,
And the Jolly Roger sails for another day!

Mugs clashed, boots thudded, and the crew roared, One-Eyed Jack's dagger flashed skyward.

Smee/Billy/One-Eyed Jack
Oh, Captain Hook! He's the finest on the sea!
With his swagger and his steel, he's the pirate we all cheer!
No storm too wild, no foe too bold to flee,
Raise a tankard to our Hook, the king of buccaneers!

Oh, Captain Hook! With his lass of storm and might,
Desylva's winds will blow, and their love will burn the night!
Through realms and fights, they've won with heart and hook,
Here's to Captain Hook, the pirate none can shook!

One-Eyed Jack stood, grinning, and slashed the air with his dagger, voice gravelly and fierce.

One-Eyed Jack
In Agrabah's dunes, where scorpions did swarm,
Hook slashed through with his blade, and his lass brought down the gale!

One-Eyed Jack spun, mimicking a duel, winking at Desylva.

One-Eyed Jack
The Orb of Dominion, its power to transform,
He snatched it from the sands, left Regina's schemes to fail!
In Wonderland's bazaar, where mirrors twist and lie,
He broke the glass with his hook, while her lightning cleared the maze.
No Rumpel's golden threads could bind him, though they try,
With Desylva by his side, they set the realms ablaze!

Black Tom's harpoon tapped the deck, the crew's voices swelling, lanterns flickering wildly.

Smee/Billy/One-Eyed Jack
Oh, Captain Hook! He's the finest on the sea!
With his swagger and his steel, he's the pirate we all cheer!
No storm too wild, no foe too bold to flee,
Raise a tankard to our Hook, the king of buccaneers!

Oh, Captain Hook! With his lass of storm and might,
Desylva's winds will blow, and their love will burn the night!
Through realms and fights, they've won with heart and hook
Here's to Captain Hook, the pirate none can shook!

Billy vaulted to the capstan, lute blazing, voice soaring with youthful fire as he strummed wildly, leaping to the railing.

Billy
In Neverland's lagoon, where shadows haunt the tide,
Hook dove for sapphire shards, with her storms to light the deep!
The War Horn's call, the Shield, he's braved with pride,
While Rumpel's tricks and Regina's smoke were swept into the heap!

In Siren's Port, when runes did bind their fate,
We stormed the dark, cut chains, with our blades and Smee's old rope!
No god like Ares, nor Poseidon's watery hate,
Could sink our captain's heart or his lady's fiery hope!

Smee whooped, One-Eyed Jack fired a pistol skyward, Black Tom's cutlass pounded the deck.

Smee/Billy/One-Eyed Jack
Oh, Captain Hook! He's the finest on the sea!
With his swagger and his steel, he's the pirate we all cheer!
No storm too wild, no foe too bold to flee,
Raise a tankard to our Hook, the king of buccaneers!

Oh, Captain Hook! With his lass of storm and might,
Desylva's winds will blow, and their love will burn the night!
Through realms and fights, they've won with heart and hook,
Here's to Captain Hook, the pirate none can shook!

Billy (Voice bright)
His coat's all patched, his hook's a gleaming threat,
He's outsmarted every god from the Isles to Camelot's stream!

Billy (dance along deck, lute raise high)
The Veil of Shadows cloaked him, no regret,
With Desylva's gale behind, they're the ocean's fiercest team!

From Silence Shard to Compass, relics won with guile,
He's danced with death and laughed, with his crew to guard his back!
No tavern brawl or witch's cursed wile,
Can sink our Captain Hook, his heart's the truest tack!

The deck shook with stomping, mugs clashing like cymbals.

Smee/Billy/One-Eyed Jack
Oh, Captain Hook! He's the finest on the sea!
With his swagger and his steel, he's the pirate we all cheer!
No storm too wild, no foe too bold to flee,
Raise a tankard to our Hook, the king of buccaneers!

Oh, Captain Hook! With his lass of storm and might,
Desylva's winds will blow, and their love will burn the night!
Through realms and fights, they've won with heart and hook,
Here's to Captain Hook, the pirate none can shook!

Smee swayed, grinning; One-Eyed Jack winked; Billy cheered. Black Tom stomped.

Smee
When I'm frettin', it's Hook who calms me fears,

One-Eyed Jack
With a wink and a jest, he'll lead us through the fray!

Billy
His hook's a spark that sets the seas to cheers,
And Desylva's storms will light the darkest day!

Black Tom's harpoon rose in salute. The crew's voices thundering.

Smee/Billy/One-Eyed Jack
No kraken's claw, no wraith, no witch's spell,
Can match the fire of Hook and his lady's gale!
From port to port, we'll sing this tale to tell,
The Jolly Roger sails, and we'll never fail!

Oh, Captain Hook! He's the finest on the sea!
With his swagger and his steel, he's the pirate we all cheer!
No storm too wild, no foe too bold to flee,
Raise a tankard to our Hook, the king of buccaneers!

Oh, Captain Hook! With his lass of storm and might,
Desylva's winds will blow, and their love will burn the night!
Through realms and fights, they've won with heart and hook,
Here's to Captain Hook, the pirate none can shook!

The final note faded into roars. Desylva's mark glowed faintly, her grin sharp. She leaned toward Billy, voice warm but firm. "Keep that lute singing, lad." Billy's lute shifted to a fiercer strum, strings humming with storm-like intensity as Desylva strode to the center of the deck, cloak billowing, her mark pulsing blue, hair wild in the breeze, her eyes locked onto Killian.

Desylva (fierce and passionate)
Oh, my pirate's bold, with a hook that gleams like fire,
His grin's a storm that sets the seas alight!
Through realms of shade, we've climbed o'er peril's spire,
My winds beside him, we've outrun the night!

She paced, dagger flashing, a gust snapping the lanterns.

Desylva
In Agrabah's sands, where scorpions struck with sting,
My lightning cracked, his blade did carve the way.
The Sword of Dominion, its power ours to bring,
With Hook, I'll storm the fates that dare to sway!

Smee's mug clanged, One-Eyed Jack's pistol flashed, Black Tom's cutlass pounded.

Billy/Smee/One-Eyed Jack
Oh, Captain Hook! He's the finest on the sea!
With his swagger and his steel, he's the pirate we all cheer!
No storm too wild, no foe too bold to flee,
Raise a tankard to our Hook, the king of buccaneers!

Oh, Captain Hook! With his lass of storm and might,
Desylva's winds will blow, and their love will burn the night!
Through realms and fights, they've won with heart and hook,
Here's to Captain Hook, the pirate none can shook!

Desylva's voice rose, mark blazing, lightning crackling faintly around her. She spun toward Killian grinning fiercely.

Desylva
In Wonderland's maze, where mirrors twist and lie,
My tempests broke the glass, his hook did gleam!
The compass star we claimed 'neath madness' eye
Together we're the ocean's fiercest dream!

When Ares bound me, chains of iron and of flame,
His courage tore them down, my winds set free.
No god's grim wrath could dim our love's bright claim,
With Hook, I sail through any stormy sea!

Billy whooped, Black Tom's harpoon rose, the deck shaking with stomps.

Billy/Smee/One-Eyed Jack
Oh, Captain Hook! He's the finest on the sea!
With his swagger and his steel, he's the pirate we all cheer!
No storm too wild, no foe too bold to flee,
Raise a tankard to our Hook, the king of buccaneers!

Oh, Captain Hook! With his lass of storm and might,
Desylva's winds will blow, and their love will burn the night!
Through realms and fights, they've won with heart and hook,
Here's to Captain Hook, the pirate none can shook!

Desylva's voice softened, her eyes fixed on Killian.

Desylva
In Neverland's lagoon, where shadows haunt the deep,
His hook did dive, my storms did light the tide!

Desylva stepped closer, mark glowing bright.

Desylva
The War Horn's roar, the Shield, we fought to keep,
No Rumpel's gold could break our steadfast stride!

In Siren's Port, when runes did chain our fate,
Your blades and hearts, oh, crew, did set us free!
With Billy's eyes and Jack's fierce steel's debate,
And Tom's mute might, we crushed their villainy!

Mugs clashed, One-Eyed Jack's dagger flashed, Smee roared.

Billy/Smee/One-Eyed Jack
Oh, Captain Hook! He's the finest on the sea!
With his swagger and his steel, he's the pirate we all cheer!
No storm too wild, no foe too bold to flee,
Raise a tankard to our Hook, the king of buccaneers!

Oh, Captain Hook! With his lass of storm and might,
Desylva's winds will blow, and their love will burn the night!
Through realms and fights, they've won with heart and hook,
Here's to Captain Hook, the pirate none can shook!

Desylva's voice soared, lightning flickering brighter as she reached Killian, still seated on the crate.

Desylva
The Veil of Shadows cloaked him, dark and grand,
My lightning pierced the gloom to guide him home!
From Camelot's bright waves to Isles' dark strand,
With Hook, no realm's too wild for us to roam!

His heart's my anchor, fierce through every fight,
The Silence Shard, the Trident's watery claim,
No witch's smoke nor crocodile's cursed slight,
Can dim the fire of Hook's undying flame!

Black Tom's cutlass thudded, Billy's lute wailed, voices thundering.

Billy/Smee/One-Eyed Jack
Oh, Captain Hook! He's the finest on the sea!
With his swagger and his steel, he's the pirate we all cheer!
No storm too wild, no foe too bold to flee,
Raise a tankard to our Hook, the king of buccaneers!

Oh, Captain Hook! With his lass of storm and might,
Desylva's winds will blow, and their love will burn the night!
Through realms and fights, they've won with heart and hook,
Here's to Captain Hook, the pirate none can shook!

Desylva's voice turned fierce, her eyes blazing.

Desylva
When Smee's a-frettin', Hook's the calm to ease his dread,
With Billy's sharp eyes spotting peril in the dark!
One-Eyed Jack's blade will strike where foes have fled
And Tom's mute strength's a force to spark our bark!

No kraken's claw, no wraith, no witch's spell,
Can match the fire of Hook and my own gale!

Billy/Smee/One-Eyed Jack/Desylva
From port to port, we'll sing this tale to tell,
The Jolly Roger sails, and we'll never fail!

Oh, Captain Hook! He's the finest on the sea!
With his swagger and his steel, he's the pirate we all cheer!
No storm too wild, no foe too bold to flee,
Raise a tankard to our Hook, the king of buccaneers!

Billy/Smee/One-Eyed Jack
Oh, Captain Hook! With his lass of storm and might,
Desylva's winds will blow, and their love will burn the night!
Through realms and fights, they've won with heart and hook,
Here's to Captain Hook, the pirate none can shook!

The final note rang out. Desylva swung a leg over Killian's lap, straddling him on the crate, her mark blazing as she cupped his face. His arms wrapped around her waist, hook pressing into her lower back, pulling her close. She kissed him fiercely, tasting of salt, rum, and storm-fire, her lips claiming his as the crew's roars faded to a distant hum.

The Jolly Roger glided on, her enchanted timbers thrumming with the shanty's echo, lanterns casting golden pools across the deck as the moon silvered the calm sea. Killian's arms stayed around Desylva, her head against his chest, their heartbeats syncing with the ship's gentle sway. Smee puffed his pipe, grinning; One-Eyed Jack sheathed his dagger; Black Tom leaned on his harpoon; Billy strummed a soft coda.

The stars burned brighter, the sea a mirror of their triumph, carrying the crew's ballad into the night. A hymn to their captain, his storm-lass, and the unbreakable legend of the Roger's relentless voyage.

The Tears of the Moon (Day 350)

The Jolly Roger cut through a silver sea beneath a sky where a crescent moon hung low and luminous, its pale light casting an ethereal glow over a realm of shadowed jungles and mist-wreathed cliffs, an otherworldly landscape where the horizon shimmered like liquid silver and the air carried a faint sweetness, undercut by the musk of damp earth and the tang of salt from distant waves.

The ship approached a jagged coastline where the Serpent Temple loomed atop a sheer drop, a towering edifice of dark basalt, its spires rising like the vertebrae of some ancient beast, carved with coiling snakes whose emerald-inlaid eyes glinted like malevolent stars, catching the moonlight in flashes of green fire. Vines draped its walls like living curtains, their thick, leathery leaves glistening with dew that dripped onto the stone below, each drop shimmering like liquid moonlight, pooling in cracks etched by millennia of storms.

The jungle stretched behind it, a tangled mass of gnarled trees with bark as dark as pitch, their branches twisting upward like skeletal hands clawing at the sky, rustling with a low, incessant murmur, a chorus of unseen life woven into the mist that curled through the canopy like smoke from a dying fire. The air thrummed with a resonant hum, a vibration that pulsed in the bones like a heartbeat, and the distant hiss of serpents echoed through the foliage, their calls weaving a tapestry of menace that prickled the skin. The waves lapped at the hull with a rhythmic sigh, the water cold and silvered, reflecting the moon's crescent in fractured ripples that danced across the surface like shards of a broken mirror.

They sought the *Tears of the Moon*, a pearlescent gem the size of a dove's egg, its surface a swirl of opalescent blues and silvers that shifted with the light, glowing with a soft radiance that pulsed faintly, as if alive. Legend held it could break any curse with its power, a beacon of purity said to dissolve enchantments with a single touch. Rumpelstiltskin craved its ability to sever the chains of his dagger's curse, dreaming of freedom from the shadow

that bound him, while Regina sought its strength to dismantle her enemies' magical defenses, envisioning a realm where her will reigned supreme over shattered spells and broken foes.

The crew battled a creeping threat as the Jolly Roger drew closer to the shore/ Vines slithered over the deck like living ropes, their thorns scraping wood with a sound like nails dragged across slate, curling around railings and masts with a possessive grip, runes glowing faintly to mend scratches. The air heavy with the scent of wet loam and the faint metallic tang of salt carried on the breeze.

Main Deck

Smee, stout frame tense beneath a patched coat, ruddy face slick with sweat as he hacked at tendrils with a cutlass, shouting, "Keep her clear, lads! This jungle's alive and it don't like us!" his voice roughened by the strain of holding the wheel steady against the vines' pull. One-Eyed Jack manned a cannon portside, his eye sharp as he fired a warning shot into the mist-shrouded trees, the boom reverberating off the cliffs. He muttered, "Snakes everywhere, don't trust 'em, Cap'n," his eye twitching as he reloaded with a practiced flick of his wrist, ash smudging his cheek.

Black Tom loaded harpoons starboard, his scarred hands steady as he worked in silence, his broad shoulders hunched against the mist, his presence a grim anchor. Mist coated his arms, beading on his skin like dew, but he brushed it off with a flick of his fingers, his focus unbroken. Billy swung in the rigging, his youthful frame dwarfed by the sails, his voice piercing the night as he clung to a torch that flickered against the damp, "Somethin's comin' through the trees, Cap'n! Big ones, scales flashin'!" his hands trembling as he gripped the ropes, his freckled face pale beneath a wool hat sodden with mist.

Quarterdeck

Killian gripped the wheel with a sailor's grace, his black coat glistening with dew that beaded on the leather like pearls, his hook catching the moonlight in flashes of silver. "Drop the anchor, lads!" he commanded, his voice cutting through the jungle's hum like a blade. Black Tom and One-Eyed Jack leapt to the capstan, their boots thudding on the enchanted oak deck, its runes shimmering to mend thorn gashes. Black Tom's scarred hands gripped the capstan bars, his broad shoulders straining as he pushed, while One-Eyed Jack growled, "Heave, Tom, let's root her fast!" his hands guiding the chain as it clanked into the shallow silvered water, the anchor biting into the sandy bottom with a muffled thud.

Desylva stood beside him, her cursed mark pulsing with the moon's energy, a faint blue glow flickering beneath her skin like a heartbeat. She tied her dark hair back with a leather cord, her fingers deft despite the damp, her gray eyes tracing the cliffs with a storm's intensity, her breath visible in the cool night air as she murmured, "This place is sacred, and deadly. The moon's watching us, Killian, and it's restless," her voice low and edged with caution, her dagger gleaming at her hip as she braced herself, the storm brewing in her blood a tangible hum beneath her skin.

Killian steadied the ship with a firm hand, his jaw set against the hum vibrating through the deck, his blue eyes narrowing as he scanned the temple's silhouette against the crescent moon. The ship bobbing gently some fifty feet from the shore, its waves lapping the hull, the water's depth a mere eight feet, far below the waterline. Killian turned to Desylva, her cursed mark pulsing blue beneath her sleeve, her gray eyes fierce. "The shore's close, love, but the gap's too wide for a plank. Conjure us a path?" Her lips curled into a sharp grin, "Aye, Captain, hold steady." She raised her hands, storm magic crackling as a shimmering ramp of wind and mist wove from the deck to the dark sand, its translucent surface pulsing with faint lightning, firm yet alive with her power.

Killian and Desylva shared a look. He took her hand, and they walked to the ramp. They descended ramp, their boots steady on the ethereal ramp.

Land

They stood on the shore of dark sand and tangled roots, their boots sinking into the damp earth with a soft squelch, the air heavy with the scent of wet loam and the faint metallic tang of salt carried on the breeze. The enchanted oak deck hummed faintly behind them, its runes glowing to mend a thorn's scratch. Killian's black coat swayed, his cutlass drawn, his hook glinting as he stepped forward, Desylva close behind, her dagger gleaming, her cursed mark flaring brighter. "Steady, love," Killian murmured, his voice low, his blue eyes scanning the jungle's edge. "This shore's got teeth," Desylva replied, her gray eyes sharp, her breath a faint mist in the cool air.

Smee's voice carried faintly over the wind, "Hold her steady, lads! Don't let her drift!" as One-Eyed Jack cursed the mist, slashing at encroaching tendrils with his cutlass, the blade sparking against thorns. One-Eyed Jack fired a cannon shoreward, the boom scattering vines in the trees, his eye fixed on the jungle, "Take that, you cursed weeds!" he bellowed, ash smudging his cheek. Billy franticly shouted, "They're climbin' higher, Cap'n!"

Black Tom fired a harpoon, its barbed head trailing a thin, enchanted line, pinning a vine to a shoreward tree with a thud that echoed through the mist. He reeled the line back, the harpoon's return scraping sand as he retrieved it. He then gathered three more harpoons from the deck, their iron heads gleaming, stowing them near the rail, his broad shoulders steady as he brushed mist from his arms. The deck's enchanted oak hummed, its runes glowing faintly to mend thorn gashes, the wood sealing itself under the crew's boots, a living shield against the jungle's assault.

Torches cast flickering shadows across the shore, their orange light dancing on the sand as Killian led the way, his cutlass gleaming, his hook a crescent of silver. Desylva followed, her senses razor-sharp, her cursed mark pulsing with the jungle's hum, her dagger clutched tightly as she scanned the trees, catching every rustle, every glint of movement.

The ascent began up a winding path of moss-slicked stone, flanked by towering trees with bark as dark as pitch, their gnarled branches twisting upward like skeletal hands clawing at the crescent moon, vines draped from their boughs, thick and leathery, their surfaces glistening with dew that dripped onto the stone below, each drop catching the moonlight in a fleeting shimmer before sinking into cracks etched by millennia of storms. The path was narrow, barely wide enough for two abreast, forcing Killian and Desylva to move in tandem, their shoulders brushing as they climbed. His breath came in steady puffs, visible in the cool air, while hers was a faint mist, her cursed mark sparking faintly with each step, a beacon of her growing unease.

The jungle pressed in around them, its shadows shifting as if alive, whispering secrets in a language older than the sea, crickets chirped a staccato rhythm, frogs croaked deep and mournful, and unseen birds fluttered overhead, their wings rustling like paper in the mist.

As they crested a rise, a wyvern burst from the canopy with a deafening screech that split the night, its massive form silhouetted against the crescent moon. Its wings were vast and leathery, stretched taut like sails across a frame of sinew and bone, shimmering green-black in the faint light, each beat sending gusts that rattled the vines. Its serpentine neck coiled with menace, its head crowned with a crest of jagged spines, its eyes glowing amber like molten gold, its fangs dripping venom that hissed as it struck the stone, leaving scorched, bubbling marks that smoked in the cool air.

Regina's despair curse wove through the night like a mournful wail, its magic a palpable force that crashed over Desylva. A wave of grief flooded her mind, memories of Torin's blood pooling on Veyra's shore, his rough hands still as the life left him, Lysara's ash scattering in the wind, her gentle voice silenced. Her magic faltered into weak, fizzing sparks that danced uselessly in the mist, her cursed mark dimming under the weight of sorrow, her knees buckling as she clutched her chest, a sob choking her throat.

The wyvern lunged with predatory grace, its talons, a set of curved, obsidian claws longer than a man's forearm, slamming Killian to the ground, pinning him against the stone with a force that cracked the slab beneath him. Venom dripped from its fangs, searing his chest through his coat. His shirt smoldered, the acrid stench of burning leather mingling with the copper tang of blood that welled from gashes torn by its claws, staining the stone in dark rivulets as he grunted, his cutlass slashing at its wing with a metallic clang, the blade sparking against its scales but barely denting its hide.

Desylva's lightning surged through her tears, a jagged bolt splitting the night with a crack that echoed off the cliffs. She stumbled forward, her rain pouring in a torrential flood, purging the venom with a hiss of steam as she broke Regina's curse with a roar of defiance. Her dagger sank into the wyvern's flank, the blade biting deep as she wrenched Killian free with a grunt. Her thunder roared, a deafening explosion that split its skull, ichor splattering across the stone in thick, black gobs, its wings twitching in death as its massive body collapsed, vines snapping under its weight.

Killian staggered to his feet, his breath ragged, his chest heaving beneath his torn coat. Blood streaked his shirt, his face pale but his blue eyes fierce as he pulled her into his arms. His lips finding hers in a fierce, desperate kiss that tasted of blood and rain, a raw edge of relief and need. “You’re my everything, love, my storm in this hell,” he rasped, his voice rough with the strain of survival. His hook gripped her waist as he pressed his forehead to hers, their breaths mingling in the cool air. She clung to him, her hands trembling against his chest, her lips brushing his in a softer echo, “And you’re my forever, my light in the dark,” her voice thick with emotion, her gray eyes shining with unshed tears as she steadied him, their bond a fire reignited amidst the chaos.

The path twisted upward through a dense thicket, vines parting like reluctant curtains to reveal a crumbling courtyard before the temple’s entrance, a sunken plaza of cracked basalt tiles, their surfaces etched with faded runes that glowed faintly green under the moonlight, ringed by statues of serpents standing sentinel, their stone coils glistening with dew, their emerald eyes catching the crescent’s glow in flashes of eerie light. The air grew thick with the scent of damp earth and ancient decay, a musty tang that clung to the throat, and the hum intensified into a vibration that rattled pebbles on the ground.

Rumpelstiltskin’s cackle pierced the silence like a shard of glass, his magic weaving through the mist as shadow serpents erupted from the cracks, sleek, sinuous forms with scales like polished obsidian, their edges glinting like sharpened blades, their eyes glowing like embers in a dying fire, their hisses a chilling chorus summoned by his shadow curse, a dark enchantment that plunged Desylva’s vision into a void of black. Her world shrank to sound and touch, her dagger slipping from her grasp with a clatter as serpents coiled around her legs, their scales cutting like glass through her leather trousers, drawing thin lines of blood that trickled onto the stone.

Killian roared, “Get off her, you bastards!” his voice a thunderclap of fury as he leapt to her side. His cutlass slashing through one serpent with a wet crunch, ichor spraying across his coat in a dark arc, another coiled around his arm, its fangs grazing his wrist, blood welling as he grunted, his hook piercing its skull with a sickening squelch. Desylva’s gusts broke through the curse, a howl of wind scattering the serpents into wisps of smoke. Her lightning arced, a brilliant net of white fire that finished them, their bodies dissolving with faint hisses as her vision snapped back, her gray eyes blazing with renewed fury.

From the ship: Smee’s voice carried up the cliff, “They’re climbin’ the hull!” as One-Eyed Jack fired a cannon, the boom scattering tendrils that writhed like severed limbs. Black Tom swung a harpoon with deadly precision, pinning a vine to the deck, and Billy hacked with an axe, his torch casting wild shadows. Desylva’s thunder steadied the ship, a resounding crack that loosed the vines’ hold, her rain pouring to slick their grip, the crew’s cheers a faint echo through the mist, Smee clapping Billy’s back, “Good lad!”

The courtyard stretched toward the temple’s entrance, a cavernous maw flanked by twin serpent reliefs, their stone coils glistening with moisture, their emerald eyes seeming to follow every move with a cold, unblinking stare. A jungle chimera leapt from the shadows, a grotesque hybrid with a jaguar’s sleek, muscular body covered in spotted fur, a serpent’s venomous tail swaying with a hypnotic rhythm, and a hawk’s piercing wings beating gusts that stirred the mist. Its roar shook the statues, dust falling from their crevices as Regina’s venom curse turned Desylva’s mist into a toxic haze, burning her throat and stinging her eyes with acrid fumes. It lunged with feline grace, its tail striking Killian’s arm, venom seeped through his sleeve, searing his skin as he grunted, his cutlass slashing at its flank.

Desylva’s rain surged, a deluge purging the venom with a hiss of steam as she broke the curse. Her lightning blasted its wings, her arms tackling him from its claws as they rolled across the stone, her dagger sinking into its side, ichor pooled as she steadied him, her voice fierce, “Hold on, love!” He surged up, slashing its throat with a savage twist, the beast collapsing in a heap. His lips found hers, a fierce kiss tasting of sweat and venom, “You’re my cure, lass, always,” his voice roughened by pain, his hook brushing her cheek as she pressed her hand to his arm, “And you’re my fight,” her breath warm against his skin.

The temple’s interior opened into a maze of shadowed corridors, their walls of dark basalt etched with runes that pulsed faintly with green light, flickering torches casting writhing shadows that danced like specters across the stone. Each step echoed with a hollow thud, the air growing cooler and heavier, laced with the scent of moss and ancient rot.

A shadow wyrm emerged from a side passage, a serpentine mass of living darkness, its body a coiling void that swallowed light, its fangs long and curved like scythes, dripping a paralysis curse from Rumpelstiltskin that gleamed like liquid midnight on the stone floor. It struck Desylva with a hiss, its fangs grazing her leg. Her muscles locked

instantly, her cursed mark dimming as she crumpled, her dagger clattering. Killian roared, his hook piercing its eye with a wet crunch, ichor splashing as he slashed its neck.

Her thunder broke the curse with a deafening crack, her rain surging to fell it, washing the venom from her skin as she staggered up. Her arms pulled him close, kissing his trembling lips with a fierce urgency, “You’re my strength, Killian, my rock,” her voice shaking with relief. He steadied her, his hand brushing her cheek, “And you’re my will, love, my storm,” his voice a low growl as he gripped her tight.

The corridors twisted deeper, the hum growing into a resonant drone that vibrated through the stone, guiding them to the temple’s heart, a vast chamber where the ceiling arched into a dome of cracked basalt, its apex open to the crescent moon above, bathing the room in a silver glow. Vines curled across the floor like possessive tendrils, weaving around an altar of black stone veined with silver, its surface worn smooth by time, on it rested the *Tears of the Moon*, its pearlescent light pulsing faintly, casting shimmering reflections on the walls like ripples on still water.

Desylva stepped toward the altar, her breath catching as the gem’s glow pulsed in time with her cursed mark, its opalescent blues and silvers swirling like a captured sea. “It’s alive, Killian,” she whispered, her gray eyes wide, her fingers hovering over the stone, hesitant. Killian stood close, his hook glinting, his hand steadying her arm. “Take it, love. It’s ours,” he urged, his voice low but firm, blue eyes locked on the gem. She nodded, her fingers closing around the stone, its surface cool and smooth, thrumming faintly like a heartbeat against her palm.

The chamber shuddered, vines tightening as if in protest, their thorns scraping stone with a hiss. “Careful, lass, this place don’t let go easy,” Killian growled, his cutlass raised, scanning the shadows. Desylva tucked the gem into a leather pouch at her belt, its glow dimming but steady, her storm magic flaring as she murmured, “It’s done. Let’s move.” The altar’s runes flickered, a warning pulse as the hum deepened, the air crackling with latent magic.

The chamber trembled as Regina’s collapse curse cracked the stone, an ominous rumble shook the floor, dust falling in curtains as fissures spiderwebbed outward, summoning a moon wraith from the shadows, a spectral figure with a skeletal frame draped in tattered robes that fluttered like smoke, its eyes glowing with a cold, silver fire, its clawed hands wreathed in a chilling flame cursed by Rumpelstiltskin to burn with frostbite’s agony.

It lunged, its touch searing Killian’s chest through his coat, frost spread across his shirt, his breath hitching as he stumbled, ice creeping up his arm. Desylva’s lightning blasted it back, a white-hot arc that split the air. Her rain surged, a deluge dousing the frost as she broke the curse with a burst of thunder, tackling him from its grasp. Her arms shielded him as she drove her dagger into its core, her voice fierce, the wraith dissolved into mist, its wail fading as her magic flared, a final tempest securing the gem.

The temple bucked as stones fell from the dome, vines snapping as Rumpelstiltskin’s shadow curse summoned a nightmare serpent, a massive beast with scales black as pitch, its eyes twin moons glowing with venom, its hiss a paralyzing wave.

Desylva’s legs locked again. Killian slashed its neck, his hook breaking scales. Her thunder felled it, breaking the curse as she clutched the pouch at her belt, the *Tears of the Moon* pulsing faintly against her hip, its light a beacon through the chaos.

From the ship Smee’s voice echoed from below, “She’s holdin’, Cap’n!” as One-Eyed Jack fired a cannon, scattering debris.

Desylva’s gusts steadied the ship, her lightning blasting falling stones as she and Killian fled, the crew’s cheers a lifeline through the chaos. Under the crescent moonlight, Killian and Desylva stumbled onto a cliffside ledge overlooking the silver sea, the temple crumbling behind.

The Jolly Roger bobbed, the sails catching the glow.

<u>Jolly Roger</u>

Killian and Desylva reached the shore, their boots slick with jungle mud, the silvered water lapping at the dark sand some fifty feet from the Jolly Roger’s anchored hull. “Up we go, love,” Killian said, his voice rough but warm, his hand steadying Desylva as they ascended, her cursed mark flaring, gray eyes fierce, her dagger still drawn.

Main Deck

They stepped onto the deck, the oak humming beneath them, its runes sealing a thorn's scratch. Desylva turned, her hands sweeping downward as the ramp dissolved into a swirl of mist, fading into the silver sea.

Killian ordered, "Prepare to sail!" his voice a thunderclap spurring the crew as he and Desylva headed to the quarterdeck, the deck steady beneath their boots. Billy, quick and sure, scrambled to the rigging, his torch flickering as he checked the sails, shouting, "Sails ready, Cap'n!" his nimble fingers adjusting the ropes with a sailor's precision.

One-Eyed Jack and Black Tom moved to the capstan, their muscles straining as they prepared to haul the anchor, its chain clanking as they gripped the bars. "Heave, Tom, like it's a fat merchant's gold!" One-Eyed Jack growled, his eye glinting, ash still smudging his cheek. Black Tom nodded, his scarred hands steady. Smee, eager to please, coiled ropes with fumbling hands, muttering, "Got to keep her tidy, Cap'n," under Killian's watchful gaze. The capstan's runes glowed faintly, the enchanted oak steady against the strain.

Quarterdeck

"Good work, lads," Killian called from the helm, his hook flashing, then commanded, "Anchor up!" his voice fierce, echoing off the cliffs. One-Eyed Jack roared, "Aye, Cap'n!" relaying orders as he secured the cannons, his cutlass sheathed. "No more snakes, lads, let's move!" he barked, his eye twitching. Black Tom, muscles straining, led the crew at the capstan, its runes glowing as they hauled the anchor, the chain clanking into the chain locker with a resonant thud, the hull's frame stirring. "Push, you lazy dogs!" One-Eyed Jack growled,

The ship's bell rang Smee's eager chime, signaling readiness, its bronze hum cutting through the mist. As the anchor broke free, the crew shouted, "Anchor aweigh!" and the sails billowed, the Jolly Roger gliding forward. Killian's hook steadied the helm, his eyes on the crow's nest, where Billy signaled clear waters, the ship's enchanted oak hull slicing through the silver sea, leaving the temple's menace behind.

A few hours later

The Jolly Roger bobbed gently off a silver sea, anchored just beyond the jungle's shadowed fringe, her deck awash in the crescent moon's ethereal shimmer. The air wove a delicate thread of salt and damp earth, the jungle's restless hum fading into the soft caress of waves against the hull. Her timbers sighed as she settled into the calm, vines hacked away by the crew's deft blades, runes healing any lingering scratches.

Main Deck

Killian and Desylva sat close, the *Tears of the Moon* casting a faint, pearlescent glow between them. Her head rested on his shoulder, gray eyes mirroring the moonlight as their fingers laced together. He brushed a tender kiss across her knuckles, voice a low murmur, "Through every storm, love, I'll face it all with you." She tilted her head, a faint smile curving her lips, "Aye, and I'll steer us true, together." Their closeness wove a quiet refuge against the night.

The crew unwound under the lunar glow. Smee hunched over a tangle of vine-torn ropes, his stout frame swaying as he stitched, grumbling, "That serpent's grip near choked us, blasted jungle's a right menace!" One-Eyed Jack polished a cannon barrel, his eye glinting as he muttered, "Thorns sharper than a shark's teeth, next time, I'll blast 'em to splinters!" Black Tom leaned against the mast, broad shoulders eased, carving a jagged snake from driftwood with steady, scarred hands, his silence a calm anchor. Billy sprawled atop a crate near the rail, youthful frame loose as he gazed skyward, voice soft with wonder, "That gem's glowin' like a star." The moonlight softened their edges, tension melting into the sea's gentle murmur.

Desylva pressed closer to Killian, her breath warm against his neck as she whispered, "We're stronger for it, every scar, every fight." He kissed her temple, hook resting lightly on her waist, rasping, "Ye're my fire, lass, burnin' bright against any dark." Smee ambled over, offering a chipped mug of tea brewed from salvaged leaves, "Warm yerselves, Cap'n. Beats that jungle muck!" One-Eyed Jack grunted, wiping cannon grease on his sleeve, "Rum's the cure, ye daft sod. Tea's fer landlubbers!"

A few hours later

The crew's voices wove a low hum, blending with the waves as they traded jabs and eased into the night. Killian leaned against the rail, Desylva tucked against his side, her jungle-grimed skin cleansed by her earlier rain, her lips grazing his jaw. "My shield through the shadows," she murmured, gray eyes soft as the moonlight. He tipped her chin with his hook, voice a husky growl, "My tide, my wild tempest."

Their lips met in a tender kiss, then deepened, fierce yet tender, a spark flaring in the quiet. One-Eyed Jack snorted from his cannon, "Moon's makin' 'em mushy, get a cabin!" Smee chuckled, jowls quivering, "Aye, let 'em spark, keeps us warm!"

The crew settled into rest. The *Tears* now stashed below in the chest in the captain's cabin. The ship drifting in a rare stillness. Killian's mind turned to the next horizon, his heart tethered to her, he knew he'd never let her slip away. The Jolly Roger cradled them, timbers a steady pulse beneath the lunar veil.

Smee steadied a crate lashed with damp rope, meaty hands glistening as he poured rum into a chipped mug, the dark liquid catching the moon's silver sheen, his breath misting in the chill. Killian and Desylva rose, slipping toward the companionway.

One-Eyed Jack lounged against his cannon, its barrel beaded with dew, polishing his flintlock with a damp rag, smirking as his voice carried over the waves, "Off they slink, Cap'n and his storm, chasin' moonlight below." Smee's laugh rumbled, wiping his brow with a shimmering sleeve, "Her squall's comin', deck'll be swimmin' soon."

Black Tom stood at the bow, dew-soaked coat reflecting the moon, scarred hands gripping the rail as droplets fell, dark eyes tracking their path amid a night bird's distant wail. Billy swung from a taut rope, torch flaring through the mist, glowing across his salt-streaked tunic.

The air thickened, a cool gust stirring the dew as Smee clapped One-Eyed Jack's back, "Below quick, 'fore she soaks us through!" They tramped to the hatch, boots slipping on the slick deck, descending just as silvery gusts rippled the sea.

Killian & Desylva's Cabin

The cabin door thudded shut with a resonant bang, the air thick with the briny sting of the sea as Killian shook off his dew-damp coat, droplets splattering the planks like fractured moonlight, the floor's runes glowing faintly to mend a scuff from his boot. Desylva unclasped her cloak, letting it fall in a sodden heap, and peeled her clinging tunic over her head, the wet fabric dragging slowly across her skin, revealing the curve of her breasts, glistening with moonlit beads that traced rivulets down her taut stomach, her dark hair slick and shimmering, framing her face as her gray eyes blazed with wild triumph.

The ship swayed beneath them, as the sea churned restlessly, waves slamming the hull with a seductive, rhythmic roar, the enchanted oak groaning, its runes pulsing to heal thorn scratches from the jungle's vines. His blue eyes smoldered like embers in the lantern's swaying glow as he snagged her belt with his hook, the cold steel scraping leather with a sharp hiss, yanking her flush against his chest. Her cursed mark pulsed, a luminescent blue throbbing like a living flame, stirring a breeze that crackled with the electric scent of her presence.

"Bloody hell, lass," he growled, voice rough as the sea's undertow, "you're a prize worth every cursed tear." Their lips met in a kiss both tender and ravenous, tasting of dew's sweetness and victory's sharp bite, tongues tangling as the ship tilted violently, the lantern swinging to cast wild shadows across the damp walls, their runes shimmering to seal a crack from the storm's jolt.

The ship jolted, a sudden lurch as the seas surged into a tempestuous churn, waves pounding the hull with fierce insistence, the enchanted oak's runes flaring to mend a splintered plank. Killian pressed her back against the wall, its runes warm under her skin, his hand splaying across her ribs, fingers brushing the damp, sensitive underside of her breast as his tongue swept into her mouth, claiming her with a slow, deliberate hunger. Her storm magic roused the wind into a howling gust that screamed through the rigging, rattling the stern window, its enchanted glass glowing, runes healing a hairline crack from the wind's force.

Her hands clawed at his shirt, nails tearing it open, baring the scarred expanse of his torso, glistening with sweat and sea spray, his chest heaving under her touch. “Come on, Killian, give me more,” she rasped, her voice a husky taunt as the ship lurched again.

They kicked off their boots and shed the last of their clothes. Their leather trousers sliding down to pool with his linen shirt in a chaotic heap, the floor’s runes glowing to dry the damp stains.

She shoved him backward onto the bed, its frame creaking, runes mending a gouge from his hook as the mattress sank under his weight. She pounced, straddling him in a fluid motion, her thighs clamping his hips with a fierce grip, the heat of her core pressing against him as thunder roared beyond the hull, shaking the timbers.

Waves pounded the ship in a relentless rhythm, her magic amplifying the storm with each roll of her hips against him, the lantern swinging wildly to cast pearlescent shadows across their entwined forms, shimmering like the moon’s own tears, the cabin’s oak walls pulsing with runes to steady the violent sway.

He flipped her beneath him with a guttural grunt, pinning her wrist above her head with his hook, the sharp curve of steel biting into her skin just enough to draw a thin bead of blood that trickled down her arm, mingling with the sweat glistening on her flesh. Her fingers grazed his hook, her storm magic surging a gentle current through the steel, electrifying his body, a searing jolt that raced through his veins, igniting every nerve with a white-hot thrill, his muscles tensing as a primal heat flooded his core, his erection throbbing with an aching intensity, his breath hitching as the shock curled his toes, a raw, electric pleasure that made his blue eyes blaze with feral need. “Gods, lass, you’re lightning in my blood,” he gasped, his voice ragged, the current’s aftershocks pulsing through him, turning him on with a desperate, trembling urgency.

The ship swayed, waves roaring as he entered her with a slow, soft thrust, sliding into her slick heat with deliberate care, stretching her gently as her breath hitched. “Like that, lass?” he murmured against her throat, lips brushing her pulse with a teasing warmth as he began a tender rhythm, each shallow thrust a caress that drew a soft moan from her lips. “Yes,” she gasped, her free hand gripping his back, nails digging into his flesh as her storm magic stirred the wind into a shrieking howl, rain hammering the deck in a torrential counterpoint.

“Want more?” he asked, his voice a rough purr as he thrust again, slow and deliberate, the head of him brushing deep inside her. Her hips rocked up to meet him, her voice trembling with need, “Yes, don’t tease me, Killian, move, damn you.” The sea thrashed furiously, her cursed mark flaring brighter, its glow pulsing in time with his languid pace as the storm escalated, thunder booming like a lover’s fierce demand outside.

His thrusts deepened gradually, the slow tenderness giving way to a firmer edge as he pressed his mouth to her throat, teeth grazing her pulse with a hungry nip that made her gasp, “Can you take it, lass?” he growled, blue eyes locking on hers as he thrust harder, a steady plunge that jolted her body against the bed, the enchanted oak frame creaking, its runes healing a splinter from the strain. “Yes,” she moaned, louder now, her nails raking his shoulders, leaving crimson welts that glistened with sweat as her hips bucked up to meet him, urging him deeper. “More, harder, pirate,” she demanded, her voice breaking into a ragged plea.

The ship rocked wildly, waves crashing as her storm magic churned the tempest, the wind screaming through the rigging like a banshee’s cry, enchantments holding firm.

“Want it rougher, do you?” he snarled, his pace quickening, each thrust now a forceful claim that slammed her hips into the mattress. “Yes, yes!” she cried, her thighs trembling around him as the rain lashed the deck in sheets, her magic whipping the elements into a frenzied roar that matched her throaty moans, the bed’s frame groaning, its runes glowing to mend a crack under their weight.

Her patience frayed, legs tightening around his waist as she arched beneath him, her voice raw and commanding, “Stop toying with me, Killian, claim me proper!” The ship shuddered, waves thundering as he obeyed, his thrusts turning brutal, each one a punishing slam that drove deep into her core, her screams piercing the air as the bed’s frame splintered with a sharp crack, its runes flaring to heal the fracture instantly. “Can you take all I’ve got, lass?” he rasped, his hook digging deeper into her wrist, the steel cutting a thin red line as he pinned her harder.

“Yes, gods, yes!” she screamed, her body writhing beneath him as he pounded into her, his mouth sucking a bruising mark on her throat while his tongue traced the salt of her skin. “Want it all, then?” he growled, his pace relentless, the weather escalating with her cries, lightning flashed beyond the window, illuminating the sweat-slicked sheen of her skin, the taut stretch of her thighs as they flexed around him. “Yes, give me all you got. Plunge that sword in to the hilt. Don’t hold back. Claim me!” she pleaded, her nails scoring deeper, crimson trickling down his back as the storm hit a fever pitch, the air crackling with her magic, the cabin trembling as the window glass splintered, the runes to glowing to mend any cracks ensuring the window's stability. Their rhythm grew feral, a primal clash as she met him thrust for thrust, her hips bucking fiercely, nails carving bloody furrows down his arms until crimson dripped onto her chest. “You’re mine, lass. You want more?” he snarled, driving into her with savage force as the ship rocked wildly, waves thundering, “Yes, yes!” she screamed, her voice raw and splintered.

Her climax tore through her, a tempest exploding in her core, her inner walls clenching around him like a vice, her cursed mark blazing like a beacon. “Killian!” she cried, the storm peaking as rain hammered the deck in a deafening roar, lightning split the sky, the ship shuddering as he thrust one final time, his groan guttural and animalistic, spilling hot and deep within her as the sea surged with his release, waves crashing in a chaotic roar that shook the timbers.

The weather calmed as swiftly as it had raged, the ship steadying with a weary groan, the hull settling, runes fading as they sealed the last of the storm’s scars. The lantern’s light softened over their sweat-slicked, heaving forms, the sea whispering gently against the hull.

Killian collapsed beside her, panting as the waves gentled, her magic fading to a soft breeze. “Bloody hell, love,” he rasped, tugging her close with a hoarse chuckle, “you’ll be the death of me.” She smirked, gray eyes glinting, “Yes, and worth it, pirate,” her fingers tracing the fresh cuts on his shoulder as the rain tapered to a whisper, their breaths mingling in the stillness.

Crew Quarters
(Simultaneous with Cabin Scene)

The quarters shuddered as waves crashed outside, the air thick with the salty reek of seawater and the silver glow of a swinging lamp. Smee clutched a beam, dice rolling off the table as he cursed, “Her storm’s risin’. Cap’n’s got her crashin’!” One-Eyed Jack rocked in his hammock, twirling his flintlock, laughing, “Thunder’s their glow, ship’s ridin’ their heat!” Smee clung to a beam, “She’s berserk. Sea’s a monster!” One-Eyed Jack laughed, “Them two’s tearin’ it. Ship’s feelin’ it!” Black Tom sat rigid, his harpoon across his lap, wiping dew from the shaft as the storm raged outside.

Billy swayed, strumming his lute, his voice cutting through the roar.

Billy
By moon’s soft gleam,
they live the dream,
Cap’n and his storm supreme

With a thrust and a tide,
they ride side by side,
A tempest born where tears do stream!

Oh, the wind it roars, the sea she breaks,
A lover’s fire the night remakes,

The waves they pound, the thunder’s might,
With every clash, the storm takes flight!

The crew held on, grinning through the tumult.

(After Cabin Scene)

The storm calmed, leaving the quarters still, the air cool with a lunar freshness and the soft drip of dew through the planks. Smee sprawled on his hammock, his hat over his eyes, muttering, “Sea’s down. Reckon they’ve burned

out.” One-Eyed Jack holstered his flintlock, yawning, “Aye, he’s hushed her good, rest for the moonlit night.” Black Tom lay flat, his coat dripping beside him, his breaths slow in the peace.

Billy curled up, whispering, “They’ve stilled the flood, dream on, lads.”

Billy
The night’s at peace, the gale’s no more,
A fierce love rests upon this shore,

The sea she gleams, the calm’s our friend,
Two souls as one till journey’s end.

The lantern’s glow dimmed, the sea’s gentle lap soothing their weary forms.

Interlude: The Stolen Storm (Day 360)

The Jolly Roger loomed at the dock, black hull a shadow against the crimson horizon, sails furled like sleeping wings.

Port Market (Dusk)

The port of Elderglow buzzed under a sky bruised with dusk, its cobblestone streets slick with sea mist and lined with ramshackle stalls draped in faded canvas. The air carried the tang of salt, fish, and charred meat from a nearby tavern, mingling with the shouts of hawkers peddling wares under flickering lanterns.

Desylva stood at a blacksmith’s stall, her dark hair tied back with a leather cord, her gray eyes sharp as she tested the weight of a dagger. Its blade gleaming with a wicked edge, its hilt wrapped in worn leather. She spun it deftly, her fingers dancing over the grip, then hefted a short sword, slicing the air with a practiced arc. Her cursed mark pulsing faintly beneath her sleeve as she murmured, “This one’s got balance, but the edge needs sharpening.” The blacksmith, a grizzled man with soot-streaked hands, nodded gruffly, “Aye, lass, I’ll hone it for a price.” Desylva smirked, tossing him a silver coin, “Make it quick, mate. I don’t linger.”

Nearby, One-Eyed Jack and Black Tom bartered at a stall piled with coiled ropes and tarnished sextants, their voices low. One-Eyed Jack squinted at a brass compass, muttering, “This junk’s barely worth a copper. Bet it points to nowhere.” Black Tom, silent as ever, tested a rope’s strength with a tug, his scarred hands steady, his nod signaling approval.

At a food stall, Smee and Billy haggled over a sack of apples and a wheel of hard cheese, Smee hunched as he sniffed an apple suspiciously, “Smells half-rotten, this lot!” Billy, grinning cheekily, tossed an apple in the air, “Better than ship’s biscuits, Mr. Smee. Least these won’t break me teeth!” Smee chuckled, shaking his head, “Mind your coin, lad, or the Cap’n’ll have us scrubbin’ decks till dawn.”

In the alley’s shadows, a cloaked figure watched, their silhouette blending with the gloom, eyes glinting like coins under a hood. Their breath was shallow, deliberate, fingers twitching around a slender blowpipe hidden in their sleeve.

Desylva set the sword down, her instincts prickling. She glanced at the alley, her hand hovering near her dagger, but saw only flickering shadows. Turning to Billy she asked, “Can you bring this sword back to the ship for me once the blacksmith has finished sharpening it?” Billy nodded in agreement. “It’s a surprise so don’t let Killian see it.” Billy nodded again, “Aye.” Desylva addressed the crew, “I’m headin’ back to the Roger now, lads. Don’t dawdle.”

Smee looked up, wiping sweat from his brow, “Aye, lass, we’ll be along.” One-Eyed Jack grunted, “Don’t get lost, storm-girl.” Black Tom nodded silently, his gaze steady. Billy smirked, tossing his apple, “Bet she’s off for some alone time with the Cap’n, eh?” Smee snickered, nudging him, “Mind your tongue, lad, or she’ll zap ye with a spark!” One-Eyed Jack let out a raspy laugh, “Aye, or the Cap’n’ll gut ye with that hook!” Black Tom’s lips twitched in a rare half-smile, his nod a quiet agreement.

Desylva rolled her eyes, a playful smirk tugging her lips as she turned, her boots clicking on the cobblestones as she headed toward the harbor, unaware of the cloaked figure slipping from the shadows, trailing her like a specter through the bustling port.

Path

The path to the harbor wound through Elderglow's outskirts, a narrow dirt trail flanked by gnarled oaks and thorny brambles, their branches clawing at the fading light. The air grew cooler, heavy with the scent of damp earth and the distant roar of waves crashing against the docks.

Desylva strode with purpose, her dark hair swaying as she twirled her dagger. Her cursed mark pulsing faintly as the sea's rhythm stirred her magic. The market's clamor faded, replaced by the chirp of crickets and the rustle of leaves, until a sharp *whistle* cut the silence. A blow dart, its tip glinting with a sickly green sheen, shot from the shadows, striking her neck with a soft *thunk*. Pain flared, a burning cold spreading through her veins. Her vision blurred, her legs buckled, and she collapsed onto the dirt, her dagger slipping from her grasp as she gasped, "Bloody… hell…" Her cursed mark flickered, her magic stifled by the dart's venom, her fingers clawing weakly at the earth.

From the shadows emerged a man, tall and wiry, clad in a tattered cloak, his face obscured by a hood, his eyes cold as flint. He moved with practiced stealth, his boots silent as he knelt beside her, muttering, "Got you, storm-witch." He bound her wrists with coarse rope, his fingers rough as he dragged her limp form into the underbrush, her boots scraping furrows in the dirt. A second figure joined him, shorter and stockier, his voice a low growl, "Hurry, Gav. They said moonrise, no later." The first man, Gav, hissed back, "Keep your voice down, Torren. She's out, but her kind don't stay down long."

Desylva's consciousness wavered, her thoughts sluggish but defiant *Who are these bastards?* as they hauled her through the brambles, her body jostling against roots, the venom numbing her limbs but not her will. The path behind lay empty, her dagger glinting in the dirt, the only sign of her passage as the shadows swallowed her trail.

Jolly Roger (A few hours later)

The Jolly Roger rocked gently, hull gleaming under the first stars, the creak of the timbers a soft counterpoint to the lapping waves. Lanterns swung from the rigging, casting pools of golden light across the deck, where Killian stood at the helm, his black coat open, his hook tapping the wheel as he scanned the horizon, a faint smirk playing on his lips, thinking of Desylva, no doubt, her storm-gray eyes and fiery spirit.

Main Deck

The crew's boots thudded as Smee, One-Eyed Jack, Black Tom, and Billy clambered aboard, their arms laden with sacks of provisions. Billy had the sword hidden deep within the packages he carried, wrapped tight and out of sight. Smee puffed, setting down a crate of apples, "Heavy as sin, these!" Billy grinned, tossing an apple to Black Tom, who caught it with a silent nod. Billy grabbed the sword and scampered up to the crow's nest. One-Eyed Jack squinted across the deck, his eye narrowing, "Where's the lass?" Black Tom's gaze swept the ship, his silence heavy with concern. Billy scampered back down to deck. Smee, wiping his brow, called to Killian, his voice tinged with worry, "Cap'n, where's Desylva?"

Killian's smirk vanished, his eyebrow arching as he turned, his blue eyes sharp, "What do you mean? Isn't she with you lot?"

Billy's grin faded, his apple stilled in his hand, "We ain't seen her in hours, Cap'n. She said she was headin' back here." One-Eyed Jack leaned against the railing, his voice gruff, "Aye, stormed off, she did. Figured she was plannin' a cozy moment with you."

Killian's jaw tightened, a flicker of concern crossing his face, "What?" Smee shuffled nervously, "We thought she wanted… y'know, some alone time with ye, Cap'n, so we didn't rush." Killian's hook clenched, his voice low and edged, "If she was headin' here, she never made it." Billy's eyes widened, "Then where the blazes is she, Cap'n?" Black Tom's silence spoke volumes, his hand resting on his cutlass.

Killian strode from the quarterdeck, his coat flaring as he descended to the main deck, his boots heavy on the planks. “Something’s wrong,” he growled, his eyes scanning the dark port beyond the gangplank. “She’s not one to vanish without a spark.” One-Eyed Jack straightened, his hand on his hilt, “Where ya goin’, Cap’n?” Killian’s gaze was steel, his voice a command, “To find her. You lot comin’ or stayin’?”

He stormed down the gangplank, his hook glinting in the lantern light, his stride purposeful despite the unease coiling in his chest. The crew exchanged a glance, Smee’s nervous nod, Billy’s wide-eyed resolve, One-Eyed Jack’s gruff grunt, and Black Tom’s silent step forward.

“Aye, Cap’n,” Smee called, scrambling after him, the others following, their boots thudding on the dock, the Jolly Roger swaying quietly behind, its lanterns flickering like watchful eyes.

Port

The streets were a maze of shadows, lanterns casting jagged pools of light across cobblestones slick with mist. The air buzzed with the hum of taverns and the clink of coins, but an undercurrent of menace hung heavy as Killian led the crew back into Elderglow’s heart. His black coat swirled, his hook a metallic gleam as he scanned every alley, his jaw set with a fury barely restrained.

“We split up,” he ordered, his voice a low growl, “cover more ground. Billy, you’re with me.” He turned to One-Eyed Jack, his blue eyes piercing, “When I find her, I’ll send Billy to fetch you lot. Move fast.” One-Eyed Jack nodded, his eye glinting, “Aye, Cap’n. We’ll tear this port apart if we have to.” Black Tom gave a curt nod, his scarred hand tightening on his cutlass, while Smee muttered, “Hope she’s just lost, Cap’n, not… y’know.” Killian shot him a look, “She’s not lost, Smee. Someone’s taken her. I can feel it.” Billy, clutching his dagger, piped up, “We’ll find her, Cap’n. She’s tougher than a storm at sea.” Killian’s lips twitched, a fleeting ghost of a smile, “Aye, lad, that she is.”

Killian and Billy veered toward the western alleys, where the path to the harbor snaked through darkened warehouses, their boots splashing in puddles as they moved with purpose. One-eyed Jack and Black Tom took the eastern market, their figures fading into the crowd, while Smee headed toward the docks, muttering, “Please be alright, lass.”

Killian’s senses were razor-sharp. His hook tapping his thigh as he scanned for any sign, her dagger, her scent, a spark of her magic. “Keep your eyes peeled, Billy,” he said, his voice low, “She’s here somewhere, and I’ll be damned if I let this port keep her from me.”

Billy nodded, his bravado tempered by worry, “Aye, Cap’n. Bet she’s givin’ whoever nabbed her hell already.” Killian’s jaw clenched, “That’s my lass.”

They pressed on, the port’s shadows deepening.

Derelict Warehouse – Back Room

In a dimly lit room within a crumbling warehouse, the air was thick with the stench of damp wood and rusted iron, the walls streaked with mold and cracked by years of neglect. A single lantern swung from a rafter, casting flickering shadows across the floor, where Desylva sat bound to a wooden chair, her wrists and ankles secured with enchanted chains that glowed faintly with blue runes, their cold metal biting into her skin. Her dark hair hung loose, strands clinging to her sweat-dampened face, her gray eyes blazing with defiance despite the venom still numbing her limbs. She tugged at the chains, her cursed mark flickering weakly as she tried to summon a spark, but the runes pulsed, stifling her magic like a hand over her mouth. Across the room, two men … Gav, wiry and sharp-eyed, and Torren, stocky with a scarred jaw … huddled near a crate, their voices low and tense.

Gav glanced at Desylva, his fingers twitching nervously, “Whatever you’re tryin’ to do, it won’t work. Those chains are enchanted. Bought ‘em from a dark peddler in Neverland. Your magic’s dead here.” Desylva’s lips curled into a smirk, her voice dripping with defiance, “You grabbed the wrong woman, mate. I’m not some tavern wench you can truss up and sell.” Torren snorted, his eyes cold, “You’re exactly the one they wanted. Storm-touched, they said. Worth a fortune.” Desylva’s eyebrow arched, her mind racing … *Neverland? Who’s got that kind of coin?* … “You’ll be sorry, you idiots. You don’t know who I run with.”

Gav laughed, a harsh bark, “Don’t care. Someone paid us good gold to nab you, and they’re promisin’ more when they get you.” Desylva’s eyes narrowed, “Someone hired you? Who?” Torren shrugged, leaning against the crate, “They didn’t give names. Just orders.” Desylva pressed, her voice sharp, “They? More than one?” Gav nodded, his gaze flickering to the door, “Aye. Said they’d collect you at moonrise. That’s all you need to know.” Desylva leaned back, her smirk unwavering despite the chains, “Moonrise, eh? You’re in for a nasty surprise, mates.”

A sudden crash echoed from beyond the door. Shouts, the clang of steel, a pained grunt. Gav and Torren froze, their eyes darting to the sound. Desylva’s smirk widened, “Reckon my rescue’s here.” Gav’s face paled, “Rescue?” Torren moved toward the door, his hand on his dagger, “I’ll check it.” He barely reached the handle when the door exploded inward, splintering under a powerful kick. Torren stumbled back, clutching his chest as Killian stood in the doorway, his black coat splattered with blood, his cutlass dripping crimson, his hook gleaming with a fresh stain of gore. His blue eyes burned with fury, his presence a storm of its own.

Desylva’s heart leapt, “Killian!” Gav’s eyes widened at the hook, his voice a whisper, “Captain Hook!?” Killian grabbed Torren by the collar as the man struggled to rise, his cutlass at his throat, “You messed with the wrong pirate, mate.” Torren stammered, “You’re… Captain Hook? We… we didn’t know!” Killian’s smirk was cold, “So you’ve heard of me. Good.” Torren’s eyes flicked to Desylva, “Is she… yours? We had no idea, we swear!” Killian’s fist silenced him, knocking him out cold with a thud.

Killian advanced on Gav, who backed away, hands raised, “We didn’t know she was yours, Hook! They never said she belonged to you!” Killian’s hook caught Gav’s throat, pinning him to the wall, his voice a dangerous purr, “They? Who’s they?” Gav’s voice trembled, “No names, I swear! Just said to grab her, hold her till moonrise. A test, they said!”

Killian’s eyebrow arched, “A test? For who?” Gav shook his head, pleading, “Please, don’t kill me!” Killian glanced at Desylva, her defiant smirk grounding him. He released Gav, his voice low, “I’m not killin’ you today. But cross me again, and you’ll wish you’d drowned in the harbor.” Gav bolted, scrambling out the door.

Killian knelt before Desylva, his hook slicing through the enchanted chains with a spark, his fingers gentle as he checked her for wounds. “You alright, love?” he murmured, his voice soft but edged with worry. She flexed her wrists, her cursed mark flaring as her magic stirred, “Better now that you’re here, pirate.” He grinned, his blue eyes warm.

Their lips met in a brief, fierce kiss, her hands tangling in his hair, his hook resting lightly on her hip. They broke apart, her smirk returning, “Didn’t think you’d track me so fast. Those chains killed my signal.” He winked, “My heart’s got its own compass, love.”

They rose, stepping into the warehouse’s main room, where bodies of hired thugs groaned, staggering to their feet and fleeing into the shadows. Killian’s handiwork, a testament to his wrath.

Jolly Roger (A few hours later)

The Jolly Roger swayed gently, its lanterns casting a warm glow across the deck, the night air cool and sharp with salt. Stars glittered above, the crescent moon rising over the cliffs, its silver light reflecting off the waves.

Main Deck

Killian and Desylva stood by the mainmast, their hands brushing. The crew bustling around them. Smee securing provisions, One-Eyed Jack polishing a cannon, Billy and Black Tom checking the rigging.

Desylva’s gray eyes flicked to the horizon, her voice low, “So who do you think *they* are? This smells of bigger players.” Killian shook his head, his jaw tight, “No clue, love. Could be anyone with a grudge. Rumpelstiltskin, Regina, or some new bastard with coin to burn.” Desylva’s brow furrowed, her fingers tracing her cursed mark, “And who were they testin’? Those thugs, or us?” Killian’s eyebrow arched, his hook tapping the mast, “Us? Why the bloody hell would they test us?” She gave him a knowing look, her voice steady, “That’s the question, isn’t it? Someone’s playin’ a game, and I don’t like bein’ a pawn.”

Before Killian could reply, One-Eyed Jack approached, his boots thudding on the planks, a familiar dagger in his hand, its blade gleaming, the leather-wrapped hilt unmistakable. “Found this on the path, lass,” he grunted, his eye squinting as he handed it to Desylva. “Spotted it while we were scourin’ the port for ye. Lodged in the dirt, near some trampled brambles. Ye must’ve dropped it when those bastards nabbed ye.” Desylva took the dagger, her fingers curling around it like an old friend, her smirk returning as she tested its weight, “Good eye, Jack. Thought I’d lost her for good.” He snorted, “Takes more than a few lowlifes to keep your blade from ye.” He clapped her shoulder, turning back to the rigging with a raspy chuckle.

Desylva sheathed the dagger, her gaze softening as she took Killian’s hand, her fingers warm against his palm, “We can face whatever *they* throw at us. Together.” His lips curved into a roguish grin, his blue eyes glinting, “Together, aye. No force in any realm can break us, lass.” They shared a lingering kiss, her hands sliding to his chest, his hook resting gently at her waist.

The crew glanced over, Billy stifling a grin, Smee muttering, “There they go again.”

Desylva pulled back, her eyes gleaming with a seductive spark, “What does my hero want for rescuin’ me?” Killian’s grin widened, his voice a low purr, “Hero, eh? Well, love, what are you offerin’?” She stepped closer, her breath warm against his ear, “Whatever you want, pirate. Name your prize.” His eyes darkened with desire, “I want so much, Des. Every inch of you.” She smirked, her voice a sultry challenge, “Then take me to our cabin and claim your reward.” He took her hand, his grip firm, “With pleasure, love.” They turned toward the companionway, her laughter soft as he led her below.

The crew’s knowing glances following. Billy whispered to Smee, “Told ye she wanted alone time!” Smee chuckled, “Aye, lad, let ‘em have it.”

<u>Killian & Desylva’s Cabin</u>

The air in the cabin hung heavy with the scent of polished oak and sea salt, warmed by the faint musk of their shared heat. The ship swayed gently, timbers creaking in a low, rhythmic groan that mingled with the soft lap of waves against the hull, the crescent moon’s silver light filtering through the stern window to cast shimmering patterns across the worn wooden floor, like ripples of liquid starlight.

Outside, a sudden squall stirred, the wind howling through the rigging as if answering the wild pulse of Desylva’s magic, the ship rocking with a restless rhythm that mirrored the rising tide of their desire, each sway a pulse, each creak a heartbeat echoing their need.

Killian closed the door with a soft thud, his hook clicking the latch with a metallic snap, his blue eyes locking onto Desylva as she stood by the bed, her gray eyes smoldering with a fire that was equal parts defiance and want, her dark hair loose and wild, catching the moonlight like a raven’s wing. “You’re a sight, love,” he murmured, his voice a low growl that vibrated through the space, roughened by the day’s events and softened by the hunger in his gaze.

He stepped closer, his black coat open to reveal the taut lines of his chest beneath a half-unbuttoned linen shirt, the fabric clinging to his skin, damp with the sea’s mist, outlining the hard planes of muscle earned through years of swordplay and storms. She smirked, her lips curving with a teasing edge, her fingers tugging at the laces of her leather cloak, “And you’re trouble, Cap, always have been.” Her voice was a sultry challenge, laced with the thrill of their shared victories, as she shed the cloak, letting it fall to the floor with a soft thud, revealing a thin linen shirt that hugged her curves, the faint glow of her cursed mark shimmering through the sleeve like a blue ember pulsing with her heartbeat.

He closed the distance, his hand sliding to her waist, warm and possessive, his hook grazing her hip with a cool, deliberate touch that sent a shiver racing up her spine. Her breath hitched, her gray eyes darkening as she tilted her chin up, daring him. “Trouble’s my trade, lass,” he rasped, his lips brushing the shell of her ear, his breath hot against her skin as he pulled her flush against him, their bodies aligning with a heat that crackled like a storm about to break. “And you’re the spark that sets it ablaze.” Their lips crashed together in a hungry kiss, all salt and adrenaline, her hands fisting in his dark hair, tugging just enough to draw a low groan from deep in his throat. His tongue teased hers, a slow, deliberate dance that tasted of the sea and the fire of their battles, her body pressing closer, craving the weight of him.

She pushed him back, her fingers deft and impatient as she slid his coat off his shoulders, the heavy leather pooling on the floor with a rustle, her hands roaming his chest, her fingertips traced the scars etched across his skin, each one a map of their fights across realms. “You fought for me today,” she whispered, her lips brushing his jaw, her breath warm and teasing as she nipped at the stubble there, “My pirate, always charging in.” Her voice was soft but fierce, a lover’s vow wrapped in reverence.

He grinned, a roguish flash of teeth, his hand untying the laces of her shirt with practiced ease, peeling the damp fabric away to reveal the smooth expanse of her skin, her breasts rose with each quick breath, full and flushed in the moonlight, her cursed mark glowing brighter, a blue flame dancing beneath her wrist. “Always will, love,” he rasped, his voice rough with promise, his hook tracing a delicate, teasing line down her spine, its cool metal sent shivers cascading through her, her skin prickling as she kicked off her boots with a thud, her trousers sliding down her legs to join the pile, leaving her bare save for the moonlight painting her curves in silver, her body a canvas of strength and desire.

He followed suit, kicking off his boots with a clatter, his shirt hitting the floor to reveal muscles taut from years at sea, scars glinting in the flickering lantern light, each mark a testament to battles survived. Her fingers explored them, her touch both tender and possessive, her nails grazing the ridges of his abdomen, dipping lower to tease the trail of dark hair disappearing beneath his breeches.

“You’re mine, Killian,” she murmured, her voice a low purr, her gray eyes locked on his as she tugged at his waistband, her fingers brushing the hard evidence of his arousal straining against the fabric. His breeches fell, revealing the full length of his desire, thick, rigid, pulsing with need as he pulled her against him, skin to skin, the heat of their bodies igniting the air like a spark in dry tinder.

“And you’re mine, tempest,” he growled, his hand gripping her hip, his hook resting lightly against her thigh, the contrast of warm flesh and cool metal making her breath catch. He lifted her onto the bed, the furs soft against her back, her legs wrapping around his waist as the ship rocked harder, the squall outside rising. Rain pelted the window with a staccato rhythm, her magic stirring, a faint gust rattling the cabin’s timbers as thunder rumbled in the distance.

He hovered above her, his weight braced on his hand, his hook glinting as it rested beside her head, caging her in a way that felt both protective and possessive. His blue eyes burned with a mix of reverence and raw hunger as he leaned down, his lips brushing hers in a teasing kiss, his breath hot against her mouth.

“Are you ready to take all of me, love?” he murmured, his voice a low, gravelly challenge, his arousal brushing against her inner thigh, the tip of his length grazing her slick entrance, teasing, deliberate, a slow drag that sent a jolt of heat through her core, her body arching instinctively toward him. She gasped, her hands clutching his shoulders, her nails digging into his skin as she glared up at him, her voice a breathless plea laced with impatience, “Yes, Killian, gods, stop teasing me!” Her hips tilted, seeking more, her cursed mark flaring as her magic surged, a faint crackle of lightning illuminating the window behind them.

He chuckled, a low, wicked sound, but obliged. His length pressed against her entrance, the tip parting her folds with a slow, deliberate pressure, teasing her with the promise of fullness. “Patience, lass,” he teased, his voice rough as he brushed against her again, the slick heat of her drawing a groan from him. Then, with a controlled thrust, he entered her, his thick length sliding into her inch by inch, filling her with a heat that made her gasp, her inner walls stretching to accommodate him, the sensation a delicious burn that sparked pleasure deep in her core.

Her nails raked his shoulders, leaving faint red lines as she arched against him, her breath hitching, “Killian… More!” He thrust again, deeper, a steady rhythm that claimed her, each movement deliberate, his hips rocking with a sailor’s precision. Her warmth enveloped him, tight and pulsing, drawing a low groan from his throat, “Gods, Des. You’re fire.” The bed creaked beneath them, the ship lurching as thunder roared outside, her magic flaring, lightning flashed, bathing their tangled forms in stark white light, her gray eyes wild and unguarded as they locked on his.

He thrust into her a few more times, each stroke deep and forceful, the friction building a coil of pleasure that had her moaning, her hips rocking to meet him, her legs tightening around his waist. “You feel so good,” she gasped, her lips finding his neck, kissing and nipping the salty skin, her teeth grazing his pulse as it thundered under her touch. He growled, his hand sliding to her thigh, gripping hard as he thrust again. The rhythm intensified, the ship’s sway amplifying their movements, but she wanted control, pushing against his chest, she urged him to shift, her voice a sultry command, “My turn, pirate.”

They switched positions with a fluid grace, Killian rolling onto his back, the furs bunching beneath him as he sat up against the headboard, his chest heaving, his arousal still glistening from her. She straddled him, her thighs bracketing his hips, her hands braced on his scarred chest for balance. She paused, her fingers wrapping around his length, hot and pulsing in her grip, stroking him slowly as she met his gaze, her lips curving in a teasing smile.

“Ready for me, Cap?” she purred, her voice dripping with challenge as she positioned herself above him, guiding his tip to her entrance. Her slick heat brushed against him, a slow, deliberate tease that made him groan, his hand gripping her thigh, his hook resting lightly against her hip, cool metal against her fevered skin. “Always, lass. Take me in,” he rasped, his blue eyes dark with need. She slid down onto him, inch by inch, her body sinking onto his length with a slow, deliberate grace, her inner walls stretched around him, the sensation drawing a low moan from her lips as she took him fully, her hips settling against his, their bodies joined in a searing union. “Gods, Killian,” she breathed, her hands digging into his chest, her nails leaving faint crescents as she began to move.

She rode him with a fierce, commanding rhythm, her hips grinding in slow, deep circles, then quickening into a fluid dance that drew ragged moans from him. Each motion was deliberate, her body rising and falling, her thighs flexing as she controlled the pace, her cursed mark blazing blue, casting flickering shadows across his skin. “You’re perfect,” he groaned, his hand sliding to her waist, guiding her movements as his hips bucked to meet her, the friction sparking pleasure that coiled tighter with each roll of her hips. “Faster, love,” he urged, his voice breaking with need.

She obliged, her movements growing more urgent, her breath hitching as she leaned down to kiss him, her tongue tangling with his in a deep, hungry dance, her murmured, “You’re my sea, my everything,” swallowed by his lips. The ship rocked harder, waves crashing against the hull, the storm outside echoing their fervor. Her magic flared, a gust rattling the cabin’s window, rain hammering the deck in time with her rhythm.

They lingered in this position, the intensity building over long, heated minutes. Her hips ground against him, each movement drawing gasps and moans, her fingers tracing his scars as his hand roamed her back, his hook grazing her skin with a teasing chill. “Don’t stop,” he growled, his voice raw as he thrust up to meet her, his length pulsing inside her, the pleasure a shared fire that burned brighter with each motion. Her breath came in short, sharp pants, her body trembling as she neared the edge, but she wanted more, wanted him to take her fully. “Killian,” she gasped, her voice thick with need, “Take me. Now.”

He didn’t hesitate, rolling her with a swift, practiced motion, he flipped her onto her back, the furs soft beneath her as he knelt between her legs, his body a silhouette of strength in the moonlight. He lifted her legs, hooking them over his shoulders with a gentle but firm touch, her thighs pressing against his chest as he positioned himself. His length brushed her entrance again, a teasing promise that made her whimper, her hands clutching the furs.

“Ready, love?” he asked, his voice a low growl, his blue eyes locked on hers. She nodded, her voice a desperate plea, “Yes. Please, Killian!” He thrust into her, hard and deep, his length filling her with a force that made her cry out, her body arching into him as pleasure surged through her core. Each thrust was rougher, more urgent, the bed creaking loudly, the ship lurching as thunder roared outside, her magic flaring wild, lightning illuminating their bodies in flashes of white.

He set a relentless pace, his hips driving into her with a primal intensity, her legs trembling on his shoulders as she gripped his arms, her nails digging into his skin, leaving red trails. Her moans filled the cabin, mingling with his groans, “Des… gods, you’re everything.”

The friction built to a fever pitch, her inner walls tightening around him with each thrust, the pleasure a coiling storm ready to break. Her cursed mark blazed, casting blue light across his sweat-slicked chest, her gray eyes locked on his, wild and unguarded. The ship shuddered, rain hammering the deck as her magic peaked, a gust rattling the window, the storm outside a mirror of their passion.

Her release hit like a tempest. Her body tensed, her breath catching in a sharp gasp as pleasure surged through her, a white-hot wave crashing over her senses. She cried out, her voice a raw, primal sound that echoed with the thunder outside, her inner walls clenching around him in pulsing waves, each spasm drawing him deeper as her climax tore through her. Her fingers dug into his shoulders, her body trembling uncontrollably, her cursed mark flaring brighter than the lantern, bathing the cabin in blue light as her magic surged, a gust shaking the ship’s timbers.

Her release was a flood, her slick heat coating him, her thighs quivering against his shoulders as she rode the waves of ecstasy, her moans softening into breathless whimpers.

His release followed moments later, triggered by the tight, pulsing grip of her climax. His hips bucked hard, a guttural groan tearing from his throat as he called her name, “Des… love!” His body tensed, his length pulsing deep within her, a hot rush of his release filling her in powerful spurts, each one drawing a shudder from him as he gripped her hip, his hook pressing into her thigh, not breaking skin but anchoring her in the moment. His blue eyes locked on her gray, raw and vulnerable, his face contorted with pleasure as he spilled into her, the heat of his climax mingling with hers, their bodies locked in a shared peak.

The ship lurched as if bowing to their union, lightning splitting the sky outside, illuminating their sweat-slicked forms. His thrusts slowed, his body trembling as the last of his release pulsed through him, leaving him breathless, his chest heaving as he collapsed onto her, his weight a warm, grounding press against her trembling body.

Her legs slipped from his shoulders, falling limp against the furs, her thighs slick with their combined release as she panted, her chest rising and falling beneath him. For a moment, they lay there, his body draped over hers, their skin slick with sweat, their breaths mingling in the warm air. His forehead rested against hers, his lips brushing her temple in a soft, reverent kiss.

“My love,” he murmured, his voice hoarse, his hand caressing her side, fingers tracing the curve of her hip as his hook rested gently against her shoulder, cool metal soothing her heated skin. She smiled, her voice soft and sated, “My pirate. … My heart.” Her fingers traced lazy patterns on his chest, circling a scar, her touch tender as she nestled closer.

After a few moments, he rolled off her, the furs shifting beneath them as he settled onto his side, pulling her into his arms. Her body curled against his, her head resting on his chest, the steady thump of his heartbeat a quiet anchor after the storm. His hand stroked her back, fingers tangling in her damp hair, while her arm draped over his waist, her cursed mark glowing faintly, its blue light softening in the lantern’s glow.

“You’re my forever, Des,” he whispered, his lips brushing her forehead, her hair damp against his skin. “And you’re mine, Killian. Through every realm,” she murmured, her voice a sleepy vow as she pressed a soft kiss to his chest, her breath warm against his skin.

They lay tangled in the furs, the storm outside easing to a gentle rain, its patter a lullaby against the window. The ship rocked softly, cradling them as they held each other, their bodies entwined, their love a quiet fire burning steady in the aftermath.

Year 4

Interlude: The Carnival Isle (Day 3)

The Jolly Roger eased through twilight waves, her enchanted oak hull gliding with a soft, seductive hush that rippled across the sea. The water shimmered in bands of molten gold and deep indigo, the setting sun bleeding its last fire into the horizon, staining the sky in bruised purples and smoldering oranges. The world felt caught between breaths — day surrendering to night, sea surrendering to sky, the ship slipping through the seam where both met.

The sails hung full and proud, catching the cooling breeze like pale wings. Their canvas glowed faintly in the fading light, each ripple whispering of storms weathered and tempests conquered. The rigging hummed with residual magic, threads of energy woven into rope and timber from years of Desylva's winds tangling with the Roger's own enchantments. Runes carved deep into the planks pulsed with soft blue light, mending micro-fractures with quiet diligence — the ship's heartbeat, steady and sure.

Three years had passed since Desylva's boots first scuffed the deck, her storm-touched presence now etched into the Roger's very bones. The ship carried the memory of her magic like a lingering scent: ozone threaded through oak, static woven into sailcloth, faint sparks dancing along the mast whenever the wind shifted just right. Her storms had shaped the vessel, tempered it, strengthened it — lightning flashing in her storm-gray eyes, her cursed mark pulsing blue through tempests that left the deck slick and charged. Her winds tangled with the sails in a dance of controlled chaos that made the rigging hum with raw energy.

She'd come aboard with a tempest's raw edge, her fury whipping the sails in wild arcs, but now she was a fixture — as ingrained as the enchantments and glowing runes carved into the planks that mended cracks with ethereal whispers, and the deep, resonant groan of the hull under strain. Her shadow was as familiar as canvas snapping taut in the breeze, her magic woven seamlessly into the enchanted timbers. The Roger responded to her with a subtle, living awareness, as though the vessel itself had learned to breathe in rhythm with her.

Ahead, the horizon unfurled into a strange silhouette: a speck of land rising from the sea, crowned not with cliffs or palms but with towering tents and spinning wheels. Ferris rims pierced the dimming sky like skeletal halos, their metal frames catching the last sunlight in glints of gold and crimson. Pennants fluttered atop distant peaks, flickering like tongues of fire in the breeze. Even from afar, the isle pulsed with color — a riotous glow that shimmered across the water in fractured reflections, painting the waves in carnival hues.

Music drifted faintly over the sea, carried on the wind in ghostlike threads: distant fiddles, rolling drums, laughter rising and falling like the tide. The air thickened with scents not born of ocean or storm — sweet sugar, roasted nuts, spiced rum — mingling with salt to form a heady brew that teased the senses. The Roger's lanterns flickered in response, their warm glow dancing across the deck as though the ship itself felt the pull of revelry.

The Carnival Isle waited on the horizon, bright and wild, a beacon of chaos wrapped in color and sound. And the Jolly Roger, forged in storms and tempered by magic, sailed toward it with the steady grace of a creature curious about what new madness lay ahead.

Quarterdeck

Killian commanded the helm, his black leather coat open to the cooling breeze that curled around him like a teasing hand. The frayed hem brushed the wheel with a leathery whisper, sending subtle vibrations up his arm. His hook gleamed against the wood as he gripped it firmly, blue eyes fixed on the distant isle with a roguish spark that deepened the faint scar above his brow. The Roger responded beneath him, enchanted timbers humming with anticipation as though the ship herself sensed the revelry ahead.

Main Deck

Lantern-light flickered across the deck as Smee bustled forward, jiggling with barely contained excitement. He polished a dented spyglass with his sleeve, then jammed it to his eye with a gasp. "Blimey, Cap'n, look! A carnival ahead! Lights twinklin' like a thousand fireflies in heat, music driftin' over the waves like a siren's tease, games and

stalls burstin' with color bright as a whorehouse on payday!" His gravelly voice rose over the creak of rigging, cheeks flushed in the lantern glow. “Reckon there’s grog flowin’ like blood from a fresh wound and prizes ripe for the takin’. Maybe even a wench or two to warm the night!”

One-Eyed Jack leaned against a cannon, his grizzled face twisting into a skeptical sneer as he polished the barrel. The metal gleamed under rough, calloused strokes. “Sounds like a honeyed trap to me,” he muttered. “Bright colors hidin’ sharper teeth than a shark’s maw. Drawin’ ye in with sweet promises only to bite deep.” His amber eye glinted warily in the dimming light.

Black Tom coiled rope with steady, scarred hands that moved like coiled serpents ready to strike, each loop precise. His dark eyes flicked toward the horizon, a rare spark of intrigue breaking his usual stoic calm. He tilted his head slightly — a subtle nod that stoked the crew’s growing buzz. His massive frame cast long shadows across the deck, grounding the rising excitement with quiet strength.

Billy scrambled up the ratlines with the agility of a monkey, boots scraping the rope in playful slaps. He reached the crow’s nest and peered out, voice ringing sharp and clear. “I see it now, Cap’n! Tents red as fresh blood, gold as pirate loot, wheels spinnin’ high enough to scrape the clouds! Lights dancin’ wild as fire sprites! Bet there’re games where ye can win a fortune or a curse — maybe even a kiss from a pretty dancer if ye play yer cards right!”

Quarterdeck

Killian’s lips curved into a roguish grin, his hook tapping a restless rhythm on the wheel, the metallic clink echoing like a challenge across the deck, his body shifting with eager tension. “A bit o’ fun, lads? Why not. We’ve earned a night off these endless waves, chasin' shadows and dodgin' curses. Could be gold in them tents, or at least a tale worth spinnin' over rum.”

Desylva leaned closer, smirk curling like smoke, hips swaying with deliberate grace. Her hand trailed up his arm in a teasing graze that sent a shiver through him. Her storm-gray eyes flashed with playful heat. “Fun, pirate? As long as it doesn’t end with you losin’ that other hand in some fool’s wager. Though I’d relish nursin’ you back — my fingers tracin’ every scar.” Her voice curled like smoke, sultry and edged with storm. “Let’s see what chaos brews. Might get my winds howlin’ in ways you’ll enjoy later.”

He chuckled low, pulling her flush against him for a heartbeat. His hook traced her lower back through her cloak, cool steel pressing with deliberate promise. “Careful, love. Your teasin’ might make me skip the isle and claim my prize right here on deck. Let the crew watch the storm we brew." She nipped his ear lightly, breath hot and ragged. “Promise? The crew might blush at how I make you beg.”

Main Deck

The crew’s chatter swelled, rum clinking in tankards as lanterns cast flickering shadows that danced like eager spirits. The promise of revelry tugging at their sea-worn hearts like a siren's seductive call.

Smee whooped, “To the carnival, then! May our pockets bulge, our hangovers be light, and our beds not empty!” One-Eyed Jack grumbled, “And our blades stay sharp, ye old fool. Don’t say I didn’t warn ye when the tricks turn nasty and ye’re left with nothin’ but regrets.”

The deck buzzed with voices, each weaving a thread into the carnival’s allure, the air thick with anticipation and the tangy bite of spiced rum that burned sweetly on tongues.

Smee adjusted his spyglass again, peering through with one squinting eye, "Trader swore by his beard—dancers in silks twirlin' like whirlwinds, their hips swayin' hypnotic as a siren's curve, jugglers flingin’ fire that defies the night and licks the air like flames from hell! Stalls brimming with trinkets shiny as doubloons, wheels that spin ye ‘til ye stumble laughin'!"

Quarterdeck

Desylva leaned into Killian with a teasing press of her hip. “Hear that, pirate? Dancers in silks. Jealous yet? Or plannin’ to steal me one for later?” Killian growled softly, hand sliding to her waist with possessive pressure, fingers

digging in just enough to elicit a gasp, "Jealous? Only if they try stealin' you, then my hook'll dance too. But you in silk? Now that's a vision worth chasin' tonight."

Main Deck

One-Eyed Jack spat over the rail. “Thief’s den, that. Glitter to blind ye while they swipe yer coin — or worse, yer dignity. Keep sharp, Smee, or ye’ll be broke and beggin’ for scraps.”

Billy slid halfway down a rope, boots swinging. “Aye, but the prizes! Heard a lass won a whistle that trills like a lark, summonin’ birds from the sky. And a ring that glows with inner fire!” Black Tom’s hands stilled on the line, scarred fingers flexing. He gave a slow nod — approval, or interest. Hard to tell.

One-Eyed Jack swigged deeply from his tankard. “Prizes? Bah. Likely cursed baubles that burn yer fingers or twist yer luck. Trouble’s likely brewin’. Carnivals don’t float for nothin’. But if there’s ale strong as kraken ink, count me in.” Smee chuckled, slapping Billy’s back. “Games o’ chance! Dice that roll true for the lucky — or false for fools like Jack!”

The banter flowed like rum, excitement building as the isle grew closer, lights twinkling like beckoning eyes in the gathering dusk. The Jolly Roger quivered beneath them, eager as her captain. The carnival’s call rippled over the waves — a riddle cloaked in color and intrigue.

Quarterdeck

Killian leaned forward, blue eyes tracing the isle’s glow. His mind sparked not just with thoughts of rest, but with the chance to coax a laugh from Desylva amid the dazzle. Her wildness beside him honed his craving for these fleeting joys. Her storm magic thrummed in his bones. Danger was their craft — but mirth sang like a lost tune.

Desylva stood at his side, her cloak whispering as she crossed her arms. Her cursed mark pulsed faintly blue beneath her sleeve. Her gray eyes narrowed at the distant speck. Her hair dancing in the breeze, framing a face edged with a tempest’s promise. She tilted her head, voice low and wry, “Sounds noisy. Maskin’ somethin’, I’d bet,” her words flicked like a dare, sparking his grin wider.

Killian turned to Desylva with a wink, his blue eyes sparkling with mischief, gleaming with playful heat that promised more than words. His voice a sly murmur, “What say you, love? A carnival romp to stir your storms. Get that mark pulsin' hot?” Her grin flashed, keen as her blade, “If trouble’s afoot, I’ll top it. Let’s peek up their sleeves.” Her thrill matched his, her storm stirring as she loosened her stance.

Main Deck

Smee clapped, “Heard they’ve got a beast with two heads roarin’ for coins. Could snag us a tale or two!” One-Eyed Jack snorted, flicking his rag aside, “Beasts? More like cutpurses and cons, don’t whine when ye’re skint, Smee.”

Billy dropped to the deck with a thud, freckles aglow, “They’ve got wheels hoistin’ ye skyward, trader saw the sea from one!” Black Tom’s nod deepened, a rare spark in his.

Quarterdeck

Killian’s hook stilled its rhythm. A night of revelry wasn’t mere pause, but a test of this odd isle’s fringe, “We’ll eye it ourselves!” his blue eyes glinting with a pirate’s daring, “Carnival’s ours tonight!”

Desylva’s shoulder brushed his, her dagger’s hilt gleaming as she adjusted it, her voice cut through the wind, “Better not be all talk, carnivals twist things.” Her cursed mark pulsed brighter, her storm magic tingling with the isle’s hum, her defiance a match to his sea.

He smirked. “Twist or no, we’ll take it. Might even win you somethin’, lass.” Her laugh was sharp. “Don’t lose your hook.” Killian’s heart thudded, her storm a rhythm beside him. A carnival awaited, a fleeting break from the sea’s endless call.

Main Deck

The crew's cheers surged, a rough hymn. Rum tankards clashed, the air dense with salt and zeal. One-Eyed Jack his voice a rough bark, "If it's a trap, I'll blast us out, count on it." Black Tom stood at the bow, his harpoon resting against the rail, his silence a calm anchor. Billy's shanty broke out, voice carrying over the waves, a thread of joy.

Billy
To lights and spins,
our night begins!

The ship surged forward, hull cutting through the silvered sea. The isle loomed ahead, a riot of color and sound spilling across the water. Lanterns flickered on deck, casting their faces in gold. Danger might lurk, a shadow beneath the revelry, but tonight they sailed for mirth.

Arrival (Carnival Island)

The Jolly Roger eased into the harbour as dusk deepened into a velvety indigo, the sky swallowing the last streaks of sun until only a faint ember glowed along the horizon. Stars pricked through the dark like scattered diamonds, their cold shimmer cast against the riotous glow of the Carnival Isle.

Lanterns swung from crooked poles along the shoreline, their kaleidoscopic light spilling across the water in shimmering pools of amber, crimson, and green. The reflections rippled like living paint, bending and stretching with each gentle lap of the tide. Tents rose behind them in towering silhouettes — vibrant reds, golds, and blues — their canvas walls billowing as if breathing, peaks crowned with snapping pennants that flickered in the salty wind. Music drifted faintly across the harbour, muffled by distance: the pulse of drums, the sharp cry of fiddles, laughter rising and falling like a tide.

The scents followed — sweet caramelized sugar, roasted nuts crackling over open flames, fried dough wafting warm and tempting across the water. Even the faint tang of torch-smoke curled through the air, threading with the sea's brine.

The Roger glided forward with steady grace, enchanted timbers humming softly beneath her hull. Runes along her sides flickered in quiet pulses, adjusting to the harbour's calmer waters. Her sails eased, slackening as the wind softened near shore, canvas settling like wings folding after flight. Lanterns along her rigging swayed gently, casting warm gold across the deck and reflecting in the harbour's glassy surface.

The harbour itself was a mosaic of motion and color — spinning wheels turning lazily in the distance, silhouettes of dancers shifting behind tent flaps, bursts of light from fire-breathers illuminating the night in brief flashes. But from the ship, these details remained softened, blurred by distance and dusk, hints of chaos waiting beyond the shoreline.

The Roger drifted into her berth, hull brushing the pier with a soft, resonant thud. Ropes were cast over posts, tautening with practiced ease. The ship settled, timbers groaning in a long exhale as the harbour embraced her. Lantern-light from the isle washed over her deck, painting her planks in shifting hues of gold and red.

The gangplank thudded down onto the sandy pier, creaking under its own weight as it settled into place. Boots soon followed — eager, heavy, and sure — as the crew disembarked into the carnival's glow, leaving the Roger resting in the harbour's quiet cradle.

Land

The island buzzed with a cacophony of laughter, music, and hawkers' cries, a mask of mirth draped over unseen edges, tugging at their sea-worn instincts with a promise and a threat.. The carnival grounds unfolded before them in a whirlwind of motion and color that swept the crew into its embrace the moment their boots hit the sand. Lanterns cast jittery pools of red, gold, and blue across the cobblestones, their light flickering like restless spirits. The air hung thick with sugar, smoke, and salt — a heady brew that clung to skin and stirred instincts sharpened by years at sea.

Smee bounded ahead, spyglass tucked under his arm, inhaling deeply the sweet, greasy scents wafting from stalls. His hat bobbed wildly as he pushed into the crowd, stout frame nearly swallowed by the swirl of bodies. "Smell that,

lads! Freedom for a night — no watches, just wonders!" His voice boomed over the din, his excitement infectious even as he nearly collided with a juggler's flaming torches.

One-Eyed Jack followed with a wary squint, hand resting on his cutlass hilt. His boots crunched over sand and scattered shells as he scanned the crowd with a predator's eye. "Wonders? More like wanders into trouble," he muttered, gaze tracking pickpockets weaving through the throng with practiced ease. Lantern-light carved harsh angles across his grizzled face, deepening the skepticism etched there. Even amid the revelry, he tracked shadows, exits, and the subtle movements of pickpockets weaving through the throng.

Billy skipped beside him, eyes wide as saucers at the swirling lights. "Look at the colors! Like the stars fell down to play!" He pointed toward a ring-toss booth, then a spinning wheel, then a fire-breather whose plume of orange licked the night sky. His excitement bounced from stall to stall, a spark that tugged the crew forward.

Black Tom walked steadily behind them, harpoon slung over his shoulder. His dark gaze swept the crowd with quiet vigilance, noting patterns in the movement, the rhythm of the music, the way the tents breathed with each gust of wind. A subtle nod here, a shift of stance there — small signs that he approved of the isle's energy but remained ready for whatever lurked beneath it.

Killian offered Desylva his arm with a roguish bow, his hook glinting in the carnival lights like a promise of mischief, "Shall we, love?" His voice carried a low, playful heat, tempered by the hum of danger threading through the revelry. "A night of chaos. Perhaps a dance or two under those spinnin' wheels, or somethin' more private in the shadows where I can feel your winds rise?"

Desylva linked her arm with his, her smirk curling slow and seductive as she leaned in, her breath hot against his neck, "Lead on, pirate. If you lose me in the crowd, my winds'll find you — not gently. … Unless you beg nicely with that silver tongue of yours." Her breath brushed his neck, warm and teasing, her storm-mark pulsing faintly beneath her sleeve as the isle's magic brushed against her own.

He chuckled, pulling her closer with a possessive squeeze, his fingers tracing her waist through her cloak with deliberate pressure that made her pulse quicken, "Lose you? Not a chance. You're my greatest prize, and I guard what's mine with hook and heart. Though I'd not mind beggin' if it means tastin' your storm."

The carnival enveloped them in a whirlwind of sights and sounds. The tents towered like striped giants, flaps billowing to reveal jugglers tossing flaming torches that arced like comets trailing smoke and sparks, the heat kissing their faces as they passed. Acrobats flipped through the air with graceful, sweat-slicked twists that drew gasps from the crowd, muscles rippling under taut skin oiled to shine. Barkers shouted invitations thick with allure: "Step right up! Test yer luck! Win a treasure or lose yer pride!"

Killian & Desylva

Killian and Desylva slipped away from the crew, peeling off toward a quieter path where the tents thinned and the lights dimmed. The crowd parted slightly at their presence — a captain and his storm-witch moving with purpose through the revelry — as they disappeared deeper into the isle's winding heart.

Killian's gaze flicked past the dancers and fire-breathers, catching a momentary ripple in the lantern-light — a shadow bending the wrong way, as though the flame recoiled from something unseen. A performer's mask turned toward him, its painted grin too still, too knowing, before the figure vanished into the press of bodies. His jaw tightened, a quiet note of caution threading beneath the heat in his voice.

Behind them, the crew's laughter and shouts blended into the carnival's roar.

The Crew

Smee skidded to a halt before a juggler tossing flaming torches in a blazing arc, trails seared the dark, weaving patterns like comets. He rocked with a delighted chuckle, his face aglow. One-Eyed Jack muttered something about singed eyebrows and fools' luck, but even he paused to watch the fire dance.

Stalls lined the paths, piled high with candied apples glistening red as fresh blood under sticky caramel glaze that dripped slow and viscous, popcorn popping like fireworks in iron kettles with buttery bursts that left lips slick, and cotton candy swirling pink and blue like captured clouds on sticks, the sugar melting sweet on tongues with a sticky pull. The scents mingled into a dizzying haze that tugged at the crew's senses.

The crew scattered into the carnival's maze, swallowed by color, sound, and motion. Lanterns swung overhead, casting jittery pools of red and gold across the cobblestones. Music pulsed through the air — fiddles sharp as gull cries, drums thudding like distant cannonfire — blending with laughter, shouts, and the crackle of fire from nearby performers. The scents of sugar, smoke, and frying dough drifted thickly, tugging each man toward a different temptation.

Smee made for the nearest food stall with single-minded devotion. He emerged moments later clutching a caramel apple on a stick, its glossy surface dripping in slow, sticky trails down his chin. He bit into it with a groan of delight, cheeks bulging. "Sweet as victory, lads," he declared, waving the apple like a trophy. "Sticks to yer ribs like good rum — or a bad kiss!" His laughter boomed, drawing amused glances from passersby as he wiped his chin with the back of his sleeve, already eyeing a tray of fried dough dusted in sugar.

One-Eyed Jack trailed behind him with a scowl carved deep into his grizzled features. Lantern-light sharpened every line of suspicion on his face as he approached a trinket stall piled high with tarnished brass rings, fraying bead necklaces, and carved wooden fish. He picked up a brass ring, sniffed it, then tossed it back with a grunt. "Cheap junk," he muttered. "Bet half of it's cursed, and the other half pinched afore dawn." His amber eye narrowed at a knife-throwing booth nearby. After a long, skeptical pause, he slapped a tarnished coin onto the counter.

His throws were precise and brutal — daggers embedding in targets with heavy thunks that vibrated through the wood. The barker flinched at each impact, then slapped a brass ring and a small pouch of herbs into One-Eyed Jack's hand with grudging respect. "Sharp eye, mate. Killer's aim." One-Eyed Jack pocketed the prize with a grunt. "Rigged," he said, "but not bad. Smells like healin'… or poison. Might come in handy after Smee's cookin'."

Black Tom lingered at a ring-toss game, his massive frame still amid the carnival's chaos. He tested a wooden hoop with a flick of his wrist — a motion so smooth it barely disturbed the air. His silence stood stark against the clamor. The hoop sailed true, landing over a peg with a soft clink nearly lost beneath the din. The stall-keeper handed him a small carved fish, its wooden scales polished to a soft sheen. He tucked it into his belt with a rare quirk of his lips, dark eyes lingering on the game as though weighing its secrets.

Billy appeared at Black Tom's side in a blur of freckles and excitement. "Come on, Tom!" he shouted, tugging at the harpooner's arm. "Shooting gallery's this way!" Black Tom followed with steady steps, his silence unbroken. At the gallery, Billy cheered wildly as Black Tom aimed with unerring precision. Bolts struck targets with sharp cracks that echoed like whip snaps.

The stall-keeper handed over another carved fish — this one larger, painted in swirling blues — which Billy pocketed with glee. "Yer aim's legend, Tom," he crowed. "Ye could shoot the eye off a needle from a league away — or a fly off Smee's hat!" Black Tom's grunt of amusement was low, but unmistakably pleased.

Billy dashed toward a spinning wheel next, its frame painted in bold reds and yellows. The colors blurred into a dizzying whirl as the wheel spun under the barker's shout: "Step up, lad! Test yer luck 'gainst the wheel!" Billy whooped as he gave it a mighty spin. The clatter rose into a rhythmic pulse, slowing until it landed on a painted star. The barker's gap-toothed grin flashed as he handed over a tin whistle etched with swirling vines. Billy piped a shrill, jaunty tune, the notes cutting through the din like a seabird's cry.

Smee, still clutching his caramel apple, broke into a clumsy jig at the sound. His boots kicked up dust in uneven stomps, laughter booming as he tried to match Billy's rhythm. The whistle trilled, the torches flared, and the carnival's chaos swirled around them — a riot of color and sound that made even the saltiest pirates grin like boys at play.

A dancer in swirling gold silks paused mid-step as Billy piped a jaunty trill, her eyes bright with mischief. She winked at him, spinning away with a flourish that sent ribbons snapping like sparks. Nearby, a fire-breather's gaze lingered on Black Tom — not in challenge, but in wary respect — the man's silence drawing a subtle bow from the performer before he exhaled another plume of flame.

Killian & Desylva

Killian and Desylva strode through the crowd, the carnival's riot of color swirling around them in dizzying waves. His black coat cut a sharp silhouette against lantern-light that flickered in reds, golds, and blues. His hook caught the moonlight with each step, glinting like a warning as he scanned the throng — merchants hawking wares with honeyed voices, children clutching sticky candied apples, dancers twirling in silk that shimmered like liquid gold.

Desylva matched his pace with effortless grace. Her storm-gray eyes darted from the dancers' jingling bells to a fire-breather spitting plumes of orange that licked the air with a hiss. Sparks drifted upward like tiny stars. Her leather cloak rustled, its edges brushing the stones, her cursed mark pulsing faintly beneath her sleeve as her storm magic hummed beneath the revelry's din. The carnival's energy pressed against her senses — bright, chaotic, and threaded with something deeper.

She leaned close, her voice a low murmur beneath the fiddles' wail. "Too loud. Hides somethin'. Carnival's got a shadow." Killian's grin flashed, roguish and sharp. "Aye, lass. Keep your eyes peeled. Fun's got teeth here — and we'll bite back."

They wandered hand-in-hand through the throng, her cloak brushing his coat with a soft, teasing rustle that sent subtle shivers up his spine. The crowd parted slightly at their commanding presence — a captain and his storm-witch moving with purpose through the revelry. Lantern-light danced across their faces, the air thick with the press of bodies and the heady mix of sweat, sugar, and smoke that clung to skin like a lover's lingering touch.

A troupe of masked dancers swept past, silk ribbons trailing behind them like streaks of color caught in the wind. A barker shouted from a nearby stall, his voice booming over the din as he beckoned passersby to test their luck.

Desylva's storm-mark pulsed again, faint but insistent — a quiet warning beneath the carnival's cheer. Killian felt the shift in her posture, the subtle tightening of her fingers around his. He squeezed her hand in return, a silent promise that whatever shadow lingered beneath the isle's mirth, they'd face it together.

They drifted toward a quieter stretch of the grounds where the tents thinned and the noise softened. Lanterns hung lower here, their glow gentler, casting warm halos across the cobblestones. The air cooled slightly, carrying hints of sea breeze through gaps in the carnival's maze.

Then they saw it — the Ferris wheel.

It loomed tall like a mechanical giant forged from iron and light, its massive frame groaning softly with each slow rotation. Cars swung gently in the night breeze, creaking in rhythmic arcs. Lights twinkled along the spokes in reds, golds, and blues like a constellation spun from carnival magic, towering over the tents below, promising dizzying heights and stolen intimacy. From its peak, the view promised the sea's dark expanse glittering under stars, the carnival shrinking into a mosaic of color and motion.

"Up for a ride, love?" he teased, his voice a low, rumbling growl laced with heat as he pulled her toward the short line, his blue eyes darkening with intent, the carnival's chaotic symphony fading to a distant hum around them. "View the sea from above. Might spot our next adventure... or just steal a moment alone up there where I can have you all to myself, no crew gawkin'."

His hook lightly traced the small of her back through her cloak with cool, deliberate pressure, the steel a thrilling contrast that made her breath catch, his fingers on her other hand intertwining tighter, thumb stroking her palm in slow, suggestive circles that promised more.

She arched a brow, her gray eyes sparkling with wicked challenge and rising desire, her body leaning into his touch with a subtle arch that pressed her curves against him, her hand squeezing his with a spark of electricity that tingled up his arm like a promise, her voice a sultry purr that vibrated low in her chest.

"Only if you promise not to rock the car too hard, pirate. … I wouldn't mind a little thrill, your hands wanderin' in the dark heights, slidin' under my cloak to feel how you make my storm build, hot and wet." She nipped his earlobe

lightly with her teeth, the graze sharp and teasing, her free hand trailing up his chest to fist in his shirt, pulling him closer as heat flared between them.

He grinned wickedly, a predatory flash of teeth in the carnival lights, his hook pressing firmer against her back to guide her into the waiting car, the seat creaking intimately under their weight as they settled close, thighs touching, bodies aligned in the confined space that rocked gently with their movement. "Promise? Where's the fun in that. I'll rock you till your winds howl and the stars envy us, love. Make you gasp my name up there where no one can hear but the night."

The wheel operator secured the bar with a clang, and the car lifted slowly, grinding upward with a rhythmic sway that pressed them together. The carnival shrank below to a vibrant mosaic of swirling colors, laughter, and lights, the sea beyond a vast, dark mirror reflecting the stars like scattered diamonds, the wind whipping stronger at the ascent, tangling her dark hair wild across his shoulder and carrying her scent of ozone and wild desire straight to him. As they rose higher, the world fell away, the noise muting to a distant roar, leaving only the creak of the wheel, the whistle of wind, and their shared breath quickening in the intimate cocoon.

"Feels like flyin'. Your ship could use wheels like this, or maybe just you pinnin' me down like this more often," she murmured, her lips brushing his jaw, her storm mark pulsing blue through her sleeve in rhythmic flares that matched the heat building between her legs. He laughed, arm around her shoulders, pulling her close for a kiss that deepened with the height, his hook tracing her back lightly, "With you, every night's a thrill. Carnival or no."

She leaned into him, her hand on his thigh, “Up here, we're kings of the world. You and me against the night," he murmured, his lips brushing her ear with his hot breath, hand sliding to her thigh with bold pressure that made her pulse race. She turned, capturing his mouth in a fierce kiss, her fingers tangling in his hair with a tug that drew a growl, tongues dancing hungry and wet, her body arching into his with needful friction, her hand pressing his thigh in return, nails grazing through fabric.

"Kings? Then claim your queen, pirate. Up here where the stars can watch and whisper our sins," she whispered against his mouth, her leg draping over his in the tight space, her hand sliding boldly up his thigh with slow, deliberate pressure, fingers tracing the hard line of muscle through his pants until she cupped the growing bulge of his arousal, stroking with teasing firmness that drew a low, guttural growl from his throat. His kiss turned hungry, hook pressing her closer. Her storm mark pulsing blue through her sleeve like a heartbeat in sync with his.

His control frayed, his hand fisting in her hair to tilt her head back, exposing her throat as he claimed her mouth in a fierce, devouring kiss, tongues tangling hot and wet, teeth grazing lips in hungry nips that tasted of rum and salt, his hook sliding up her side to cup her breast through her cloak, the cool steel teasing her nipple to a hardened peak that strained against fabric, eliciting a throaty moan from her that vibrated into his mouth, the world below forgotten in their heated tangle.

The car rocked harder with their shifting weight, swaying at the peak where the world spun below, but they were lost in each other. His hips grinding instinctively against her hand as she stroked him firmer, feeling him throb thick and insistent under her palm, his breath ragged against her skin. "Gods, Des, you drive me mad, your touch like lightning strikin' straight to my core. Up here, you’re all mine. No interruptions, just you unravelin' for me." His voice was rough, edged with desperate want, his kiss trailing down her neck to bite lightly at the pulse point, marking her with heat as her winds swirled playfully around the car, rocking it more in teasing gusts.

She gasped, arching into his hook's pressure, her grip tightening on his arousal with slow, torturous strokes that had him groaning low, "Then take what's yours, pirate. Make me burn higher than these lights, feel how wet you make me with just a touch." Her free hand guided his under her cloak, pressing his fingers to the heat between her thighs, the damp evidence of her desire soaking through fabric, her eyes locking with his in dark promise as the wheel began its descent, the moment suspended in electric tension.

He pulled back just enough to smirk, breath hot and uneven, his hook pinching lightly to draw another moan, "Not yet, love. … Save that storm for below deck, where I can plunder you proper, slow and deep till you scream my name to the waves."

The car grounded with a gentle thud, but the heat between them lingered, bodies flushed and pressed close as they stepped out, her hand still teasingly brushing him, his arm possessive around her waist, the carnival's chaos welcoming them back with oblivious revelry, but their shared glances promising the night was far from over.

Ring Toss

The crew regrouped at a ring-toss booth tucked between two towering tents, its lanterns casting warm halos across rows of painted pegs and dangling prizes. The air buzzed with laughter, clattering wheels, and the distant crackle of fire-breathers. A barker shouted encouragement over the din, his voice booming like a drumbeat.

Billy stepped up first, eyes bright. His ring sailed in a perfect arc, clinking neatly over a bottle. He whooped, bouncing on his heels as the stall-keeper handed him a spinning top that whirled with colorful sparks when flicked. “Magic in a toy!” Billy crowed, sending the top skittering across the counter in a shower of glittering light.

Smee tried next. His ring veered wildly off course, bouncing off a peg and nearly hitting a passing juggler. He burst into booming laughter, caramel still stuck in his beard. “Blimey, me aim’s gone with the rum!” he declared, wiping his chin and grabbing another ring with renewed determination.

One-Eyed Jack snorted, stepping forward with a grunt. His throw was sharp and efficient, the ring snapping onto a peg with a satisfying clink. The stall-keeper handed him a skewer of grilled fish, still steaming. He sniffed it, shrugged, and took a bite. “Better’n half the grub I’ve had at sea,” he muttered, earning a round of chuckles.

Black Tom followed, his movements calm and deliberate. His ring glided through the air like a quiet promise, landing true with barely a sound. The stall-keeper offered him a small carved boat, its wooden hull smoothed by careful hands. Tom nodded once, tucking it into his belt with a rare flicker of satisfaction.

Killian and Desylva arrived through the crowd, hand-in-hand, lantern-light catching the edges of their cloaks. The crew greeted them with cheers and playful jeers, the carnival’s glow reflecting in their grins.

Desylva stepped to the counter, her storm-mark pulsing faintly beneath her sleeve. She tossed a ring with casual ease — a flick of her wrist, a whisper of wind — and it landed perfectly. The stall-keeper’s eyes widened as he handed her a small crown woven from gilded wire and bright carnival beads. She placed it atop her dark hair with a wicked wink at Killian. “Your queen o’ the carnival, pirate.”

Killian bowed with exaggerated flourish, hook tapping his chest. “And your king bows.” His grin sharpened. “Though I’d rather crown you in private.” The crew roared with laughter, Smee nearly choking on his caramel apple.

The barker gestured toward a second rack of prizes — scarves in every color, fluttering like captured ribbons in the lantern-light. Killian’s eyes lingered on them, then he tossed a ring with a roguish spark in his gaze. It landed true.

The stall-keeper beckoned him forward. “Pick yer prize, captain.”

Killian scanned the scarves — gold, blue, green, violet — then reached for a deep red one, its fabric soft and shimmering like embers. He draped it around Desylva’s shoulders, the color striking against her cloak. “For my storm queen,” he murmured, voice low enough for only her to hear. Her gray eyes softened, storm-mark pulsing once in warm acknowledgment. “Red suits the danger you court,” she teased, fingers brushing the scarf’s edge.

The crew lingered a moment longer, admiring their prizes, trading jests, and soaking in the carnival’s glow. Lanterns flickered overhead, casting shifting gold across their faces. The air hummed with music and murmured secrets.

Then a ripple of hush drifted through the nearby crowd — a soft shift in the carnival’s rhythm. A tent of deep purple velvet stood just beyond the ring-toss booth, its flaps embroidered with silver stars that shimmered like hidden truths.

Billy pointed with wide eyes. “Look there… fortune-teller’s tent.” One-Eyed Jack grunted, wiping fish grease from his chin. “Bah. Tricks and lies.” But even he stared a moment longer.

Desylva's storm-mark pulsed once beneath her sleeve — faint, but unmistakable. Killian's grin returned, slow and sharp. "Let's see what fate's got to say."

They headed toward the tent, the carnival's roar dimming behind them as shadows and secrets beckoned.

Fortune Teller

The tent beckoned. As they drew closer the scent of incense curled from within in heady ribbons of sandalwood and myrrh, clinging to skin like a whispered enchantment. Lanterns hung low around the entrance, their flames flickering in uneasy patterns as though stirred by unseen breath.

The crew stepped inside. Candlelight flickered across the dim interior, refracting through crystal balls that scattered rainbows across the walls. Tarot cards lay strewn across a silk-draped table like fallen leaves, each painted with symbols that seemed to shift in the wavering glow. The air was thick — warm, perfumed, and humming with a subtle, uncanny energy that prickled the skin.

The teller sat behind the table, an old crone with eyes like polished onyx that absorbed every glimmer of light. Wrinkled skin bore faded tattoos of runes spiraling up her arms and throat. Her voice rasped like wind through bones as she smiled a toothless grin. "Cross my palm with silver, dears… and glimpse yer fates. Truths that burn or soothe, as the stars decree."

Smee eagerly stepped forward, coin clinking into her gnarled hand. "Tell me, miss. Will I find treasure — gold to fill me pockets?" The crone peered into her crystal ball, its depths swirling like smoke caught in a storm. "Treasure, aye… but not gold. Riches in loyalty. Bonds that outlast storms." Smee blinked, scratching his beard. "Loyalty? Huh. Not shiny, but… good enough."

One-Eyed Jack tossed a coin next, leaning in with a skeptical squint. "What's me future hold? More eyes or less? Or just more scars?" She cackled, her yellowed teeth gleaming. "One eye sees clear… but beware the blind spot in trust. Betrayal lurks where ye least expect — sharp as yer blade." One-Eyed Jack grunted, unimpressed, though his grip tightened subtly on his cutlass.

Billy dropped silver onto the table with wide-eyed excitement. "Me? Adventures galore?" The teller's gaze deepened. "Songs and seas, lad… but a shadow follows yer tune. Darkness in melody. Beware the silence that comes after." Billy's freckles paled slightly, though he forced a grin. "Silence? Bah. I'll sing louder."

Black Tom stepped forward last among the crew, placing a coin silently on the table. The crone nodded as though recognizing something ancient in him. "Strength in silence, giant. Yer harpoon strikes true… but mercy tempers the blade. Mercy saves ye from yer own edge." Black Tom's dark eyes flickered — a rare, thoughtful shift — before he stepped back.

Then Killian and Desylva approached.

The crone's eyes widened, her breath hitching as she gazed into the swirling mists of the crystal ball. Her gnarled hand trembled. Candlelight dimmed, shadows stretching long across the tent. Her voice dropped to a cryptic murmur. "A storm follows ye, pirate…" The old woman's eyes narrowed. "Rare," she whispered. Her fingers drifted over the crystal ball's swirling mist. "Two threads bound this tight... I don't see many that hold through curse and storm." Her gaze lifted slowly. "And that is why what comes frightens me. … Danger hides in joy. See it here, in the weave o' fate."

Killian's blue eyes narrowed, hook tapping a restless rhythm against his thigh. "Tell me somethin' I don't know, old hag. Danger's an old friend." Desylva stood beside him, her fingers brushing her dagger's hilt, the steel cool against her palm, "She's right, trouble's our shadow. Sticks closer'n salt to sea," she smirked as her storm magic tingled.

The crone leaned closer, tattoos shifting in the candlelight like living runes. "Yer tale draws toward an end, storm and hook. Danger lurks in shadows spun by a dark weaver of deals and deceit. Pullin' ye apart like threads in a loom. Hearts torn asunder. Alone ye'll wander. Years stretchin' like endless seas. Hearts achin' in the void."

Desylva's brow furrowed, unease flickering in her gray eyes. "What danger? Speak plain." The teller shook her head slowly, her tattoos seeming to shift in the candlelight, "I see only what the mists reveal. Separation long and bitter. Years stretchin' like endless, lonely seas. Alone ye'll wander in anguish, fates cruelly severed."

Killian raised a brow, curiosity piqued but tempered with skepticism. His hand found Desylva's beneath the table, fingers curling around hers. "Riddles, love. We're true love. And true love wins. Nothing can sever that." Desylva nodded, though her storm-mark pulsed faintly with unease. "Aye. Let's not borrow trouble from mists."

The crone sighed, voice thinning like fading smoke. "Time's wheel turns slow… but eventually fates entwine again. Stronger for the break. Pain carves deep scars before the mending." Desylva's grip tightened on Killian's hand, her mark flickering faintly, "Vague riddles. You raise more questions than answers." The teller leaned back, eyes hooded. "Apart ye shall be… alone… for many years. But reunited in time, if threads hold true."

A faint crackle stirred the air. Desylva's storm-mark pulsed sharply. Shadows in the tent flickered — and a soft, slithering giggle drifted through the incense-laden air. Rumpelstiltskin's whisper curled like smoke, making the lanterns sway and dim.

The crone's hands trembled, her voice dropping to a hiss, "Beware the beast what wears a mask."

Killian's grin tightened, steel glinting in his gaze. "Aye. Let's move, lass. Riddles don't scare us — but they nudge."

The crew filed out of the tent, the night air cool against their skin after the heavy incense. Smee muttered, "Creepy old bat… probably just stirrin' pots for extra coin." One-Eyed Jack grumbled, "Blind spots and shadows… bah. I see fine with one eye." Billy dismissively hummed a jaunty tune, louder than before, "Shadows on tunes? Mine'll be bright as carnival lights!" Black Tom nodded once, unperturbed.

Behind them, the tent's lanterns flickered again — as though something inside exhaled.

Grounds

The carnival's cheer felt brittle now, a thin veneer stretched over a pulse of menace that quickened their steps as they left the fortune-teller's tent. The night seemed louder than before — fiddles shrieking, drums pounding, laughter rising sharp as gull cries. Lanterns flickered uneasily, their flames bending as though disturbed by a passing shadow.

The crowd thickened around them, a crush of revelers in bright masks adorned with feathers and bells. Bracelets jingled as dancers spun past, tossing coins at stalls or clapping in time with performers. Painted faces grinned too wide, their smiles stretched beneath lacquered colors. The air felt charged — festive, but edged with something watching.

Smee tried to shake off the tension first. He bartered a copper coin for a candied apple, its sticky glaze dripping onto his fingers as he took a messy bite. His cheeks puffed with delight. "Sweeter'n rum, Cap'n," he declared, licking caramel from his thumb. "Carnival's treat — beats ship's biscuits any day!" His laughter boomed, though it wavered at the edges.

One-Eyed Jack lingered at a stall where smoked fish sizzled over a brazier, their crisped scales gleaming gold. He sniffed suspiciously, nose wrinkling. After a long pause, he tossed a coin that clinked against the vendor's tin. "Better'n ship rations," he muttered. "Might keep it — if it don't turn sour." The vendor handed him a skewer, its smoky scent curling into the air. One-Eyed Jack took a bite, chewing thoughtfully as his eye swept the crowd for trouble.

They moved on, weaving through the carnival's twisting paths. A fire-eater exhaled a plume of blue flame that rippled like a living serpent. A masked jester juggled knives that flashed silver in the lantern-light. A troupe of drummers pounded out a rhythm that vibrated through the ground, shaking dust from the tent seams.

Yet beneath the spectacle, unease lingered. The fortune-teller's words clung to them like smoke. Even Billy's laughter sounded a shade too loud. Even Smee's cheer felt forced. Even One-Eyed Jack's grumbling carried a sharper edge. Black Tom alone remained steady, though his eyes flicked more often toward shadows than lights.

A sudden hush rippled through a nearby cluster of tents. Lanterns dimmed, their glow shrinking to faint halos. A breeze swept through, carrying the faint scent of incense — the same sandalwood and myrrh that clung to the fortune-teller's tent.

Billy slowed, spinning top in hand. "Feels… different here," he murmured, voice softer than usual. One-Eyed Jack grunted. "Carnival's got corners best left alone." Smee swallowed the last of his apple, wiping caramel from his beard. "Aye… let's stick together." Black Tom nodded once, a silent agreement.

They continued forward, the carnival's cheer rising again around them — but the shadow of the prophecy followed close behind, threading through the revelry like a whisper waiting to be heard.

Fire Pit

The crew lingered near the gaming booths.

Billy raced his spinning top against a lad in patched trousers, the wooden toy whirring across the stones in bright, dizzying circles. "Beat that, mate!" Billy crowed, freckles glowing in lantern-light. "Carnival's mine!" His whistle peeked from his shirt, ready for another tune. The lad laughed and spun his own top, the toys clattering together before skittering apart. Billy whooped, delighted.

Smee bartered for another candied apple as One-Eyed Jack gnawed on his smoked fish skewer, muttering about rigged games.

Black Tom paused beneath a tightrope rig where a performer balanced high above. Her silhouette cut a dark thread against the starlit sky, bare feet gripping the rope as she swayed with impossible grace. The crowd gasped with each shift of her weight. Black Tom's scarred hands flexed at his sides, his silence steady amid the whirl of noise and motion. His gaze tracked her every step — not with fear, but with the quiet respect of one who understood balance and danger.

Lantern-light flickered across their faces, casting warm gold over laughter that still carried a faint tremor from the fortune-teller's words.

Killian and Desylva drifted away from the group, slipping through a gap in the crowd where the noise softened. The shift was subtle — a shared glance, a brush of fingers — and then they were moving toward a quieter stretch of the carnival. The crew remained close enough to hear Billy's whoops and Smee's booming chuckles, but Killian and Desylva stepped into a pocket of space where the revelry thinned.

They paused at a fire pit where embers glowed like the eyes of some buried beast, heat pulsing against the cool night. Flames licked upward in slow, hungry curls, casting shadows that stretched long across the stones. Desylva's red scarf fluttered in the breeze, a vivid slash of color against her dark hair. Killian's blue eyes caught hers, mischief sparking beneath the carnival glow. "Fits ye, lass. Carnival's got its charm." Her laugh cut sharp through the warm air, edged with storm. "Don't get used to it. Somethin's brewin' under all this racket."

Her cursed mark pulsed brighter — a blue flicker casting faint light along her jaw. Years of instinct honed her senses. Her storm stirred as a chill threaded through the spiced warmth of the carnival. The air shifted, subtle but unmistakable.

Killian felt it too. His hand drifted toward his cutlass, fingers brushing the hilt. "Aye. Keep close. Mirth's a mask here."

A shadow stretched along a nearby tent — too long, too thin, bending at angles that didn't match the lanterns' glow. Rumpelstiltskin's presence slithered through the air like a whisper, a giggle threading beneath the fiddles' tune, a cold note that prickled the skin. Regina's cold note followed, a faint echo that prickled the skin.

Desylva's storm-mark flared again, a brief crackle of blue. "He's near," she murmured, voice low. "Or watchin'."

The fire pit flared suddenly, a gust scattering sparks that hissed against the stones. Revelers nearby danced on, oblivious to the shift, their laughter rising in bright bursts that felt brittle at the edges. But Killian and Desylva stood still, senses sharpened by the carnival's hidden pulse.

Behind them, the crew's voices carried faintly — Billy cheering, Smee laughing, Jack grumbling, Tom silent. The carnival roared on, but the shadows between its lights grew longer.

Beast Taming Show

The beast-tamer's tent loomed just beyond the fire pit, its striped canvas close enough for Killian and Desylva to catch the crowd's rumbling excitement — and close enough to the crew's wandering path that its noise brushed their ears as well.

A low rumble rolled across the carnival — not loud enough to shatter the revelry, but deep enough to make heads turn. Killian's hand stilled on his cutlass hilt. Desylva's storm-mark flickered once beneath her sleeve. Smee paused mid-bite, caramel dripping down his chin. One-Eyed Jack's eye narrowed, tracking the sound. Even Black Tom shifted his stance, weight settling as though the ground itself had whispered a warning. Billy's tin whistle trilled off-key as he lowered it, freckles paling. For a heartbeat, the carnival breathed in — waiting.

Then the night snapped. A roar tore through the carnival — a guttural bellow that ripped laughter and music apart like a blade through silk. Carnival-goers shrieked, scattering in panicked bursts, masks flashing and feathers flying as the crowd broke apart.

The roar came again — closer, sharper — and the striped tent shuddered as something inside struck metal with bone-deep force.

Killian was already moving. He seized Desylva's hand, pulling her from the fire pit's glow as the crowd buckled in panic. Her cloak snapped behind her like a storm-torn banner, her mark flaring bright beneath the sleeve. "With me," he growled, cutting through fleeing revelers as they pushed toward the beast-tamer's tent. Desylva's eyes burned storm-gray, her voice a low promise, "I'm right here, pirate."

A snarling tiger — massive, striped, its fur rippling like shadowed waves under harsh spotlights — slammed against the iron bars of its rust-bitten cage. Metal groaned. Canvas tore. With a final, ferocious snarl, the beast burst free, shredding the striped tent as it lunged into the open.

The tamer cracked his whip, sharp snaps echoing like thunderclaps. The tiger roared back, jaws gaping wide, fangs gleaming ivory-bright. Hot breath steamed in the cool night as its muscles coiled, ready to spring. Its fur rippled like shadowed waves, eyes burning yellow fury as panic erupted.

Black Tom reacted first. He spun his wooden hoop and hurled it with a flick, the ring clattering against the ground in front of the beast. The tiger's eyes snapped toward the motion — a heartbeat of distraction — then it lunged into the crowd with a thundering roar, claws extended like scythes carving furrows through dirt and scattered straw.

A ripple of red magic twisted through the air. Regina's curse sparked in the tiger's eyes, turning them a burning crimson. Its form shuddered, muscles bulging unnaturally as rage overtook instinct. A juggler's torches toppled, igniting a blaze that licked upward in greedy tongues.

Smee yelped, dropping his candied apple. "It's loose, Cap'n — carnival's gone mad!"

Screams pierced the air like shattered glass. Stalls toppled under the beast's weight, canvas collapsing in bursts of color and splintering wood. Revelers fled in every direction, masks askew, bells jangling wildly.

One-Eyed Jack snarled, eye narrowing. "Knew this was a bloody trap!"

The crew sprang into action.

Killian drew his cutlass, steel catching firelight in a bright arc. His hook flashed as he stepped between the beast and a cluster of terrified carnival-goers. “Stand back. … Lads, let’s dance with this cat!”

He parried the first strike. The tiger’s claws sliced the air inches from Killian’s chest. The blow ripped his coat sleeve, leaving a shallow gash along his arm. He hissed at the sting, blood seeping from the gash. His grin sharpened into something wild. “Not tonight, striped devil. Back to your cage before I send you there myself.”

Desylva’s storm answered. Thunder cracked overhead, a jagged bolt slamming into the ground near the beast’s flank with a boom that rattled nearby stalls. Her cursed mark flared bright blue, illuminating her determined face. Winds whipped sand into the tiger’s eyes, blinding it momentarily. Rain followed in a sudden burst, steam rising where droplets struck the fire-lit ground. Its claws slashed wide as lightning cracked overhead, in jagged bolts that singed fur. Her gusts pinned it against a tent pole, “Feel my storm’s bite!” she shouted, voice ringing through the chaos. “Your fury’s no match for mine!”

Smee dove behind a toppled barrel. “Someone lasso the brute before it guts us!” One-Eyed Jack charged, cutlass swinging. He slashed at the tiger’s paws, drawing blood from the tiger's flank in a hot spray that splashed warm and sticky as he forced it back step by step. “Come on, kitty — taste me blade, ye overgrown rug! I’ll make boots from yer hide!” Billy scrambled onto a stall roof, piping a shrill blast on his tin whistle. The sound cut through the din like a seabird’s cry, drawing the tiger’s attention upward. “Over here, ye big cat! Bet ye can’t catch me!”

Killian and Black Tom exchanged a quick look — a silent plan. Together they lunged. Killian grabbed the beast’s scruff, his hook digging into its thick fur, while Tom wrapped his arms around its torso, muscles straining as he wrestled the creature sideways. The tiger bucked and thrashed, roaring loud enough to shake lanterns from their hooks.

The crew piled on. Ropes and nets were snatched from nearby booths, thrown over the beast in a tangle of coarse fibers. Dust rose in clouds. Sparks flew from overturned torches. The tiger’s roars shook the ground as they fought to pin it down.

Finally, with a last heaving effort, the beast collapsed under the weight of ropes and bodies, panting hard, its rage dimming as the curse flickered out.

The tamer rushed forward, breathless and grateful. “Ye saved the show! Heroes, all o’ ye — that tiger’s rage could’ve torn the place apart!” He and two assistants hauled the subdued beast back toward its cage, securing the bars with trembling hands.

Adrenaline surged through them like fire in their veins, skin slick with sweat and blood-specked dust, as the tamer escorted the tiger back to its cage.

Lanterns swayed overhead, casting flickering gold across the crowd. Revelers clapped and cheered, mistaking the fight for a grand spectacle. Masks glinted with sequins and feathers as the carnival resumed, chaos swallowed by fiddles and laughter.

From the shadows, Rumpelstiltskin’s voice slithered through the air. “Fools. Enjoy your little games.” A fireball arced toward them. Desylva’s rain quenched it mid-flight, steam hissing upward. Killian wiped his blade on his torn coat. “Nice shot, lass. Teamwork, aye?” Her gray eyes blazed, storm-bright. The red scarf he’d won her fluttered in the wind, damp from her summoned rain.

Smee emerged from behind his barrel, retrieving the stick of his dropped candied apple. Dust smeared the glaze, but he waved it triumphantly. “Nearly ate me whole, that thing! Carnival’s wilder’n the sea, Cap’n!” One-Eyed Jack pocketed his brass ring with a grunt. “Worth the scrap. Better’n fishin’ fer trinkets.” Black Tom tossed a carved wooden fish to Billy, who caught it mid-air with a laugh and piped a triumphant blast on his whistle. The note danced over the stalls, a thread of victory weaving through the lingering tension.

Killian shook blood and dust from his hook as he sheathed his cutlass. His coat hung torn at the sleeve, the gash beneath already drying. “Not bad for a night off,” he said, voice low. “Keeps us sharp.” His blue eyes flicked to

Desylva, her storm-mark pulsing a steady blue beneath her sleeve, her magic settling but alert. Her voice cut through the resuming din, sharp and steady, “Too quiet now after that,” she murmured. “Watch the edges.”

Regina’s shadow lingered. A chill threaded through the warm air despite the fire-breather’s renewed plumes. Carnival lights flickered, casting jagged shapes across the tents. Dancers spun faster, their silks a blur. Jugglers tossed knives and torches higher, as though trying to outshine the darkness creeping in.

Fire Pit

They drifted back toward the fire pit, the embers glowing low and warm against the cooling night. The carnival’s roar had softened to a tired hum — fiddles fading, drums slowing, laughter thinning into scattered pockets. Lanterns flickered overhead, their flames guttering as hawkers folded stalls and performers packed away props. Victory still buzzed faintly in the air, but danger’s shadow lingered at the edges.

A barker approached Killian with a wide grin, offering a bright yellow flower. “For luck, mate — ye earned it!”

Killian accepted it with a roguish tilt of his head. He tucked the flower gently into Desylva’s hair, its vibrant petals glowing against her dark strands. “For my wild bloom. fits ya perfect, love,” he murmured, voice warm. “like sunlight piercin' a storm, makin' it all the hotter.”

Desylva’s laugh was dry, a blade’s edge softened by a flicker of warmth. “Luck’s earned, pirate. Not handed.” Her gray eyes softened for a breath as she adjusted the flower, the red scarf at her throat fluttering in the breeze.

Killian slowly brushed a thumb along her jaw — a brief, intimate touch. ““For my wild bloom. fits ya perfect, love,” he murmured, voice warm. “like sunlight piercin' a storm, makin' it all the hotter.” He pressed a quick kiss to her cheek. The crew whooped, Billy’s whistle trilling a celebratory note. Desylva nudged Killian’s shoulder with a teasing smirk, her voice a seductive purr. “Keep that up and I’ll make you my prize. Pinned down and claimed. Till you beg for mercy.” Her gray eyes softened for a breath. He pulled her into a quick, heated kiss amid the crew's whoops. His hand fist in her hair with a possessive tug. Their tongues tangling fierce and wet, bodies pressing with raw need before parting breathlessly.

Three years had forged them — storm and sea, danger and devotion — a rhythm pulsing beneath the carnival’s revelry. Rum carts rolled past, barrels thumping over stones. Music swelled one last time, a fiddle’s cry weaving through the night like a lingering echo. The island hummed, danger dozing beneath its painted veneer. But their crew stood steady, boots planted on the slick cobblestones.

The night stretched thin, alive with victory’s thrill, the stars burning brighter above the sagging tents. The carnival’s chaos bound them tighter.

Smee swayed with a stick of candied apples, caramel clinging to his beard. “Worth the scare, Cap’n! Sweet as gold, this!” One-Eyed Jack bartered coins for a pouch of healing herbs smelling of earth and mint, and a skewer of smoked fish crisped golden over a brazier. He sniffed it once, eye glinting with grudging approval as he tucked it into his belt, “Beats salt pork.”

Billy raced his spinning top again, sparks whirling across the stones. “King o’ the spin!” he crowed, laughter bright. His whistle dangled from his shirt and his carved fish prize gleamed in lantern-light, tucked proudly into his belt.

Black Tom lingered by the fire pit, its embers glowing like coals in a forge. His hands rested on his knees as he watched another tightrope walker take her final bow, her silhouette fading against the starlit sky. His silence was a steady heartbeat amid the fading chaos.

Killian and Desylva stood near the dwindling fire, its warmth brushing their faces. Her scarf danced in the breeze, the yellow flower wilting slightly in the cooling air. His blue eyes traced her silhouette with a softened mischief. “Scrapes worth the night, storm?” Her grin flashed, fierce and fond. “Aye — though if you’d ducked quicker, that beast wouldn’t have tried makin’ a meal of you.” Her storm-mark pulsed faintly, meeting his sea-wrought calm in a crackling spark.

Around them, dancers stilled, bells tinkling faintly as they packed away silks. Jugglers sheathed their blades. A barker folded his stall with a tired grunt.

Killian flipped a copper coin to a juggler, its arc catching firelight. “Fine show, mate. Keep the flames alive.” Desylva’s fingers brushed his as she shifted her dagger, voice low and teasing. “Still chasin’ trouble?”

The isle’s glow thinned to embers. Lanterns flickered low, their colors bleeding into the dark as tents drooped like tired giants settling for sleep. Hawkers murmured their last bargains, voices fading into the salt-heavy breeze. Stars gathered overhead in bright clusters, watching as the crew lingered in the carnival’s waning breath.

Smee gnawed the last of his apple, twirling the stick between sticky fingers. “Mad whirl, this. Stuffed an’ spent, I am!” One-Eyed Jack slung his herb pouch over his shoulder, skewer rattling against his brass ring. “Reeled in a decent catch. Carnival’s wild — but it delivers.” Billy trilled a quick note on his whistle, pocketing it alongside his stilled top. “Carnival’s lights… never seen anything whirl like that. Feels like the whole isle’s still spinnin’ in me head!” Black Tom adjusted the coil of rope at his belt, his scarred hands steady as he watched the last lanterns gutter out across the isle.

Killian nudged Desylva’s scarf, smoothing the red silk as he tilted his head. “Beast didn’t rattle you.” Her gray eyes caught the lantern glow, sharp and steady. “Nor you.” His smirk deepened. “Takes more than a big cat to keel me over.”

A hawker thrust a wooden star trinket into Killian’s palm. “For the flair, captain!” Killian waved it off with a chuckle. “Got my prize here.” He nodded toward Desylva, her flower still clinging defiantly in her hair.

The last of the carnival’s firelight guttered out. Torches hissed into darkness, leaving only smoke threads curling upward. Tents collapsed into deeper shadow as the final stragglers slipped away down the narrow paths, their footsteps swallowed by the night.

Smee swayed slightly, apple stick spinning in his grip. “Ship’s callin’. Me legs feel like jelly. Carnival’s had its fill o’ me!” One-Eyed Jack nodded. “Aye. Enough madness for one night. Fought hard. Scored well.” Billy hopped over a puddle of spilled rum, nearly tripping before catching himself with a laugh. “If that tiger shows up again, I’ll challenge it to a spin-off. Bet I’d win!” Black Tom stepped forward, boots firm on the cobblestones, falling into place at the front of the group as they moved away from the fire.

Killian and Desylva paused one last time by the cooling fire pit. Her scarf fluttered. The flower drooped. His gaze held hers, mischief softened by something deeper. “Night well spent, reckon?” Her grin was a playful jab. “If you don’t lag next time. Beast almost claimed you.” His hook flashed as he shifted, voice a warm rumble. “Takes a tempest to keep me, love. You know that.” They stepped from the fire’s dying glow and into the dimming isle.

Shuttered stalls lined the path, their bright paint dulled under moonlight. Abandoned game booths sagged with half-packed prizes. A toppled juggler’s torch lay cold on the stones. A cracked feathered mask rested forgotten near a tent pole. The remnants of revelry clung to the cobblestones like echoes — laughter thinning, music fading, the scent of sugar and smoke drifting away on the breeze. The crowd’s laughter faded into distant echoes. The sea’s gentle sigh called them home.

Billy hopped over a puddle, nearly tripping before catching himself with a laugh. “Next time, I’m winnin’ somethin’ bigger — maybe a wheel ride or a fire-eater’s trick!” Black Tom nudged him forward with a steady hand, as the path narrowed.

Together, they turned toward the docks, boots scuffing the cobblestones as the carnival’s lights flickered out behind them — collapsing into shadow, leaving only memory and the promise of the ship’s lanterns glowing faintly through the haze.

Path back to the Jolly Roger

The crew stumbled back toward the shore, boots heavy with sand and exhaustion scraping along the cobblestone path. The carnival’s glow faded behind them, shrinking to a distant shimmer swallowed by the deepening dark. The

tents blurred into the dark at their backs, bright stripes muted to dull silhouettes. Starlight draped the isle in a cool silver hush, the sea's soft murmur rising to greet them like a familiar lullaby.

Smee twirled his candied apple stick between sticky fingers, caramel clinging stubbornly. "What a night," he breathed, grin weary but wide. One-Eyed Jack's growl carried a note of pride. "Carnival's mad… worth the haul, though."

Black Tom strode steady, carved wooden fish gleaming faintly at his belt. Moonlight caught the polished scales, turning them silver as he scanned the thinning path ahead. His silence anchored the group, a calm counterpoint to their tired chatter. Billy flashed a grin, voice bright despite the fatigue tugging at his limbs, declared. "Best night yet."

Killian led them, his black coat swaying with each step. The tear at his sleeve had stiffened with dried blood, a jagged reminder of the fight. His hook caught moonlight in sharp flashes, steel gleaming like a sliver of starlight.

Desylva kept pace beside him, her red scarf rippling like a banner in the cool breeze. The yellow flower tucked into her hair drooped slightly. Her gray eyes scanned the darkened shore, storm-mark pulsing faintly beneath her damp cloak. "Too quiet after that brawl," her voice a low thread of doubt. "Somethin's brewin'."

Killian's smirk softened as his gaze flickered to her, voice low. "Carnival's got its hooks in deep. Never sleeps easy."

The sea breeze strengthened, carrying the briny tang of salt and the faint creak of wood and the familiar rhythm of waves brushing the shore. Lanterns along the dock flickered in the wind, their glow soft and welcoming.

Killian slowed as the Jolly Roger came into view — her enchanted oak hull rising from the dark like a steadfast sentinel. Lanterns swayed gently on her deck, casting warm gold across the gangplank. The ship's silhouette loomed proud against the star-studded sky, a promise of home after the isle's wild revelry.

Desylva's storm-mark pulsed once more, then settled. "Back to the sea," she said quietly. Killian nodded, hook tapping lightly against his thigh. "Aye. Back where we belong."

The crew gathered at the dock's edge, boots scuffing the worn boards as they approached the gangplank. Behind them, the carnival's last lantern flickered out — leaving only starlight, the whisper of waves, and the Jolly Roger waiting in the dark.

Desylva paused. Just once. Looking over her shoulder. For a heartbeat she thought she saw a figure. Watching. Then the lantern died. And the shape was gone. A chill skated briefly down her spine.

Killian turned when he realized she had stopped. His brow furrowed slightly as he caught the look on her face. "Des?"

At the sound of his voice, she tore her gaze from the darkness and looked toward him. The concern in his eyes steadied something inside her. He offered his hand. For a heartbeat she hesitated, then crossed the last few steps and slipped her fingers into his.

Together, they turned from the darkened carnival and headed for the waiting ship.

Jolly Roger - Gangplank

They climbed the gangplank in a slow, weary procession, boots thudding softly on planks slick with night-dew. The carnival's distant glow faded behind them, swallowed by the hush of the cove. Each step carried them farther from the isle's clamor — laughter, fiddles, firelight — until only the sea's sigh remained, a familiar welcome that washed over them like a cleansing wave.

The Jolly Roger rocked gently in the cradle of the sheltered inlet, her enchanted timbers humming with quiet recognition as her crew returned. Lanterns swayed along the rigging, casting warm golden pools that danced across the water's black mirror. Their reflections rippled with each soft swell, stretching and folding like living light.

Salt and pine drifted through the air — the ship's own scent, clean and sharp, chasing away the carnival's sticky sweetness. The deck groaned under their weight as they boarded, the sound low and familiar, like a creature stirring from rest. Ropes creaked softly in the rigging, answering the breeze with gentle whispers.

The isle itself seemed to exhale around them. Waves brushed the hull in slow, steady breaths. The cliffs rose dark and silent on either side, their shadows deepening the sense of refuge. The sea's breath rose and fell in slow, steady rhythms, smoothing the jagged edges of the night's chaos. Above, stars glittered in cold constellations, their reflections scattered across the water like shards of silver.

Main Deck

Killian and Desylva stepped aboard first, the gangplank creaking behind them as the Jolly Roger welcomed their weight. His torn sleeve brushed her shoulder as he moved past, the dried blood from the tiger fight — stiff along the seam — catching the lantern glow in a brief, sharp glint. Her red scarf fluttered once in the night breeze before settling against her cloak.

They crossed the main deck with the crew, boots scuffing over familiar planks, carnival prizes glinting faintly in the lantern-light. Billy drifted toward the starboard rail, drawn by the moonlit waves. Smee trudged to his familiar barrel, dropping onto it with a relieved groan. One-Eyed Jack made straight for the cannons, habit pulling him into a quick inspection even through exhaustion. Black Tom moved with steady purpose, gathering a stray coil of rope as he took his place near the bow.

Quarterdeck

Killian and Desylva ascended the quarterdeck steps together, the ship's timbers humming beneath their boots. Killian set his hand on the helm, claiming his place with quiet certainty. Desylva settled beside him, cloak brushing his arm as the lantern-light pooled softly around them.

Main Deck

Billy leaned against the railing, the moon painting silver across his freckles. "Carnival's just a wild tale now, Cap'n," he said. "What a yarn it'll make. Tigers roarin'. Prizes sparklin'. Whole isle buzzin' like a hive." His grin was bright, but fatigue softened its edges.

Smee, still clutching his apple stick like a trophy. "Safe at last," he yawned, stretching his arms wide. "Apples an' chaos — that's me done for the night! Blimey, me heart's still poundin' from that beast's glare. Felt like it wanted me for dessert!" His laughter boomed, but his eyelids drooped.

One-Eyed Jack muttered, "Let that beast try us here," patting the nearest cannon. "I'm waitin' with steel ready. Arm's still achin' from slashin' at its hide… but no curses followin' us aboard." His eye flicked toward the shore, wary but satisfied.

Black Tom coiled the rope with deft hands. The motion slow, steady, almost meditative. His dark eyes fixed on the horizon where stars kissed the waves, a subtle nod acknowledging the group's relief. The carved wooden fish at his belt glinted faintly, catching lantern-light like a quiet badge of victory.

Quarterdeck

Killian's hook tapped the wheel with a familiar metallic tap. The sound steadied him — an anchor after the carnival's frenzy. "Fine work, lads," he said, voice warm and rare. "Handled that tiger like seasoned hunters, claws and all." Pride roughened his tone, threading through the quiet night.

Desylva leaned closer, wiping her dagger clean on her cloak. The blade caught the lantern glow like a sliver of moonlight. Her storm simmered low beneath her skin, her mark pulsing faintly blue — a heartbeat echoing his. "Trouble's holdin' its breath," she murmured. "Won't for long. But tonight… we won."

Killian's gaze lingered on her, the red scarf at her throat rippling in the breeze, the wilted yellow flower still tucked defiantly in her hair. The ship's lanterns cast soft halos around them, turning the moment quiet, intimate, and steady.

Main Deck

Around them, the crew settled into familiar rhythms. Smee stretched out on his barrel, humming a tune under his breath. Billy leaned farther over the railing, watching moonlight ripple across the waves. One-Eyed Jack finished his inspection and leaned against a crate, arms crossed, eye half-lidded. Black Tom secured the last coil of rope and rested a hand on the rail, steady as stone.

The Jolly Roger rocked gently, her timbers humming with contentment. The sea reclaimed them, its calm pulse rising beneath the deck like a promise.

Above, the stars burned sharp and cold. Below, the water whispered against the hull. And aboard, the crew breathed as one — tired, triumphant, and ready for whatever dawn carried.

A few hours later – Quarterdeck

The night deepened further, the sea's whisper mingling with the ship's creaking timbers. The Jolly Roger bobbed gently in the cove, sails sagging in the faintest breeze as stars blazed overhead like watchful eyes. Lanterns swayed along the rigging, their glow softening into warm halos that pooled across the deck. The carnival's distant chaos felt like a fading dream, swallowed by the hush of the open water.

Killian stood taller at the wheel, his silhouette framed by moonlight. He swept his gaze over the crew with a nod of approval — a quiet gesture that carried more weight than words.

Main deck

Smee mumbled sleepily from his barrel perch, apple stick still clutched like a prized trophy. "Night, lads. Dream o' more apples," he muttered, hat slipping over one eye as he slumped sideways. One-Eyed Jack sprawled against a crate, his herb pouch and fish skewer clinking softly as he shifted. "Glad to be off that isle," he grumbled. "Too much flash for me taste. But the herbs'll mend me aches." His voice softened at the end, fatigue smoothing its usual bite.

Billy curled near the mast, whistle and carved fish tucked into his belt. His spinning top rested beside him, still and quiet. "Moon's makin' the waves dance," he mumbled, already drifting. "Feels like the whole sea's hummin' me to sleep…" His words drifted into the breeze, half-spoken, half-dreamed. Black Tom stood at the bow, harpoon propped against the rail. His dark eyes scanned the silvered waves, a silent sentinel watching the horizon. He cast one last glance shoreward before settling, the carved fish at his belt glinting faintly in the lantern glow.

Quarterdeck

Killian's hand traced the wheel's grooves, the wood familiar beneath his palm. His coat swayed as he breathed the salt air deep, the smoke and rum fading from his lungs like distant memories. His blue eyes softened as they lingered on Desylva with a depth that spoke volumes — a look that carried three years of storms weathered side by side, a tether through wild seas and shadowed realms — her presence now the anchor to his wandering soul.

Desylva adjusted her fluttering scarf, the wilted flower in her hair a stubborn burst of yellow against her dark strands, clinging defiantly like her spirit. Her gray eyes met his, steady and clear. "Home," she murmured. "Carnival's dust in the wind. Good riddance to its riddles." Her storm settled, a quiet hum beneath her skin.

Killian's grin widened, warm and roguish. "Aye. Ship's our heart. The isle's just a yarn spun and forgotten." He brushed a thumb along the wheel, the gesture grounding him.

Desylva stepped closer, her dagger resting easy at her hip. Her presence was a tempest tamed for the moment — calm, but never quiet. Killian leaned in and pressed a soft, fleeting kiss to her lips, a tender claim that ignited a spark, the warmth grounding them amid the night's hush. Her scent of ozone and wild winds wrapped around him, familiar and steady.

The ship sighed, planks groaning softly underfoot like a contented breath. The crew's breathing synced with the waves, a quiet rhythm of peace earned. Lanterns dimmed as the breeze shifted, casting long shadows across the deck.

Killian's hook tapped once against the wheel — a promise of readiness for whatever dawn carried. Desylva's hand brushed his arm, a fleeting touch that lingered with warmth. Their bond glowed in the lantern light, a quiet strength forged in revelry and danger, unbreakable as the Roger's hull.

The night wrapped around them, deep and still, as the Jolly Roger rocked gently in the cove — waiting for dawn's call.

A few hours later (Dawn Rising)

Sometime in the quiet hours before dawn, while the crew slept off the carnival's chaos, Killian and Desylva slipped the Jolly Roger from the cove. Sails rose with soft snaps, catching a steady wind that carried them into open water without waking a soul.

Dawn unfurled slowly across the horizon, pale gold bleeding into the last remnants of night. The Jolly Roger carved through the fading starlight, sails swelling with a brisk wind that tugged her free of the cove. The water gleamed silver beneath her hull, rippling gently in her wake as the carnival isle dwindled behind them — first a cluster of shadows, then a smear of color, then nothing but memory swallowed by the rising dawn.

A rare stillness cloaked the ship as she sliced through the waves. The timbers hummed with quiet purpose, the enchanted oak responding to the wind's pull with a steady, confident creak. The crew slumbered below, exhaustion claimed by hammocks and bunks, leaving the deck to Killian and Desylva alone.

Killian stood at the helm, hook grazing the wheel's edge with a faint clink. His coat stirred gently in the morning breeze. The early light caught the edge of his torn sleeve, turning the dried mark of the tiger fight into a faint rust-red seam. His blue eyes lifted toward the horizon, steady and alert, the calm of command settling over him like a second skin.

Desylva stood a short distance away, one hand resting on the railing as she watched the dawn climb. Her scarf trailed softly behind her, drifting in the mild morning air. The wilted yellow flower in her hair glowed faintly in the new light, a stubborn spark of color against the quiet sea. Her storm-mark, hidden beneath her sleeve, its magic resting, unlit, as if even the tempest within her paused to breathe.

Killian's gaze settled on Desylva as his mind flickered back to the isle: the lights, the noise, the danger threaded beneath revelry. The contrast sharpened the peace of this moment. Her wildness had honed him; her storm had stitched itself into his sea-hardened worn soul, a current he navigated through every gale. He brushed the tear in his sleeve, murmuring, "That scrap was a breather. Next one's ours to conquer."

Desylva's nod was soft, thoughtful, her cloak shifting as she adjusted her stance at the rail. Her gaze traced the wind's path across the waves, her scarf drifting in the mild breeze. The flower in her hair glowed in the early light, a small ember against the pale horizon — a stubborn spark of color against the quiet sea. Her posture held a quiet readiness, alert but calm, her storm-mark resting beneath her sleeve with its magic settled after the long night.

"Rough seas are home," she said quietly. "Let 'em roar." Killian reached over, nudging her wilted flower back into place. Its petals were brittle but bold, catching the dawn light in a stubborn flare. "Hold onto that," he said flashing a roguish smile. "Marks you fierce." Her laugh cut soft through the wind — warm, edged with storm. "Fierce, aye. Don't you go soft on me." Her gray eyes held his, a spark dancing beneath the steel.

He leaned close, his lips capturing hers in a brief, fierce kiss — a shared breath, a vow sealed in the hush of dawn. Salt and wind wrapped around them, the moment grounding them amid the ship's steady glide.

The Jolly Roger pressed on, her resilience a heartbeat underfoot. The sails snapped full, catching the breeze. The sea stretched ahead in endless silver, the horizon brightening with the promise of new realms.

Desylva's storm and Killian's sea moved in tandem — a bond born of fire, revelry, and danger — carrying them forward into whatever waited beyond the dawn.

Quarterdeck (Dawn/Morning)

Dawn unfurled fully across the horizon, gold bleeding into the fading stars until the sky blushed with morning. The Jolly Roger rode the early swell with a steady, confident rhythm, her sails catching the newborn light in soft, shimmering folds. The sea stretched vast and silver ahead, its surface rippling like brushed metal beneath the rising sun.

Killian and Desylva stood together at the helm, the deck wrapped in a hush that belonged only to early morning. Her scarf rippled softly — a crimson thread against the pale gold sky — while his hook rested idle on the wheel, the ship's sway a gentle cradle beneath their quiet vigil. This breath was theirs alone. Their trust ran deep, her tempest a rhythm he'd never sail without.

Killian had let the crew sleep in. After the carnival's chaos, the tiger's fury, and the long trek back to the ship, they'd earned it. He'd kept the deck quiet, guiding the Jolly Roger into the morning calm while Desylva kept watch beside him.

Desylva's gray eyes probed his, a storm's promise flickering beneath the calm. "What's waitin', love — more fangs?" His grin flared, bold and unshaken. "Chaos. Ours to claim, always."

Main Deck

The crew finally stirred. Boots thudded softly on planks as they climbed up, bleary-eyed and yawning into the morning light.

One-Eyed Jack scratched his beard, as he squinted at the brightening sky. "Blazes… slept like a stone." Smee stumbled up last. "Cap'n… ye let us sleep past dawn?" His voice cracked with disbelief and gratitude.

Black Tom stepped up from below deck, harpoon resting against his shoulder. His steps were quiet and measured, the morning light catching the scars along his jaw as he moved to the rail. He offered Killian a single, steady nod — the kind that carried thanks without needing words, a silent acknowledgment of the captain's choice to let them rest.

Billy rubbed sleep from his eyes, hair sticking up in wild tufts. "Feels like I slept a whole realm," he mumbled, spinning his top once before pocketing it.

The Roger answered the morning with a soft, contented groan, her enchanted timbers settling as the breeze brushed gently through her rigging. Runes along the rail pulsed once in a slow, steady rhythm — the ship's quiet acknowledgment of calm seas and a rare, peaceful dawn.

Quarterdeck

Killian's voice carried across the deck, warm and steady. "Easy start today, lads. We've clear waters ahead, and already on course."

Main Deck

Billy straightened with a sleepy grin, spinning his top once more before letting it dance across his palm. "Sea's lookin' friendly today," he said, voice still thick with dreams.

Quarterdeck

Killian gripped the wheel, salt air filling his chest, once driven by vengeance, now alive with her. Three years had tethered them, her storm igniting his tide, her presence anchoring the ship as much as the helm beneath his hand. He smoothed his coat, voice low. "We came through it, love. Day's ours now."

Desylva's gray eyes met his, fierce and steady. "Aye," she murmured, warmth threading through her grin. "And we'll keep it." Her scarf lifted in the morning breeze, a crimson streak against the brightening sky.

The sun climbed higher, teasing the world's rim with a golden vein threading the silver sea. The sea unfurled vast and uncharted, its promise stretching beyond the horizon.

The Jolly Roger surged forward, sails swelling with the morning breeze. A gentle stillness settled over the deck, the kind that comes only after storms survived and nights well-worn.

Trouble lingered like a shadow ever near — but for this morning, the world sat steady beneath them, the sea lay calm, their course sure. All was well.

Morning settled around them, the sea calm and their course sure — a brief, bright peace before the world shifted again.

The Singing Curse (Day 15)

The Jolly Roger glided through a night so black it seemed the stars had drowned, the hull cutting through the inky sea with a whisper of menace. The air hung heavy, thick with the salt tang of the ocean and the faint metallic bite of an approaching storm.

Main Deck

The crew worked in a restless rhythm. Smee polishing the helm's brass with a rag, One-Eyed Jack coiling rope near the bow, Billy humming a half-forgotten shanty under his breath.

Suddenly, a shimmering mist crept over the deck. It rose from the water like a living thing, tendrils of silver curling around the rigging, glinting in the faint lantern light. A ghostly tune buzzed within it, a discordant hum that set the crew's teeth on edge and sent a shiver racing down their spines, as if the ship trembled under an unseen hand.

From the heart of the mist, a voice erupted. A cackling, gleeful sound that pierced the night like a dagger through silk. It echoed off the masts, bouncing between the sails, before it twisted into a taunting song.

Voice
A curse I weave, your words shall ring,
in song you're bound 'til freedom springs!

The mist pulsed with a sickly glow, its edges sharpening as if laced with malice, and the curse sank in with a visceral snap.

Quarterdeck

Killian, standing at the helm, felt it first. His throat tightened, his growl of irritation warping into a deep, resonant baritone that rolled out unbidden.

Killian
What foul hex is this, my growl's turned to chime?
A captain's wrath, trapped in tuneful rhyme!

He gripped the wheel harder, the wood groaning under his strength, his hook glinting as it caught the mist's eerie sheen. Desylva, poised near the rail, spun toward him, her storm magic flaring in protest, sparks crackled around her fingertips, snapping like tiny bolts of lightning as she sang back in a rich, defiant alto.

Desylva
A spell's been cast, our tongues now sway,
chained to notes, someone will pay!

Main Deck

The sea responded to her agitation, its surface rippling then surging, waves slamming against the hull with a hollow boom that rocked the ship. The deck tilted, lanterns swaying wildly, casting jagged shadows as the crew stumbled, their voices twisting into song against their will.

Smee dropped his rag, clutching his hat as his shrill tenor rose in a pitiful wail. His face flushed red, eyes darting as if seeking escape, his hands flapping uselessly at the mist.

Smee
Oh, woe's me, I sing, I weep,
my fate in tuneful keep!

One-Eyed Jack growled, his voice rumbling like distant thunder, his eye narrowing.

One-Eyed Jack
One eye I've got, now two tones I bear,
a cursed duet, I'll curse this air!

One-Eyed Jack yanked a rope taut, the fibers creaking under his grip, his hands trembling with barely contained rage.

Billy, leaning against a barrel, threw his head back and crooned with a reluctant flair.

Billy
Me throat's a bell, me shanty's forced,
I'll sing me rage, through this damned course!

His voice, usually rough with salt and grog, rang clear and melodic, a bitter irony that twisted his scarred lips into a scowl.

Black Tom stood apart, his broad frame silhouetted against the mist. The curse spared his silent tongue, but it found another way to torment him. His legs jerked to life, boots hammering the deck in a wild, uncontrollable jig. The rhythm matched the ghostly tune perfectly, a frantic staccato that sent splinters flying from the planks. His harpoon clattered to the deck, and his dark eyes widened in mute horror as he spun, arms flailing for balance.

The crew, still singing, turned to watch, their voices blending into a ragged, involuntary chorus.

One-Eyed Jack
Tom's tongue holds fast, but his feet take flight,

Billy
a silent storm in this cursed night!

Smee pointed, his wail breaking into a hiccup.

Smee
Look at 'im go, like a puppet on a string!
Dancin' fast to the shanty ring

One-Eyed Jack snarled a laugh. Black Tom's gaze darted between them, a desperate plea for reprieve as he twirled like a dervish caught in a gale, his boots leaving scuff marks in a chaotic spiral.

Quarterdeck

Killian and Desylva locked eyes across the swaying deck, the mist swirling thicker between them, its silvery threads weaving a cage of sound. His baritone dropped low, steady despite the chaos.

Killian
True love's kiss, the old tales swear,
might break this curse, and free us there!

He stepped away from the helm, his coat billowing as he crossed the tilting planks, the ship lurching under a fresh wave. Desylva met him halfway, her alto dipping into a sultry promise that cut through the din.

Desylva
A kiss we'll dare, my pirate strong,
to loose our tongues from song's cruel thong!

Her hair whipped around her face, caught in a wind of her own making, her cursed mark flickering faintly beneath her sleeve.

Main Deck

The crew's voices rose behind them, a swelling harmony that carried a thread of hope. Billy's croon led the strain, One-Eyed Jack's growl anchoring it, while Smee's wail danced atop like a frantic bird.

A deep groan rolled through the Jolly Roger's enchanted timbers. Then another. The sound rose and fell in eerie harmony with the cursed melody swirling across the deck, as though the ship herself had unwillingly joined the choir.

Killian and Desylva exchanged a look. Her brow lifted. His expression darkened. The realization landed between them without needing words. Even the Roger was feeling it.

Billy
A kiss, a kiss, to break the chain,

One-Eyed Jack
free our souls from this tuneful bane!

Quarterdeck

The Jolly Roger rocked harder, timbers groaning as Desylva's magic surged unchecked, the wind howling into a roaring gust that blew through the sails. Killian pulled her close, his hand cupping her jaw, his hook resting cold and firm against her waist and sang, his voice a low rumble.

Killian
Let's test the tale, love, silence this blasted choir!

Desylva (nod, alto fierce)
Make it a good one, my love, we'll defy this fire!

Their lips met in a fierce, desperate kiss, hard and unyielding, a clash of wills as much as a plea for freedom. Lightning split the sky, a jagged arc that bathed the deck in blinding white, and the sea surged beneath them, a wave crashing over the bow in a spray of foam that soaked their boots.

The crew held their breath, their song faltering into a single, held note. Smee clutching One-Eyed Jack's arm, Billy's hands frozen mid-gesture, Black Tom spinning slower as if the curse might relent. But as Killian and Desylva parted, breathless and wild-eyed, the mist pulsed brighter, mocking their effort.

Their voices rang out anew, unbroken by the kiss, the curse's grip tighter than ever. Killian pulled back, his snarl warping into a furious tune that echoed off the masts.

Killian
The kiss has failed, this curse holds tight,
we're trapped in song, we'll have to fight!

His hook slashed the air, a futile arc that scattered the mist only to see it reform, thicker and more defiant. Desylva's eyes flashed with frustration, her alto sharp as a blade.

Desylva
No freedom yet, the spell's too deep,
our voices bound, our silence weeps!

She clenched her fists, sparks snapping around her knuckles, and the sea churned higher, waves slapping the hull with a rhythm that matched the ghostly tune.

The crew groaned in melodic despair, their harmony fracturing. Smee's wail rising to a shriek, One-Eyed Jack's growl deepening to a roar, Billy's croon turning bitter and sharp. Black Tom's boots pounded louder, a frantic counterpoint to their voices, his dance growing wilder as the mist closed in.

The Jolly Roger swayed, lanterns flickering as if struggling to hold back the dark. Killian gripped Desylva's arm, his baritone a fierce anchor amid the chaos.

Killian
We'll find the source, this spell we'll break,
no cursed song our will can take!

Desylva (nod, alto resolute)
Aye, my Cap'n, we'll fight this blight,
sing we may, but we'll beat this smite!

Main Deck

The crew rallied behind them, their voices melding into a defiant chorus.

One-Eyed Jack
Sing we must, but fight we will,

Billy
break this curse, our strength instill!

The mist pulsed, a mocking laugh rippling through it. The ship sailed on, her cursed choir bound to melody under a starless sky.

A short while later

The Roger rocked uneasily beneath a sky still cloaked in darkness, the cursed mist clinging to her deck like a shroud, its silvery threads glinting faintly in the lantern glow. The sea had settled into an uneasy calm, its surface rippling with the aftershocks of Desylva's earlier outburst, though the air buzzed with the ghostly tune that held the crew in its grip.

Quarterdeck/Main Deck

Killian stood by the helm, his hand braced against the wheel, his hook tapping a restless rhythm on the wood as he stared into the mist. Desylva paced beside him, her boots thudding softly on the salt-crusted planks, her storm-gray eyes narrowed in thought.

The crew lingered nearby, their voices weaving a low, involuntary hum. Smee perched on a barrel, wringing his cap, One-Eyed Jack leaning against the rail with a scowl, Billy rubbing his throat as if to choke the melody back. Black Tom spun past in his relentless jig, boots kicking up splinters, a silent storm amid the singing chaos.

Killian's baritone broke the hum, low and edged with frustration. His voice rang out, a captain's command warped into song, his dark hair tousled by a faint breeze that carried the mist's chill.

Killian
Who'd dare weave this curse, this tuneful snare?
Some fiend with power to spare!

Desylva paused mid-step, her alto rising in response, sharp and contemplative.

Desylva
Could it be Rumpelstiltskin, that imp of guile?
He'd twist our fates with a crocodile's smile!

She gestured with a spark-flecked hand, her magic flickering as if testing the air for his presence.

Killian (Shake head; voice gruff and dismissive)
Nay, lass, his mischief's spun in gold and thread,
this song's too wild, too loose for his scheming head!

He mimicked a spinning motion with his hook, recalling the imp's penchant for deals, his lips curling in a sneer.

Killian
He'd bind us in contracts, not notes so free,
Rumple's no bard to hex with glee!

Desylva tilted her head, her voice dipping into a thoughtful cadence.

Desylva
What of Regina, then, that queen of spite?
Her magic's a shadow that swallows light!

She swept her arm toward the horizon, as if conjuring the Evil Queen's silhouette, her alto carrying a hint of grudging respect. Killian's lips quirked, his melody sharp with certainty.

Killian
Her curses blaze with mirrors and scorn,
this tune's too playful, too lightly worn!

He leaned closer, his breath visible in the cool air, singing low.

Killian
She'd trap us in grief, not a minstrel's jest,
Regina's wrath don't dance like this pest!

Smee piped up from his barrel, his shrill tenor trembling.

Smee
Aye, Cap'n, she'd curse me tears,
or me fears, or ears!

One-Eyed Jack (growl in agreement)
That witch, she'd hex me eye, not me throat,
blind me good, without a vote!

The discussion a chorus of dissent that made Desylva smirk despite the strain, probing another possibility.

Desylva (soft)
Pan, perhaps, that eternal brat?
He'd cage us in games where sanity's flat!

She spun on her heel, her coat flaring, imagining the boy's impish grin amid Neverland's wilds.

Killian (snort; voice sardonic edge)
Pan's a shadow, a flute's his call,
this song's too grand for his childish thrall!

He tapped his hook against the helm, mimicking a piper's tune.

Killian
He'd taunt us with riddles, not melody's reign,
no lost one's trick holds this much gain!

Billy (join in, croon wry)
Aye, Pan'd have us lost, not singin' in line,
his pranks don't rhyme so cursed divine!

The crew nodded, their hum shifting to a grumble, Black Tom's boots pounding a staccato beat as if to stomp the idea flat. Desylva's voice turned deeper, testing the waters.

Desylva
Poseidon, then, lord of the brine?
His trident could bind us where oceans align!

She gestured toward the sea, her magic stirring a faint ripple across its surface, her alto resonant with the weight of his name. Killian's tune softened, his eyes narrowing.

Killian
He'd drown us first, not make us sing,
his rage is tides, not this cursed ring!

He swept his hook toward the waves, his voice rising.

Killian
The sea god's wrath's a watery grave,
no song's his style, no tune he'd crave!

Smee (whimpered)
I'd rather sink than warble like this,
I wish it'd ended with the kiss!

The crew's chorus grew louder, a mix of relief and dread, their faith in Killian's logic a lifeline amid the curse's grip. Desylva ventured next, her alto a challenge. She crossed her arms, her storm magic sparking faintly at her fingertips.

Desylva
Ares, god of war?
He was impressed afore.
He'd relish our fight in this tuneful chain,
turn swords to songs for his bloody gain!

Killian (firm and resolute; eyes darkening)
War's his game, not jests so light,
no god of battle spins such delight!

He stepped closer, his voice dropping.

Killian (growl-like)
Ares'd clash steel, not twist our breath,
his chaos is death, not this musical wreath!

Billy (croon in support)
He'd have me blade, not me voice, in play!

One-Eyed Jack (growl rumbled)
War's no singsong, it's blood and fray!

The crew's hum steadied, their trust in their leaders' reasoning holding firm, though Black Tom's dance quickened, a silent plea for answers. They sighed in unison, their voices blending briefly in a frustrated duet. Killian's baritone heavy, Desylva's alto strained. Her tone brightened with a sudden spark, an idea of where to go for help.

Desylva
A fairy blue, with magic bright,
could she unweave this cursed flight?

She turned to face Killian fully, her eyes alight with memory.

Desylva
She came to us once, warned us clear,
her wings a blur, her voice severe!

Killian, misunderstanding her intent, shot her a sidelong glare, his distaste for fairies bubbling up even in song.

Killian
That winged wench, all prim and shrill,
'Stand down,' she trilled, 'don't breach that will!'

He mimicked her flutter with a mocking wave of his hook, his baritone dripping with scorn.

Killian
If she's behind this, we're in deep strife,
her power's a maze, could cost us life!

Desylva (press on, alto coaxing yet firm)
Could it be her, this spell's design?
A lesson carved in melody's line?
She's meddled afore, with warnings dire,
perhaps this tune's her vengeful choir!

Killian (tune grows grim, shoulders squaring)
If it's Blue, we're caught in her game,
a fairy's whim could douse our flame!

He glanced at the crew, their faces a mix of hope and dread, then back to Desylva, his voice resolute.

Killian
We've no choice left, to her we'll steer,
her aid's our shot, though I loathe her near!

Desylva (alto softens, a plea beneath strength)
She might unravel this tuneful trap,
set our voices free from this wretched clap!
To her glade we'll sail, her dust we'll seek,
only she might end this curse so bleak!

Killian (nodded, baritone a reluctant vow)
No choice we've got, to her we'll plea,
her power might just set us free!

Black Tom twirled past, a spinning blur of mute accord, his boots gouging the deck as the Jolly Roger shifted course, her bow cutting toward the rumored shores of the Blue Fairy's domain. The crew's hum rose behind them, a wary anthem. Smee's trill, One-Eyed Jack's growl, Billy's croon. Trailing into the night like a mournful wind.

A few hours later - Cove

The Jolly Roger sliced through the predawn sea, sails catching the first faint glimmers of light as she approached a glowing cove nestled between jagged cliffs. The water shimmered with an unearthly luminescence, a soft teal glow that danced across the hull like liquid starlight, casting eerie reflections on the ship's timbers.

Quarterdeck/Main Deck

Killian stood at the helm, his jaw set as he guided the vessel to anchor, the chain rattling down with a hollow clank that echoed over the still waves. With a look from Killian, the crew lowered the gangplank.

The cursed mist lingered on deck, its silvery threads dimming but still buzzing with that ghostly tune, a relentless hum that grated on the crew's nerves. Desylva leaned against the rail, her storm-gray eyes fixed on the cove, her fingers twitching as if itching to summon a gale to sweep the curse away. The crew gathered, their voices weaving a low, involuntary song, while Black Tom's boots pounded a frantic rhythm, his silent dance a stark contrast to their melodic plight.

Killian stepped onto the main deck, his boots thudding with purpose, and raised his baritone in a steady command.

Killian
To Blue we've sailed, our fate to plead,
this singing curse might soon be freed!

Gangplank/Land

His coat flared as he descended the gangplank, his hook glinting in the cove's glow, a beacon of resolve amid the crew's unease. Desylva followed, her alto ringing out fierce and clear.

Desylva
Her magic's pure, her will is strong,
she'll break this spell where we've gone wrong!

Her hair whipped in a breeze of her own making, strands catching the light as she strode beside him, her cursed mark pulsing faintly beneath her sleeve. The crew trailed behind, their song a discordant march.

Smee (whimpering)
Oh, let her save me voice, I pray!

One-Eyed Jack (snarling)
I'll sing no more, come what may

Billy (crooning)
A fairy's aid, a shanty's end,
freedom's tune, our throats amend!

Black Tom spun ahead, his jig kicking up sand as they reached the shore, his dark eyes darting toward the glowing cliffs with desperate hope.

Path to Blue's place

The path to the Blue Fairy's domain wound through a grove of twisted trees, their branches draped with luminescent moss that cast a soft, golden-green haze over the ground. The air grew warm and sweet, thick with the scent of blooming night flowers and the faint hum of unseen wings, a stark contrast to the salty bite of the sea. The crew's

song reverberated off the cliffs, bouncing back in eerie echoes that twisted their notes into a haunting chorus. Killian led the way, his baritone steady despite the strain.

Killian
Through glade we tread, her light we seek,
this cursed night, her power'll peak!

Desylva matched his pace, her alto a fierce undertone.

Desylva
Her glow's our guide, her wand our key,
Blue's grace alone can set us free!

The crew stumbled along, their voices rising.

Smee (trill cracking with nerves)
Oh, fairies scare me, but I'll abide!

One-Eyed Jack (growl rumbling)
If she fails, I'll curse her hide!

Billy (croon lifting)
A shanty's fine, but not by force,
Blue please end this blasted course!

Black Tom's boots crunched leaves, his dance slowing as the glade's magic pressed against the curse.

Heart of Grove

At the heart of the grove, the Blue Fairy emerged from a swirl of light, her wings shimmering like stained glass in the dawn's first rays, casting prismatic flecks across the mossy ground. She hovered above a crystal pool, its surface rippling with her presence, her gown a cascade of silver-blue that seemed to flow like water. Her voice rang out, a crystalline melody that cut through the crew's song like a bell through fog.

Blue
You seek my aid, your fates askew,
pirates bold, my virtue's true!

Her eyes, sharp and ancient, swept over them, Killian's defiant glare, Desylva's sparking resolve, the crew's wary hope, before she sang again.

Blue
A foe's returned, his mischief spins,
this curse of song where silence begins!

Killian (sharp and impatient)
No riddles, fairy, we've had our fill,
free our tongues, your power spill!

Desylva placed a hand on Killian's arm, calming him, then her alto joined, urgent yet tempered.

Desylva
We trust your light, your magic's might,
end this tune, restore our right!

Billy Jack Smee (behind them; a plea in harmony)
Blue, oh Blue, our voices save,
lift this curse, our freedom crave.

Blue raised her wand, its tip glowing with a soft, pulsing light, and continued, her voice weaving a tapestry of hope.

Blue
Fret not, dear souls, a cure lies near,
in ancient lore, though yet unclear!

She tilted her head, her wings fluttering as she sang.

Blue
No book holds this, no page I've read,
but in my heart, the path is led!
Untested it be, untried 'til now,
hold fast, pirates, I'll change your vow!

Smee (whimpered)
Untested? Oh, we're doomed, I fear!

One-Eyed Jack (growled)
Get on with it, ye winged seer!

Billy (crooned)
A chance is all we need, aye,
Blue, set us free, don't let us fry!

Killian (voice hardened)
Enough of talk, fairy bright,
break this spell this cursed night!

Desylva (alto flared)
We've sung too long, our throats are raw,
Blue, wield your wand, enforce your law!

Blue's gaze drifted past them. For the first time she truly noticed Black Tom. The giant pirate was still dancing against his will, boots hammering the dirt in a relentless rhythm while his expression suggested he would rather face a sea serpent. One delicate brow lifted. "Oh dear." Sympathy flickered across her features. "You've suffered enough."

Black Tom spun closer, his boots kicking up dirt, his mute gaze locked on her wand with a flicker of faith.

With a graceful flick, the Blue Fairy sang a counter-curse, her notes rising like a tide, pure and piercing, threading through the air like silver filaments.

The mist trembled, its edges fraying as her melody clashed with the ghostly tune, a battle of sound that sent ripples across the pool. The crew's voices faltered. Smee's trill choking off mid-wail, One-Eyed Jack's growl fading to a rasp, and Billy's croon dissolving into a sigh, as the curse began to unravel.

The mist thinned, its silvery glow dimming, then shattered into wisps that drifted upward, vanishing into the dawn. Silence descended, heavy and blessed, the grove's hum fading to a whisper of leaves. Killian tested his voice, speaking rough and free, "Bloody hell, it's done, no more blasted song to weigh my tongue!" He rubbed his throat, his hook glinting as he shot Blue a grudging nod. Desylva grinned, her words crisp and unshackled, "Thanks, Blue, you've righted our tuneful wrong!" Her storm magic settled, the air stilling around her, her cursed mark dimming to a faint scar.

Black Tom's feet stilled at last, his boots scuffing to a halt in the dirt, though he scowled as one leg gave a final, rebellious twitch, a lingering echo of the curse's spite. He sank to his knees, panting silently, his broad hands gripping the ground as if to anchor himself. The crew exhaled in unison, their shoulders slumping with relief. Smee wiping sweat from his brow, One-Eyed Jack cracking his knuckles, Billy running a hand through his tangled hair.

The Blue Fairy lowered her wand, her wings folding slightly as she sang one final note, soft and triumphant.

Blue
The curse is broken, your voices restored,
go forth, pirates, your will's your sword!

Killian's lips twitched, not quite a smile, as he muttered, "Aye, fairy, we'll take it from here." Desylva stepped closer to him, her grin widening, "A debt we owe, but freedom's sweet, Blue's light's a match for this cursed feat!"

The grove glowed brighter, the dawn spilling over the cliffs, bathing the crew in golden light as they turned back toward the Jolly Roger. The ship waited at the cove's edge, her silhouette stark against the shimmering water, a silent promise of the open sea ahead. Smee hummed nervously, then stopped himself with a sheepish glance at One-Eyed Jack. Billy kicked a stone, muttering, "Never thought silence'd sound so grand!" Black Tom tested his legs with cautious steps, his scowl softening into a rare, faint smirk. Killian and Desylva lingered a moment longer, facing Blue across the pool, their silhouettes framed by the rising sun.

The silence that settled over the glowing cove was as sweet as the first breath after a storm, the ghostly tune's absence leaving the air crisp and light, tinged with the faint scent of sea salt and blooming night flowers from the glade. The Jolly Roger rocked gently at anchor, her hull gleaming in the dawn's golden spill, a steadfast sentinel against the shimmering water.

The crew erupted into a cacophony of raw, unshackled shouts, their voices no longer bound by melody, each cry a ragged hymn of freedom. One-Eyed Jack threw his head back, letting out a guttural whoop that echoed off the cliffs, his eye glinting with a fierce joy as he clapped Billy on the shoulder with enough force to stagger the shantyman. Billy grinned, his scarred hands rubbing his throat as if coaxing out the last echoes of the curse, his laugh rough and free, "Blessed silence, lads. I'll never take a quiet grog for granted again!"

Smee danced a clumsy jig of his own, his high-pitched giggle cutting through the din, "Oh, me voice is mine, no more warblin' woe!" Black Tom sank to the sand, his legs finally still, though he flexed his boots warily, half-expecting another twitch, his broad face creasing into a rare, relieved smirk as he pounded a fist into the ground.

Edge of Grove

The crew lingered at the edge of the grove near the path back to the ship, giving their captain and storm-witch a measure of privacy without straying far. Their relief spilling into rowdy celebration. Some stomped the earth in mock jigs to taunt Black Tom, others clinked imaginary tankards, their hands itching for the rum stowed aboard. One-Eyed Jack leaned against a barrel, his gravelly voice thick with suspicion as he eyed Killian and Desylva, who lingered by the crystal pool with the Blue Fairy, their heads bent in quiet conversation.

"That curse hit us square, mates, feels personal, don't it? Like someone's got a bone to pick with the Roger's lot!" Billy nodded, brushing sand from his coat, his tone curious and bright, "Aye, and never thought I'd clap eyes on the Blue Fairy herself, thought she was a tale for wee babes and soft-hearted fools! How's she real, and why's she mixin' with us roughnecks?" His eyes sparkled with a shantyman's hunger for a story, his fingers tapping a rhythm on his thigh as if itching to weave this into verse. Smee sidled up, his hat clutched to his chest, his voice a conspiratorial squeak, "Ya think the Cap'n knows her proper-like? He's got that look, grumpy as a shark with a hook in its gill!"

One-Eyed Jack smirked, folding his arms across his broad chest, his patch shifting as he squinted toward the trio. "Aye, look at 'im, glarin' at her like she's spoiled his rum. Old history, I'd wager." He jerked his chin toward Desylva, her stance relaxed yet commanding beside Killian, her storm-gray eyes glinting in the dawn light. Smee's brows shot up, his whisper growing urgent, "Or maybe it's Desylva what's got the tie, storm lass like her, fairies might take a shine! She's got that air, don't she? Like she's faced more'n just gales!"

Billy chuckled, his voice low and sly, "Could be both, Cap'n and storm girl may have tangled with Blue afore. Wonder what they're jabberin' about over there? Ain't every day ya see a fairy chattin' up pirates like they're old mates at a tavern!" The crew's heads turned as one, their curiosity sharpening, their chatter a buzz of speculation as they watched the distant figures by the pool.

Killian and Desylva with Blue

Killian and Desylva stood before the Blue Fairy, her wings casting prismatic flecks across the sand, her serene smile a contrast to the captain's taut jaw. His voice was gruff, free of song but laced with wary gratitude, "Your aid's appreciated, fairy, saved our voices, I'll grant ya that, though I'd rather not owe you more'n this day's work." Blue's wings fluttered, her tone soft yet firm, "No debt's claimed, Captain, only balance restored. The scales tip even now."

Killian shifted his weight, his hook glinting as he hooked it through his belt, his dark eyes flicking to Desylva as if gauging her reaction, then back to Blue with a frown. "And why didn't it work, true love's kiss? We tried it, me and her, when the blasted tune wouldn't quit. Should've broken it, aye?" His tone sharpened, a mix of frustration and lingering hope.

Blue's wings fluttered again, "It was no curse you bore, but a spell. Subtle, woven mischief, not a binding doom. True love's kiss can shatter any curse, tis true, yet spells are trickier things, not always swayed by heart alone." Her gaze held a flicker of sympathy, ancient wisdom shimmering in her eyes as she met his scowl with calm certainty. Desylva nodded, her voice warm and steady, "You've our thanks, Blue, didn't fancy singin' me way through every storm. Let's hope this foe stays buried, eh?" Her hand brushed Killian's arm, a subtle anchor. Blue tilted her head, her gaze ancient and knowing, "He is still there. Still watching. Quiet for now, but his mischief stirs still." Her voice rose, a little louder than intended, carrying across the clearing. "Beware the shadows yet to sing." Her words hung cryptic in the air as she began to fade, her form dissolving into a shimmer of light that merged with the dawn.

Killian's jaw tightened, his hook flexing briefly as he muttered under his breath, though Desylva's touch steadied him, her eyes narrowing thoughtfully at the fading glow. The sand glittered with the last of Blue's light, leaving them with a warning, and a mystery, yet unresolved.

Edge of the Grove

The crew's chatter spiked as Killian and Desylva turned back toward them, their silhouettes stark against the glowing pool. Smee nudged One-Eyed Jack, his voice a frantic whisper, "Did ya hear that? '*Shadows yet to sing'*. What's she mean by that? Is the Cap'n hidin' somethin' big?" One-Eyed Jack's growl was thoughtful, his eye narrowing, "Sounds like trouble ain't done with us. Bet they wer talkin' 'bout who done this. Some old enemy, maybe? Desylva's got that look, like she's piecin' it together!"

Billy leaned in, his grin widening, "I'd kill for a peek at their yarn, did they cross Blue afore? Fight her? Owe her? Or is it this foe she's hintin' at? Gimme a quill, lads, this is shanty gold!" His fingers danced in the air, tracing invisible notes, his curiosity a spark that lit his face. Black Tom rose from the sand and shot a glance at the trio. His mute stare heavy with questions he couldn't voice, his hands clenching as if itching to demand answers.

Smee's eyes darted between Killian and Desylva as they approached, their steps synced, their expressions a mix of relief and guarded tension. "Maybe they're plannin' somethin', a hunt for whoever cursed us! Ya think they'd tell us if it's bad?" he squeaked, his hat twisting in his grip. One-Eyed Jack snorted, his voice a low rumble, "Not likely. Cap'n keeps his cards close, and Desylva's no blabbermouth. Whatever they're discussin', it's deep waters, mark me words!"

Billy laughed, slapping Smee's back, "Aye, but I'll wager it's a tale worth hearin'. Did Blue curse 'em once? Save 'em? Or is this foe some ghost from one of their pasts? I'll sing it outta 'em yet, lads!" The crew's speculation swirled, their voices overlapping. Smee's nervous prattle, One-Eyed Jack's gruff musings, Billy's eager plotting. Black Tom stomped a step closer, his silent presence a demand for inclusion, his smirk gone stern with unspoken curiosity.

As Killian and Desylva reached them, the crew quieted, their eyes sharp with unasked questions. Killian's gaze swept over the lot of them. "Quit your gawkin', ye lot." He strode past without breaking step. "Curse's gone. Ship's waitin'." Desylva smirked as she followed at his side. "Aye, and no more dancin' unless it's for rum, eh, Tom?"

Black Tom grunted, a rare sound, and fell in behind them, though he cast one final glance toward Blue's pool. The rest of the crew followed, their chatter simmering down but not extinguished. Smee whispered, "They ain't tellin' us all, I'd bet me hat." One-Eyed Jack muttered, "Somethin's brewin', and it ain't just grog." Billy hummed thoughtfully. "A shanty's brewin' too. The Fairy's Curse. I'll call it."

Their footsteps crunched along the winding path toward the shore, a lively rhythm of freedom reclaimed. But their curiosity lingered, a thread of mystery tying them to their captain and storm-witch's hushed conversation.

Jolly Roger

The Jolly Roger loomed at the cove's edge, her sails billowing faintly in the salty breeze as the crew scrambled aboard. Their hands eager for familiar tasks, hauling ropes with grunts of effort, checking cannons with clinks of steel, anything to ground them after the spell's lingering chaos.

Quarterdeck

The sun climbed higher, painting the sea in shimmering hues of gold and blue, a promise of open waters stretching ahead like a siren's call. Killian took the helm, his hand gripping the wheel while his hook rested lightly against the worn wood, its gleam catching the light as his gaze turned distant, sifting through the Blue Fairy's cryptic warning for some shard of truth. Desylva stood beside him, her hand braced on the rail. Her gray eyes scanning the horizon with a storm mage's instinct. Her silence as telling as the faint, wry grin tugging at her lips, half amusement, half unease.

"Still gnawin' at ya, ain't it?" she said at last, her voice low, cutting through the creak of the ship and the crew's distant shouts. She tilted her head toward him, her braid swaying as the wind tugged at it. "Blue's words, '*shadows yet to sing*.' Sounds like our old friend might be stirrin' again, don't it? Been over a year since he nicked our hoard. Every last trinket, relic, gone in a flash. The entire room, emptied."

Killian's jaw tightened, his dark eyes narrowing as he stared out at the waves. "If it's him, and that's a bloody big 'if,' lass, I'd wager he's got stones comin' back now. Blue showed up then, all glowin' and grim, tellin' us to let it lie, not to chase what was stole." He snorted, a rough edge to his tone. "We heeded her, didn't we? I mean if a fairy gives ya a warnin' ya better heed it. Was it the right thing to do, ya reckon, or did we just let the bastard slip through our fingers then?"

Desylva shrugged, her fingers tapping the rail as a faint rumble of thunder rolled far off, her magic stirring the air unconsciously. "Hard to say. She was spooked, Killian, too scared to even whisper his name. 'He,' 'it,' 'they' … whoever this shadow is, Blue knew more'n she let on, and that's what's eatin' me. If he's back, why now? A year's a long stretch to sit quiet, then pop up like a squall outta nowhere. What's he after this time? Us, or somethin' bigger?" Her grin faded, her gaze sharpening as she weighed the mystery.

"Aye, and that's the rub," Killian muttered, his hook tapping the wheel with a faint clink. "Never pegged who he was … man, beast, or somethin' worse. Blue's fear kept us blind, and I don't fancy fightin' a ghost I can't see. Did we dodge a bullet listenin' to her, or just delay the inevitable? If he's watchin', like she said, he's got a game afoot, and I don't like bein' the bait." He glanced at her, his voice dropping. "What's your gut say, love? Chase the shadow, or let it be?"

Desylva exhaled, a sharp breath that carried a flicker of storm in its wake, then shook her head. "Leave it, for now. Ain't worth it, not yet. Can't fight what ya don't know, and I'd rather not bleed for a phantom 'til he shows his face. If this sod reveals himself, we'll face him then, hook and storm together, like always." She met his eyes, her grin returning, fierce and steady. "Agreed?" Killian nodded, a grim smirk tugging at his lips. "Aye, agreed. Let the bastard come to us."

He turned the wheel, setting their course, as the Jolly Roger cut through the waves, the horizon swallowing their doubts, for now.

Main Deck

The crew bustled near the main mast, their voices a low buzz. Smee's "What's next, eh?" One-Eyed Jack's "Who's this foe, then?" Billy's "Gimme a chorus, lads, I'll sort the rest!" Their rejoicing tempered by a restless hunger to know more.

The ship pulled away from the cove, her bow cutting through the shimmering waves, leaving the glade's glow behind but carrying a new riddle in her timbers, one the crew would ponder through every watch under the endless sky.

Killian & Desylva's Cabin

The cabin door slammed shut with a thunderous crash that echoed through the timbers, the ship lurching beneath their feet as Killian pinned Desylva against the wall with a primal force that radiated raw desire. The air was heavy with the musk of polished wood and sea salt, laced with the sharp tang of an approaching storm stirred by her magic. The sea churned into a frenzy, waves hammering the hull with hollow booms, her storm magic crackling like a live wire, an untamed echo of the broken curse, unbound yet restless, pulsing through the night. His hand seized her waist with a possessive grip, fingers sinking into the supple leather of her cloak, his hook glinting in the flickering lantern light as it pressed cold and unyielding against her lower back, anchoring her to the wall. Her lips crashed into his, a fierce collision of heat and hunger, her tongue delving into his mouth with a boldness that drew a deep, rumbling growl from his chest, her breath scorching his skin.

Desylva
The curse is gone, but heat runs high,
take me now, let passion fly!

The ship rocked as her magic summoned a howling wind, rain slashing the deck in torrents, a tempest mirroring her rising need. He pressed his body harder against hers, the heat of him searing through her clothes, his baritone rumbling back in a fleeting song.

Killian
Your storm's my call, I'll claim you swift,
no spell can halt this fiery rift!

With a swift, impatient tug, he ripped her cloak free, the leather falling to the floor in a crumpled heap that kicked up dust motes in the lantern's glow. He shrugged off his coat, the heavy fabric thudding against the planks, revealing the taut lines of his shoulders beneath a linen shirt stretched tight across his chest. Her fingers clawed at his shirt, nails scraping his skin as she tore it open.

Their boots hit the floor in a chaotic clatter, kicked aside as she yanked at his belt, the leather snapping free with a whip-like crack, his trousers sliding down to pool at his ankles. Her voice broke into a wild melody, sharp and untamed.

Desylva
Rip me bare, let fire blaze,
I need you fierce in lustful haze!

He tore her shirt open, exposing the smooth curve of her breasts and the taut plane of her stomach to the cool cabin air, her cursed mark glowing faintly beneath her sleeve. He tugged her pants down in a tangled frenzy. They now stood bare and trembling with need. The sea roared outside, waves crashing with bone-rattling force, the Jolly Roger bucking as her magic whipped the air into chaos; Lanterns swung wildly, casting jagged shadows across the walls, where runes began to shimmer, their silvery veins pulsing as they mended splintered gouges from Killian's hook.

He lifted her against the wall with a rough grunt. Her legs wrapped around his hips in a vice-like grip, thighs clamping tight as she lifted herself, guiding him to her core with a deft, desperate motion. He entered her with a slow, deliberate thrust, her slick heat enveloping him inch by searing inch, her gasp a raw, piercing note that echoed in the cabin, her walls clenching around him as lightning cracked outside, bathing them in stark white. Her nails dug into his shoulders as she arched into him, her storm magic surging, waves slamming the hull in rhythm with her shuddering breath. Her cursed mark glowing a vivid blue beneath her sleeve, illuminating the space between them like a captured storm. Thunder growled low and menacing beyond the ship, rain pounding the deck like a war drum in time with her hips rocking against him with reckless abandon.

He braced his hook against the wall, the metal gouging the oak with a splintering crunch, but the runes flared brighter, their glow weaving tendrils of light that sealed the damage, restoring the wood's polished sheen. His hand gripped her hip with bruising force, fingers leaving red imprints as he thrust deeper, matching her frenzied rhythm, his baritone a primal song.

Killian
Your heat's my claim, I'll take you deep,
this hunger's ours, no curse to reap!

The wall creaked under their weight, runes humming as they repaired microfractures. The ship tilted as Desylva's magic fueled a tempest. Rain flooded the deck above, the wind screaming through the rigging like a banshee. The air grew thick with the mingled scents of sweat and salt, the heat of their bodies charging the cramped space. Her body pressed harder against him, breasts flattening against his chest, her cursed mark blazing vivid blue, illuminating their sweat-slicked skin. His lips ravaged her throat, sucking fiercely to brand her pulse with a dark, possessive mark, his growl twisting into a tuneful snarl.

Killian
You're mine, my lass, no song can bind,
I'll have you wild, our souls entwined!

The ship bucked beneath them, waves slamming the hull with unrelenting ferocity, her magic fueling the tempest's rage, wind screaming as lightning cracked the sky, its blinding flash seeping through the window to bathe them in stark relief. Her cries sharpened, a soaring refrain, raw and unrelenting.

Desylva
Oh, Killian, yes, don't let me fall,
I burn for you, I give it all!

Her hair, damp with sweat and rain, tangled wild around her face, her gray eyes blazing with feral need, her cursed mark pulsing brighter, the storm outside hitting a fever pitch as lightning flashed in relentless bursts. He thrust deeper, pinning her tighter against the wall, his hand gripping her hip with bruising intensity, her legs tightened around him, pulling him impossibly closer as a scream tore from her throat in a wild crescendo.

Desylva
I'm breaking free, your touch ignites,
this love's a storm that fills the nights!

Thunder boomed overhead, shaking the timbers with bone-rattling force, her magic lashing the weather into a frenzied chaos, wind howling like a beast unchained. His fingers dug into her flesh, leaving marks of possession as her nails drew blood from his shoulders, the sharp sting fueling his need. He snarled.

Killian
Your fire's mine, I'll claim it raw,
no fairy's grace can match this law!

The window rattled in its frame, runes glowing to ensure the window's stability. The tempest outside roaring a mirror to their desperate, consuming rhythm as the ship swayed in the grip of her unleashed power. Their pace grew relentless, a clash of flesh and fury that drowned out the world. His lips bruised hers in a devouring kiss, swallowing her cries as her body trembled against him, her voice breaking into sharp gasps.

Desylva
I'm yours, my love, the edge is near,
take my hard, sink your spear!

The sea swelled higher, waves crashing against the Jolly Roger with punishing force, her magic surging unchecked. Lightning flashed in rapid bursts, illuminating the cabin in jagged arcs, casting their shadows long and wild across the walls. His hook scraped the wood beside her, leaving gashes that the runes swiftly healed in pulses of silver light. as he lifted her slightly, deepening each thrust. Her head tipped back against the timbers, a raw cry echoing through the space.

Desylva
Oh, gods, it's now, I'm torn apart,
with you I blaze, my pirate's heart!

The ship rocked wildly, timbers groaning as her magic unleashed a monstrous wave rain pounding like a frenzied heartbeat, the wind a howling chorus to their crescendo. Their release crashed over them like a tidal wave, shattering their restraint. Her body convulsed against the wall, her scream a piercing crescendo that rivaled the thunder.

Desylva
Killian, yes, I'm yours to keep,
Our love runs wild, our love runs deep!

Her muscles clenched around him, a pulsing grip that sent tremors through her frame, her nails raking his back, leaving bloody trails as her cursed mark flared blindingly, then dimmed to a scar. He thrust hard one final time, a guttural roar erupting from his chest as he pressed himself deep and spilled into her, his body shuddering with the force of his climax, his voice a ragged song.

Killian
My storm, my love, I'm lost in you,
our fire burns, our bond holds true!

Lightning split the sky, its blinding arc seeping through the enchanted glass window, which rattled but held, its runes faintly glowing to mend a hairline crack. Her magic unleashed a ferocious gust, the sea roared it's approval, waves slamming the hull, then subsided into a restless calm. The storm broke apart, rain tapering to a soft patter against the deck, the wind fading to a whisper as her mark's glow extinguished. Their song dissolved into breathy silence, his lips softening against hers in a tender, lingering kiss.

The ship steadied, the weather calming with her sated breath, the cabin settling into a hush. His chest heaved, his strength sapped as he held her against the wall, her legs loosening around his hips, her body slumping against him, spent and trembling. Her fingers traced lazy circles on his chest, her breath hot against his shoulder. He murmured, "No curse could rival this, love," his voice rough, free of melody. She smirked, her tone husky, "Aye, our storm's our own, no tune to claim it."

As his strength returned, he scooped her into his arms with a gentle grunt, her body pliant against his, and carried her to the bed. They sank into the mattress, pulling the linens over their sweat-damp skin, her head nestling into the crook of his neck, his arm curling around her waist, his hook resting lightly on her hip. Her storm-gray eyes softened, meeting his, their breaths syncing in the quiet, the bed's runes faintly glowing as they mended a final nick from their earlier frenzy.

The sea lapped gently against the hull, the night beyond the window a serene hush, the ship a sanctuary for their wild, unbroken bond, the air cooling as they lay entwined beneath the linens, their fire banked but ever-burning beneath the surface. The Jolly Roger swayed gently under a twilight sky, her timbers creaking softly as the last echoes of Desylva's tempest faded into a calm sea, the air thick with the damp scent of rain-soaked wood and the faint tang of salt.

Crew Quarters

The quarters buzzed with a restless energy, lit by flickering lanterns that cast long shadows across the hammocks and wooden walls. The day's ordeal—the curse, the Blue Fairy, the storm—had left the crew weary yet wired, their voices a low hum of chatter as they settled in after hauling the ship back to order. Billy perched on an upturned crate, his hands drumming a rhythm on his knee, his tangled hair still damp from the rain. Smee sprawled in a hammock, swinging lazily as he gnawed on a crust of bread. One-Eyed Jack leaned against a beam, his arms crossed, his patch glinting in the lantern light, while Black Tom sat on a barrel, sharpening a knife with slow, deliberate strokes, his boots finally still but his dark eyes sharp with lingering tension.

Billy clapped, the sound sharp in the cramped quarters, his voice cutting through the murmur with a spark of excitement, "Oi, mates, gather 'round, I've got a shanty brewin' from today's mess! 'The Fairy's Curse,' I'm callin' it, give it a listen, tell me what ya think!"

Smee sat up, nearly tipping his hammock, his squeaky tone eager, “A shanty, eh? Long as it ain’t cursed, I’m all ears, Billy!” One-Eyed Jack grunted, his eye narrowing, “Better be worth me time, me throat’s still raw from that blasted curse.” Black Tom paused his sharpening, his knife hovering mid-air, and tilted his head, a silent nod of approval, his mute curiosity piqued.

Billy grinned, his scarred lips stretching wide, “Aye, it’s a proper yarn, curse an’ all, with a beat to stomp yer boots to! Here’s the lot of it, lads, sing out if ya like!” He cleared his throat, took a swig from a dented flask, and launched into the shanty, his voice rough but rich, filling the quarters with a rollicking rhythm.

Billy
Through a night so black, no stars to guide,
A mist rolled in on a silver tide,
A voice did cackle, a tune doth rings,
‘in song you’re bound, til freedom springs.’

Our throats did bend, our words took flight,
A cursed song in the dead o’ night,
From Cap’n bold to Tom’s wild spree,
We sang our chains, no longer free!

Billy stomped his foot on “chains,” the crate thudding in time, his hands clapping a beat that echoed off the walls. Smee swayed in his hammock, tapping along, while One-Eyed Jack’s boot twitched despite his scowl. Black Tom’s knife resumed its slow scrape, matching the rhythm, his smirk faint but growing.

Billy
Yo ho, the fairy’s curse did strike us sore,
A tune to bind us, shore to shore!
With voices trapped and feet a-dance,
We sailed for Blue, our only chance!
Yo ho, the fairy’s curse, beware her gleam,
A shadow looms in a silent dream!

Billy’s voice lifted high, urging the crew to join. Smee piped in with a shaky “Yo ho!” One-Eyed Jack growled the “strike us sore,” and Black Tom thumped his barrel with a fist, his silent contribution a steady pulse. The quarters shook with their stomping, the lanterns swaying as the shanty took hold, a rough harmony born of shared memory.

Billy
Killian roared, his growl a chime,
‘A captain’s wrath trapped in tuneful rhyme!’
Desylva sparked, her storm did sway,
‘chained to notes someone will pay!’

Smee did wail, a shrill lament,
Jack growled low, his fury spent,
I crooned me rage, Tom kicked the deck,
A silent fool in a cursed wreck!

Billy pointed at each mate in turn. Smee flinched with a giggle, One-Eyed Jack’s scowl deepened into a grudging nod, Black Tom’s smirk widened as he tapped his boot, recalling his jig. The air grew warm with their laughter, the shanty weaving their ordeal into a tale they could claim, the crate creaking under Billy’s enthusiastic stomps.

Billy
Yo ho, the fairy’s curse did strike us sore,
A tune to bind us, shore to shore!
With voices trapped and feet a-dance,
We sailed for Blue, our only chance!
Yo ho, the fairy’s curse, beware her gleam,
A shadow looms in a silent dream!

Smee's trill cracked with glee, One-Eyed Jack's growl rumbling deep, Black Tom's thumps shaking the barrel. Billy grinned, sweat beading on his brow, his voice carrying the crew's spirit as they stomped and clapped, the quarters alive with the echo of their freedom.

Billy
'Who cast this spell?' we sang in dread,
Rumple's gold? Regina's thread?
Pan's wild jest or sea god's might,
Ares' clash in the dead o' night?

None fit the tune, too wild, too free,
'Til Blue's name rose, our key to be,
To her glade we turned our bow,
A fairy's wrath, we'd face her now!

In a cove of glow, her wings did shine,
Blue sang soft, 'Your fate's entwined!
A wand she waved, a counter-tune,
The mist did fade 'neath risin' moon

Our voices hushed, Tom's feet went still,
'Bloody hell,' growled Cap'n's will,
Desylva grinned, 'We're free, me dears,'
But Blue's last words stirred shadowed fears!

Billy's voice dipped low for Blue's part, then rose sharp for Killian's curse, his hands mimicking a wand's flick and a hook's slash. Smee shivered, "Ooh, them shadows!" One-Eyed Jack muttered, "Aye, too true," while Black Tom's knife paused, his eyes narrowing as if picturing the glade.

Billy
Yo ho, the fairy's curse did strike us sore,
A tune to bind us, shore to shore!
With voices trapped and feet a-dance,
We sailed for Blue, our only chance!
Yo ho, the fairy's curse, beware her gleam,
A shadow looms in a silent dream!

Back to the Roger, we cheered our lot,
But whispers grew, 'Who's she forgot?'
A foe unseen, her warning clear,
'Shadows sing,' she left us here,

Cap'n and lass, they spoke so low,
What secrets hide? We'll never know,
So raise a glass, but watch the sea,
The fairy's curse ain't done with me!

Yo ho, the fairy's curse did strike us sore,
A tune to bind us, shore to shore!
With voices trapped and feet a-dance,
We sailed for Blue, our only chance!
Yo ho, the fairy's curse, beware her gleam,
A shadow looms in a silent dream!

Billy finished with a flourish, his foot stomping hard, his voice ringing out as he raised his flask. The crew joined the final chorus, their boots thundering, Smee's "Yo ho!" shrill, One-Eyed Jack's growl fierce, Black Tom's fist pounding

like a drum. The quarters shook, a triumphant roar fading into breathless laughter. Billy leaned back, wiping his brow, his grin wide as he looked to his mates. “Well, lads, what ya reckon? Fit for the Roger’s tale?”

Smee clapped wildly, nearly tumbling from his hammock, “Oh, it’s grand, Billy! Gave me chills, that ‘shadows sing’ bit, d’ya think it’s true, what Blue said?” One-Eyed Jack scratched his chin, his growl thoughtful, “Aye, it’s a banger, catches the mess right, specially me growlin’. But that last verse… Cap’n and Desylva know more’n they let on, eh?”

Black Tom set his knife down, pointing at Billy with a rare, approving nod, then tapped his ear and chest, good tune, strong heart. Billy chuckled, his voice hoarse, “Aye, Tom likes it, and Jack’s onto somethin’, them two’s got secrets, I’d wager me grog! Smee, ya daft sod, it’s a shanty, not a prophecy, though I’d sing it louder if I knew the foe!” He took another swig, eyes glinting. “Needs a tweak or two, maybe, more about Tom’s dance? What say ya, mates?” Smee giggled, “Oh, more o’ Tom twirlin’, he’d hate it!” One-Eyed Jack smirked, “Add me cursin’ the fairy, make it proper pirate!” Black Tom thumped the barrel, grinning, and Billy laughed, “Done, lads. I’ll sing it ‘til we know the truth!”

The crew settled back, their laughter fading into a comfortable hum, the shanty’s rhythm lingering in their bones. Smee swaying, One-Eyed Jack cracking his knuckles, Black Tom resuming his sharpening with a steady scrape.

The lanterns flickered, casting their faces in warm light, the sea beyond the hull whispering a gentle lullaby. Billy hummed the chorus under his breath, his mind already spinning new lines, his curiosity about Killian and Desylva’s hushed words fueling his next verse.

The Jolly Roger sailed on, her crew bound by the day’s tale, their voices free but their questions sharp, the shanty a tether to the mystery that lingered in the shadows of the fairy’s warning.

Interlude: A Quiet Week Aboard the Jolly Roger (Day 18)

The Jolly Roger drifted smoothly across a glassy sea, her hull slicing through the still waters under a late afternoon sun that bathed the deck in a golden haze. A few days had passed since the singing curse had gripped them. The air was crisp with salt and the faint earthy scent of sun-warmed wood, the ship’s timbers humming softly as the crew savored a rare, peaceful respite. No storms or foes marred the horizon, just the gentle lap of waves against the hull.

Main Deck

Billy lounged by the mast, carving a rough whale from a piece of driftwood. One-Eyed Jack and Smee buffed cannons. Black Tom sat against a barrel, nursing a mug of grog, his boots quiet now, the memory of his cursed jig a wry jest traded over rum.

Quarterdeck

Killian stood near the helm, his hook catching the sunlight as he scanned the deck, his dark coat swaying in a light breeze. Desylva leaned against the mainmast, her storm-gray eyes glinting, her hair loose and wild, her magic at rest beneath the serene sky. The crew’s chatter was a low murmur, spiked by the clink of Black Tom’s mug and the scrape of Billy’s knife.

Killian’s voice cut through, firm and edged with a smirk, “Oi, lads, a quiet seems to be upon us, this day’s ours to claim, and this time we sing ‘cause we damn well want to, not ‘cause some unknown bastard’s hex forces it!” He tilted his head toward Desylva, his hand resting on the helm, then looked back at the crew. “Blue broke it, aye, but she ain’t the one what cast it. Still don’t know who’s laughin’ at us out there. So let’s give the Roger her song, free as we please!”

Main Deck

The crew stirred, a ripple of grins and nods. Billy set his carving aside, One-Eyed Jack and Smee’s rags hit the deck, Black Tom raised his mug with a rare, faint smirk. “Aye, Cap’n!” Billy called, “A tune by choice, beats wonderin’ who’s got it in for us!”

Killian stepped from behind the wheel, boots striking the deck, his baritone rich and willing, a glint of defiance in his eye.

Killian (Slowly descend quarterdeck stairs)
This ship's enchanted,
She's tempest-banded,
She's ocean-branded,
Why, she's the Jolly Roger!

All
Jolly Roger!

Killian (step onto main deck)
This ship's a terror, carved from the night, oh yeah!

All
Keep sailin', whoa, keep sailin'!

Killian
Her timbers shimmer, a magical sight, oh yeah!

Desylva
I'll seize the storm, I'll conjure up the storm!

Killian
She's swift as a blade, cuts the waves with a spark,
The Jolly Roger's glory lights the seas in the dark,
Jolly Roger!

Billy stomped over, hauling a rope with a lopsided grin.

Killian
(*Go) Go, Jolly Roger, you're tearin' up the brine supreme!*

All (unbound and bold)
Jolly Roger, go, Jolly Roger!

Killian
(Go) Go, Jolly Roger, the fiercest ship you've ever seen!

All
Jolly Roger, go, Jolly Roger!

Killian
You are dream (ah-ah), the seas'll scream (ah-ah), for Jolly Roger!

All
Go go go, go-go-go-go-go-go-go-go!

Smee waved his rag like a banner, scrambling atop the cannon, while One-Eyed Jack climbed the rigging, clapping a steady beat, the deck pulsing with their willing stomps. Killian strode toward the mast, his coat billowing.

Killian (swelling with pride)
Her sails catch thunder, they glow with a sheen, oh yeah!

All
Uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-uh!

Killian
She's charmed for plunder, the fiercest ever seen, oh yeah!

All
Uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-uh!

Killian
With my hook at the helm, storms bend to her might,
Desylva's lightning strikes, we'll conquer the night,
Jolly Roger!

The crew raised their fists and grog. Black Tom thumped his barrel, sloshing his drink as he matched the rhythm.

Killian
(Go) Go, Jolly Roger, you're tearin' up the brine supreme!

All
Jolly Roger, go, Jolly Roger!

Killian
(Go) Go, Jolly Roger, the fiercest ship you've ever seen!

All
Jolly Roger, go, Jolly Roger!

Killian
You are dream (ah-ah), the seas'll scream (ah-ah), for Jolly Roger!

All
Go go go, go-go-go-go-go-go-go-go!

Billy swayed as he sang, tossing the rope aside. Killian vaulted onto a crate, his voice booming over the calm sea.

Killian
Her cannons thunder, with spells they ignite, oh yeah!

All
Uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-uh!

Killian
Her speeds like a demon, she's gone in the night, oh yeah!

All
Uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-uh!

Killian
Foes flee her shadow, their sails torn apart,
This ship's got a soul, with a wild enchanted heart,
Jolly Roger!

The crew's response rattled the planks, Smee tumbling off his perch with a yelp, One-Eyed Jack swinging higher in the ropes.

Killian
(Go) Go, Jolly Roger, you're tearin' up the brine supreme!

All
Jolly Roger, go, Jolly Roger!

Killian
(Go) Go, Jolly Roger, the fiercest ship you've ever seen!

All
Jolly Roger, go, Jolly Roger!

Killian
You are dream (ah-ah), the seas'll scream (ah-ah), for Jolly Roger!

All
Go go go, go-go-go-go-go-go-go-go!!

The song carried a fierce joy, the ship reveling in their voluntary tribute, a defiance of the unknown foe still lurking in their minds. Killian jumped down, joining the crew, his voice blending with theirs in a call-and-response that rang with freedom.

Killian
With grog in our bellies, we ride every swell,

All
She's swift as the devil, sends foes straight to hell!

Killian
Her legend's a tempest, her name's never tame,

All
The Jolly Roger sails, forever our claim!

The deck surged as their voices grew louder and unforced.

Killian
(Go) Go, Jolly Roger, you're tearin' up the brine supreme!

All
Jolly Roger, go, Jolly Roger!

Killian
(Go) Go, Jolly Roger, the fiercest ship you've ever seen!

All
Jolly Roger, go, Jolly Roger!

Killian
You are dream (ah-ah), the seas'll scream (ah-ah), for Jolly Roger!

All
Go go go, go-go-go-go-go-go-go-go!

Killian (raise hook)
Raise the red flag high, lads, and let's take the sea,
With Jolly Roger's might, we'll always be free!

Killian finished with a flourish. The crew cheered, stomping and laughing. Billy whistling, Smee scrambling up, One-Eyed Jack sliding down, Black Tom smirking over his grog. Their voices theirs again, no hex to claim them.

As the crew's song faded into a lively buzz, Killian's eyes found Desylva, the quiet days since the curse doing nothing to dull their spark. He crossed the deck, his steps sure, a smirk tugging his lips as he stopped close, the heat of her nearness a pull he didn't resist.

"No unknown cur makin' us sing this time, love, just us, 'cause we bloody well want it," he said, his voice rough with intent, a nod to the mystery still gnawing at them. She grinned, teasing, "Aye, our tune, our choice, no curse or spell to blame."

He began, his baritone bold and free.

Killian
I've got a fire burnin' deep in my soul,
A pirate's heart that you've taken whole,
Lass, you've got the spark, you've set me ablaze,
With your thunderous eyes and your wild, stormy ways.

Desylva stepped up, hands on her hips, her alto fierce and unshackled.

Desylva
I've got a tempest ragin' under my skin,
A gale that howls when you pull me in,
You've got the steel, that hook in your grin,
Captain, you stir me. Let the chaos begin!

They circled each other, the crew pausing. Billy leaning on his crate, Smee peeking over the cannon, One-Eyed Jack and Black Tom trading knowing looks.

Killian's hand grazing her arm, Desylva's eyes alight, as their harmony crackled.

Killian
We're bound by the fight, the sea, and the flame,
Through shadows and battles, we've staked our claim,

Desylva
No calm can hold us, no tide can tame,
Tell me now, love, feel the same!

Killian
You're the storm that I crave, I've got to have you, oh aye!
Lighting my dark with your lightning's cry!

Desylva
Oh, love, you're mine, it's plain to see,
I crave you wild, set my heart free!

Both
Oh-oh-oh, the storm that I crave!
Oh-oh-oh, the storm that I crave!

Billy tapped his foot, muttering, "Still wonder who hexed us," while Smee clapped, the crew savoring a song untainted by force. Killian drew nearer, his voice low and husky.

Killian
I've sailed through hell, faced death's cold sneer,
But your gale's the thrill that keeps me here,
With my hook and your rain, we'll conquer the night,
My storm-wrought queen, my heart's delight!

Desylva spun away, then back, her tone wild and fierce.

Desylva
I've cracked the skies, brought thunder to play,
But your rogue's charm sweeps my calm away,
With my wind and your steel, we're a force untamed,
My pirate bold, forever we're named!

The crew nodded, Black Tom's smirk deepening, One-Eyed Jack's eye glinting, as the song wove a bond no one could touch. Their voices climbed, hands brushing.

Both
We're bound by the fight, the sea, and the flame,
Through shadows and battles, we've staked our claim,
No calm can hold us, no tide can tame,
Tell me now, love, feel the same!

Smee sniffled, "Ain't that somethin'!" Billy grinned. A faint breeze lifted Desylva's hair.

Both (louder)
You're the storm that I crave, I've got to have you, oh aye!
Lighting my dark with your lightning's cry!
Oh, love, you're mine, it's plain to see,
I crave you wild. Set my heart free!

Oh-oh-oh, the storm that I crave!
Oh-oh-oh, the storm that I crave!

The crew's quiet claps a nod to their chosen melody. Killian clasped her hand.

Killian
You've got the power, lass, you shake my core!

Desylva
You've got the hunger, love, I'm yours for more!

Killian
With every clash, our legend grows strong!

Desylva
With every storm, it's here we belong!

Both
You're the storm that I crave, I've got to have you, oh aye!
Lighting my dark with your lightning's cry!
Oh, love, you're mine, it's plain to see,
I crave you wild, set my heart free!

Oh-oh-oh, the storm that I crave!
Oh-oh-oh, the storm that I crave!

Killian spun her into his arms, foreheads touching.

Both
Through the gales and the fight, we'll never part,
My anchor, my love. My beating heart!

As the last note drifted off, Killian pulled Desylva close, his hand cupping her face, his hook at her waist. He kissed her deeply, a fierce yet tender claim.

The crew burst into cheers, tankards aloft. Billy whooping, “Aye, that’s our Cap’n, no curse needed!” Smee clapping wildly, “Oh, it’s grand, free an’ true!” One-Eyed Jack grunting, “Proper pirate, that, damn the bastard who hexed us!” and Black Tom thumping his barrel, grinning wide.

Their hoots carried over the calm sea, the Jolly Roger steady beneath them, her deck alive with song and spirit they’d chosen, the unknown caster a taunt they’d face another day.

The sun sank lower, shadows stretching, as Killian broke the kiss with a smirk, Desylva laughing in his arms, the crew’s cheers a bold defiance of the riddle still at large.

Two days later

The Jolly Roger cut through the twilight, her sails snapping taut as they snagged the last fiery glimmers of a sinking sun. The sea stretched calm and endless ‘round her, a glassy mirror kissed by the fading light, her hull creaking soft under the weight of a crew finding their rhythm again.

The deck buzzed with life. Boots scuffed planks as ropes were coiled, a barrel rolled with a thud as One-Eyed Jack shoved it into place with a grunt, and the faint tang of grog wafted from Smee’s flask as he fumbled a mop, splashing water over Black Tom’s boots. Black Tom swatted at him with a scarred hand, while Billy barked a laugh, leaning on the mast with a weathered pipe puffing acrid smoke into the violet sky.

The night promised quiet, the kind that settled over a ship like a blanket after a storm, but a spark of mischief simmered beneath it. The shanties from nights past still echoed in the crew’s heads, their rough voices itching to break the stillness.

One-Eyed Jack squinted across the deck, his eye glinting as he polished a dagger against his sleeve, muttering to Black Tom, “Reckon we oughta give the Cap’n a proper ribbin’ tonight, him and that storm lass o’ his.” Black Tom smirked, silent as ever, the rasp of his whetstone sharpening his blade setting Smee’s teeth on edge. One-Eyed Jack just grinned wider, flipping the dagger with a cocky flourish that nearly nicked Billy’s arm.

Up by the helm, a deckhand hummed off-key, earning a sharp “Pipe down, ye tone-deaf cur!” from Billy, who stomped over to cuff the lad’s ear with a meaty hand, sending him scurrying. The crew was restless, primed for a laugh, and their sights were locked on their captain and his storm-wielding lass, the pair ripe for a bit of good-natured torment after days of whispered tales and knowing winks.

Near the stern, Killian and Desylva stood shoulder to shoulder, a quiet island amid the crew’s bustle. His hook rested lazy on the rail, catching the last light in its wicked curve. Her hand brushed his arm, her fingers lingering as they spoke low, words lost to the wind but plain in the tilt of her head, the smirk tugging his lips. Their silhouettes cut sharp against the deepening dusk, a sight too tempting for the rogues lurking nearby.

Behind a stack of barrels, Billy, Smee, One-Eyed Jack, and Black Tom crouched like conspirators, their grins flashing in the gloom. Billy clutched a coiled rope, his beard bristling with glee; Smee stifled a giggle with a shaky hand; One-Eyed Jack’s eye gleamed wicked as a shark’s; and Black Tom, smirked with a rare flicker of mirth.

“Look at ‘em, lads,” Billy hissed, voice a rough whisper over the creak of the ship, “all cozy-like, prime for a shanty to stir the pot!”

He cleared his throat with a gravelly rasp that sounded like a cannon priming, his voice rising sly and taunting as the crew sprang into action with exaggerated flair.

Billy
There she stands, the stormy lass,
Her eyes like thunder’s gleam,
Cap’n stares, his hook a-flash,
He’s lost in her wild dream!

Aye, ye see it plain as day,
He's hooked on her fierce might,
No need to wait, no time to sway,
Just claim her here tonight!

Billy jabbed a gnarled finger at Desylva, squinting one eye and puffing out his chest to mimic her stormy glare, while Smee fluttered his hands like crackling lightning, a high-pitched giggle bubbling out despite his attempt to hush it. One-Eyed Jack swung his arm in a wide arc, pretending to brandish a hook, nearly clipping Black Tom's ear. Black Tom sidestepped with a grunt and stomped a clumsy jig, nodding at Killian with a grunt of approval that said more than words ever could.

They ducked lower behind the barrels as Killian's head snapped their way, his eyes narrowing.

Billy
Sha-la-la-la-la-la, me hearty crew,
Kiss the storm, ye lad, don't be shy!
Sha-la-la-la-la-la, the wind blows true,
Take her now or the chance'll fly!

Sha-la-la-la-la-la, don't hold yer breath,
She's a gale ye can't deny,
Sha-la-la-la-la-la, Cap'n, be deft,
Kiss the storm afore we die!

Smee swayed like a drunk gull, clapping so wild he nearly toppled a barrel. Billy grabbed his collar with a snarled, "Steady, ye blitherin' fool!" yanking him back as he stomped the beat into the planks with a heavy boot. One-Eyed Jack mimed shoving Killian toward Desylva, flashing a grin and whispering, "Go on, Cap, plant one on 'er!" while Black Tom spun a rope overhead like a lasso, his silent taunt urging the captain on with a rare glint of amusement.

Billy belted, louder now, as Desylva's laugh rang out at something Killian muttered, her head tipping back in a way that only fueled their fire.

Billy
Look at her, she's lightning-born,
Her magic cracks the sky,
He's a rogue with heart forlorn,
A spark in his dark eye!

Waves do crash, the timbers shake,
Their fire lights the sea,
Don't ye pause, for pity's sake,
Just grab her, bold and free!

Smee flailed his arms like crashing waves, splashing grog from his flask and yelping, "Oh, blast it!" as it soaked his boots, earning a glare from Billy. One-Eyed Jack clutched his chest, staggering back in a mock swoon that nearly sent him tumbling over a coil of rope. Black Tom thumped the deck with a heavy boot, the ship's sway matching his rhythm.

Billy waved a meaty hand at the pair, roaring, "Go on, ye daft sods, sell it proper!" Their antics growing bolder, teetering on the edge of discovery as they peeked over the barrels.

All
Sha-la-la-la-la-la, me hearty crew,
Kiss the storm, ye lad, don't be shy!
Sha-la-la-la-la-la, the wind blows true,
Take her now or the chance'll fly!

Sha-la-la-la-la-la, don't hold yer breath,
She's a gale ye can't deny,
Sha-la-la-la-la-la, Cap'n, be deft,
Kiss the storm afore we die!

One-Eyed Jack leapt up, swinging an imaginary hook in a wild arc, crowing loud enough to wake the dead, "Plant one on 'er, Cap, ye know ye want to!" Smee twirled, tripping over his own feet with a squeak of "Oh, me poor knees!" while Black Tom stomped harder, his smirk daring Killian to react.

Billy's grin split wide as Killian's glare cut their way, Desylva's smirk sharpening with amusement as she caught the tune. Billy's voice dropping to a hushed, taunting chant, barely containing his glee.

Billy
Aye, she's waitin', fierce and fine,
Her tempest calls ye near,
One bold move, yer fates entwine,
No curse to interfere!

Smee swooned against a barrel, clutching his heart with a dramatic wheeze, while One-Eyed Jack nudged Black Tom with an elbow, who spun a slow, mocking circle. Billy pointed at Killian, winking broad and bold as if daring him to charge. The crew sang loud and cheeky, throwing caution to the wind like a torn sail.

All
Sha-la-la-la-la-la, me hearty crew,
Kiss the storm, ye lad, don't be shy!
Sha-la-la-la-la-la, the wind blows true,
Take her now or the chance'll fly!

Sha-la-la-la-la-la, don't hold yer breath,
She's a gale ye can't deny,
Sha-la-la-la-la-la, Cap'n, be deft,
Kiss the storm afore we die!

Killian whirled fully, his growl cutting through their racket like a blade through canvas. "Oi, you mangy curs. Stow that bloody noise afore I keelhaul the lot o' ya and feed you to the sharks!"

The crew scattered like rats in a squall. Smee tripped over a trailing rope, sprawling face-first with a yelped, "Mercy, Cap'n, I'm too young to die!" One-Eyed Jack ducked behind a flapping sail, cackling like a hyena, while Black Tom slipped into the shadows, smirk intact as he melted away. Billy stood his ground a heartbeat longer, saluting with a bellowed, "Just a tune to lighten the night, Cap'n. No harm meant, swear it!" before bolting after the others, his laugh booming across the deck.

Killian shook his head, muttering, "Bloody fools'll be the death o' me," while Desylva's chuckle danced on the breeze, her hand squeezing his arm.

A few hours later

The stars pricked the velvet sky like scattered silver, the crew gathered near the bow, grog warming their hands and bellies. The deck had hushed, save for the creak of timbers underfoot and the sea's soft lap against the hull, a gentle rhythm that lulled the night.

Killian and Desylva lingered by the helm, too far to hear but close enough to watch. His hand rested on the wheel, fingers tapping a lazy beat, while her arm brushed his, her coat swaying as she leaned in closer to murmur something that drew a rare, quiet laugh from him. Their shadows stretched long across the planks, a sight that softened the crew's earlier mischief into something closer to awe.

Billy sprawled on a crate, his tankard balanced on a knee as he squinted toward the helm. "They're somethin', ain't they?" he mused, voice rough but warm, like gravel smoothed by the tide. Smee perched on a coil of rope, nodding

eagerly, “Aye, like a tale come alive, they are!” One-Eyed Jack lounged against a barrel, his eye glinting as he swirled his grog, grunting, “Storm and steel, bloody perfect pair.” Black Tom sat cross-legged on the deck, silent as ever, his scarred hands resting on his knees, but his faint nod spoke volumes.

Billy hauled himself up, brushing crumbs from his beard, and rumbled, “Right, lads, let’s give ‘em another proper song, none o’ that cheeky rot this time.” His voice rolled out low and rich, a reverent hymn cutting through the stillness.

Billy
The sea lies calm, the night’s at peace,
The crew’s at watch, all still,
But up on deck, a tempest brews,
A spark o’ rogue and will!

Their eyes do clash, their voices rise,
A song to shake the brine,
The Jolly Roger hums alive,
Their love’s a pirate’s sign!

Billy swayed on his crate, one hand pointing toward the helm with a slow, proud sweep, while Smee rocked his perch side to side, humming along off-key. One-Eyed Jack lifted his mug in a lazy salute, his growl joining the tune, and Black Tom tapped a steady rhythm with his boot, eyes fixed on the distant pair. Billy’s voice, warm and reverent, a toast carried on the night air.

Billy
Can ye feel the storm tonight?
The fire in their gaze,
A hook and gale, a fearsome sight,
They set the seas ablaze!

Can ye feel the storm tonight?
No hex could tear apart,
The Cap’n bold, his stormy lass,
They rule with pirate heart!

Smee raised his mug high, sloshing grog, “To ‘em both!” Billy shot him a glare. One-Eyed Jack clapped a slow, deliberate beat against his barrel, his voice a rough undertone, while Black Tom thumped his crate with a fist, the deck trembling faintly. Billy’s eyes gleamed, nodding at Killian and Desylva as if they could feel the tribute.

Billy (swelling with pride)
She cracks the sky, he steers the wheel,
Their dance is wild and free,
Through cannon smoke and thunder’s peal,
They carve their legacy!

The crew looks on, we raise a cheer,
Their clash is ours to sing,
A tale o’ steel and lightning’s sear,
A love that storms can bring!

One-Eyed Jack mimed steering the wheel with a swagger, muttering, “That’s our Cap,” under his breath, while Smee waved his arms like rolling thunder, nearly tipping off his rope with a yelp. Black Tom grabbed his sleeve, steadying him without a word.

Black Tom stomped a cannon’s rhythm, his boots echoing the imagined battle, and Billy grinned wide, tossing his hair back as he belted on, his free hand punching the air toward the helm. The crew’s mugs thrust aloft in unison as their voices joined Billy’s.

All
Can ye feel the storm tonight?
The fire in their gaze,
A hook and gale, a fearsome sight,
They set the seas ablaze!

Can ye feel the storm tonight?
No hex could tear apart,
The Cap'n bold, his stormy lass,
They rule with pirate heart!

Smee swayed dangerously, nearly tipping again, crowing, "Ain't that grand, lads?" One-Eyed Jack's growl wove into the tune, a rare softness in his eye, while Black Tom's thumps shook the deck like a heartbeat.

Billy led with a captain's pride, his voice carrying over the sea as it dropped to a hushed reverence, his head bowing slightly.

All (softly)
From cursed tunes to quiet days,
They've fought through shadow's call,
Their bond's the wind that fills our sails,
A tempest over all!

Smee sniffled loud, wiping his nose on his sleeve with a mumbled, "Gets me every time," while One-Eyed Jack nodded slow, his usual sneer gone. Black Tom's smirk softened to something like respect, his hands still for once. Billy's hand swept toward the helm, a quiet salute in the gesture.

All
Can ye feel the storm tonight?
The fire in their gaze,
A hook and gale, a fearsome sight,
They set the seas ablaze!

Can ye feel the storm tonight?
No hex could tear apart,
The Cap'n bold, his stormy lass,
They rule with pirate heart!

They finished with a cheer, mugs clashing in a sloppy, joyous toast. Smee whooped high and shrill, spilling more grog as he flailed, "Best pair on the seas!" One-Eyed Jack grunted, "Aye, that's them, storm and steel, right enough," clapping Black Tom's shoulder. Black Tom thumped the crate twice, a rare double-tap of approval, his eyes glinting in the starlight.

Killian glanced over from the helm, catching the tail of their song, a smirk tugging his lips as he murmured something to Desylva. She laughed, bright and clear, her hand resting on his hook as she raised her own imaginary mug back at them.

Billy bellowed, "To the Cap'n and his lass!". The crew echoed it, their voices a rough hymn as the Jolly Roger sailed on under the stars.

Next Night - On deck

The night was fierce, the Jolly Roger pitching as Desylva emerged from below, barefoot, her toes gripping the planks. She tilted her head back, gray eyes tracing the stars scattered like plunder across the sky. The wind howled, tugging at her cloak as she strode to the railing and leaned against it, staring out at the churning sea. Her cursed mark, beneath her sleeve, glowed faint blue, pulsing with the tempest trapped within her. Her voice rose, raw and untamed, cutting through the gale.

Desylva
The winds howl fierce on the sea tonight,
Not a calm wave to be seen,
A cursed mark glows beneath me sleeve,
A tempest trapped, wild and keen!

The storm inside me roars to break,
A gift I can't deny,
No chains can hold, no foe can take,
I'll rule the sea and sky!

She raised a hand, sparks crackling from her fingertips, her cloak flaring as she paced the deck, the ship swaying beneath her, her voice soaring, defiant.

Desylva
Let it blow, let it blow,
Can't bind this gale inside o' me!
Let it blow, let it blow,
The sea's my throne, I'll ne'er flee!

I'll crack the skies, let thunder play,
Let the storm rage on
The rain never bothered me anyway.

She spun, lightning flickering overhead, her feet stomping a fierce rhythm. The mark glowed brighter, her power unshackled, her voice sharp, her fists clenching.

Desylva
This blue scar burns when the tempest calls,
A curse from fates unknown,
But lightning bends to my fierce will,
This power's my own throne!

The waves do dance, the winds obey,
I'll wield this gift with might,
No fear, no cage, I'll sail my way,
A storm in endless fight!

She thrust her arms skyward, waves surging briefly against the hull, her hair whipping wild as she claimed the night, a gale in her throat.

Desylva
Let it blow, let it blow,
Can't bind this gale inside o' me!
Let it blow, let it blow,
The sea's my throne, I'll ne'er flee!

I'll crack the skies, let thunder play,
The mark may glow, but I'm the fray,
Let the storm rage on!

Thunder rumbled, her mark pulsing. She grabbed the rail, defiance in every line. Her voice higher, wild and unbound.

Desylva
Up through the clouds, my bolts do soar,
The rain's my song, the gale's my roar!
No curse can chain what I've become,
I'm free to strike, the storm's my drum!

She leapt onto a crate, wind swirling ‘round her, a fierce silhouette against the stars as her power unleashed.

Desylva
Let it blow, let it blow,
Can’t bind this gale inside o’ me!
Let it blow, let it blow,
The sea’s my throne, I’ll ne’er flee!

I’ll crack the skies, let thunder play,
Let the storm rage on
The rain never bothered me anyway.

She jumped down, lightning flashing once then fading. Her breath steadied, mark dimming, the storm hers to command as she stood alone in the night.

Killian & Desylva’s Cabin / Stairs to deck
(Simultaneously with above)

Cabin

Killian stirred awake, his hand reaching across the bed to find it empty. His brow furrowed, a flicker of worry tightening his chest. Desylva was gone. The window rattled as the sea churned beyond, the howl of wind seeping through the timbers. “Bloody hell,” he muttered, “she’s out in that mess.” Visions of her in trouble, swept overboard or worse, spurred him out of bed. He yanked on his breeches and coat in a rush, the leather and heavy fabric clinging to his bare torso, snagging his cutlass from its hook by the door, the steel a cold comfort against his palm. His hook gleamed faintly as he strode out, his bare feet thumping the planks.

Companionway stairs

He hit the stairs, the ship rocking beneath him, and froze. Singing drifted down, fierce and familiar. One brow arched, his grip on the cutlass easing as he climbed slow. The storm’s roar mingled with her voice. He reached the top and quietly opened the door. He saw her, a tempest incarnate, belting her defiance to the sky. He lingered in the shadows, watching her spin and leap, lightning cracking with her words. As she finished, striding back to the railing, he stepped onto the deck, the wind tugging at his coat.

Deck

Killian approached silently, stopping just behind her. His arms slid ‘round her waist, his head dipping to rest on her shoulder, the cool curve of his hook brushing her hip. She leaned back into him, her hands settling over his arms, fingers tracing the scars beneath his sleeves. His breath warmed her ear as he whispered, “Woke up and you weren’t there, lass. Had me worried.” Desylva tilted her head, voice soft. “Sorry, love.”

“You okay?” he murmured, concern lacing his tone. “Couldn’t sleep,” she admitted, staring out at the restless sea. “Feeling restless, are we?” he teased, a hint of a smirk in his voice. “Aye, a little,” she said, a faint smile tugging her lips. He chuckled low. “I may have a cure for that.”

She turned in his arms, meeting his gaze with a spark of her own, grinning. “Oh really, pirate? And what might that be?” His smile turned mischievous, eyes glinting. “Come back to bed and find out.” He took her hand, lacing their fingers, and led her toward the companionway, her storm-quieted laugh trailing behind.

Killian & Desylva’s Cabin

The cabin door thudded shut as Killian pulled Desylva close, his hand cupping her face with a hunger tempered by tender care. Her cloak slid off with a soft rustle, the leather catching on her bare feet before pooling on the floor, its buckles clinking faintly against the planks. His coat followed, shrugged off with a heavy thump, the fabric grazing his bare torso, revealing the scarred planes of his chest in the lantern’s dim glow. Her fingers traced the coarse hair

there, nails scraping lightly as she tugged at his pants with a storm's impatience, the leather belt snapping free with a sharp crack, the fabric slithering down his legs to tangle at his ankles.

He eased her shirt over her head, his fingers brushing her shoulders, the linen whispering as it fell, baring her breasts and the glowing cursed mark beneath her sleeve. Her pants came next, his hook deftly unfastening the ties, the cloth slipping down her thighs with a soft sigh, leaving them fully naked, their skin flushed in the salt-thick air.

Outside, the sea steadied, her magic simmering low, the ship rocked gently, waves lapping the hull in time with their quickening breaths. His lips found hers, fierce yet teasing, a slow dance of nips and brushes that drew a soft moan from her throat, his hook rested at her waist, cool against her skin. Her hands roaming his back, caressing the taut muscles with lingering touches as she pressed him back toward the bed,

He lifted her with a gentle grunt, her legs wrapping 'round his hips as they sank onto the bed, its frame creaking faintly, runes glowing to mend a scratch from his hook's errant graze. Her mark flickered, a blue pulse in the dimness as he leaned over her, his lips trailing kisses down her jaw, teasing her pulse with a tender nip, his hand fondling her breast, thumb circling slowly, coaxing a sigh from her lips. "My storm," he rasped against her neck, his voice a low caress, his hook resting cool at her waist, tracing idle patterns on her skin.

He entered her with a gentle, teasing nudge, his movements slow and deliberate, savoring her warmth as she gasped, her walls fluttering around him, her gray eyes locking with his in a shared, tender spark. The ship tilted softly, waves swelling in rhythm with her quiet moans, her magic stirring a distant rumble of thunder. His hand slid along her side, caressing her ribs, fingers splaying to pull her closer, their bodies rocking in a languid dance, her sighs mingling with his low groans. Her nails grazed his shoulders, a soft touch that deepened to a fondle as she arched beneath him, her breath hitching with each careful thrust.

The sea murmured outside, its lapping growing insistent as her power wove a cocoon 'round the ship, rain pattering above like a lover's whisper.

Their pace built slowly, touches lingering. His hand stroking her thigh, her fingers tracing his spine, their gasps and moans weaving a quiet symphony. Her voice broke into a sharper cry, "Killian!" as he deepened his rhythm, no longer teasing, his thrusts steady but urgent, her legs tightening around him, pulling him closer. His hand gripping her hip while his hook braced the wall.

The air grew heavy, thick with their mingled scents of sweat and salt, the bed's runes flaring briefly to heal a gouge where his hook braced against the headboard, its silvery light casting shadows across her skin. Her nails raked his back, leaving red trails as she pressed against him, her mark glowing vivid blue, illuminating their entwined forms like a captured storm. His lips bruised hers, swallowing her moans, a hungry kiss that fueled their rising tide, the ship swaying with their motion, waves slapping the hull with growing force as her storm flared in brief sparks of lightning beyond the enchanted glass window, its runes glowing to mend a hairline crack from the tempest's pressure.

The pace quickened to a fevered clash, relentless yet tethered to their bond, his hand sliding beneath her, lifting her hips to meet each thrust, her cries sharpening into a raw refrain. The wind howled outside, the sea surging with her unleashed power, waves crashing against the hull. His hook gouged the wall deeper, splintering the enchanted oak, but the runes pulsed, weaving silver threads to restore its polish, the ship groaning as it rode her storm. Her body arched, trembling, her voice a desperate plea, "Killian!" as the tempest outside mirrored their fire, lightning flashing in jagged arcs, bathing the cabin in stark relief.

Their climax crashed like a breaker, an intensive surge that shattered their restraint. Her body tensed, convulsing beneath him, a shuddering cry tearing from her throat, "Killian, now, I'm yours!" Her walls clenched around him in pulsing waves, her nails digging into his flesh, drawing blood as her mark flared blindingly, casting blue light across their sweat-slicked skin before dimming to a scar. He drove into her with a final, powerful thrust, a ragged growl erupting as he spilled deep within her, his body shuddering with the force of his release, his voice hoarse, "My love!"

The sea surged violently, a monstrous wave slamming the hull, the timbers quaking as her magic peaked in a ferocious gust that tore at the sails, their enchantments shimmering to withstand the strain. Lightning splitting the sky in a blinding arc before the storm subsided, rain easing to a drizzle, the wind softening to a sigh.

They lay tangled, panting, his forehead pressed to hers, his hook resting beside her head, the wall's runes faintly glowing as they mended the last of his gouges. She traced his jaw, a soft laugh escaping, "Cure works," her voice husky with sated warmth. He smirked, kissing her slow, "Always does, love."

They shifted, snuggling deeper into the bed's linens, her head nestled on his chest, his heart a steady thump beneath her ear, his hand stroking her hair with gentle reverence, fingers tangling in the damp strands. Her feet curled against his legs, her skin warm against his, their breaths syncing in the quiet, the mattress cradling them like a lover's embrace.

The ship rocked gently, timbers creaking a soft lullaby, enchanted oak humming faintly, a sanctuary for their wild, unbroken bond, cradling them in its embrace. The sea lapping the hull in a serene murmur, stars shining clear through the window as her mark dimmed, sleep creeping in.

Two Days later

As dawn crept over the horizon, the sea shimmered in soft gold, its gentle waves lapping the Jolly Roger's hull like a lover's whisper. The sails fluttered faintly, catching the first rays as the ship sliced through the calm, her timbers groaning under the weight of a waking crew.

Desylva leaned against the rail near the mainmast, her storm-gray eyes fixed on Killian at the helm. His hook gleamed sharp in the morning light as he gripped the wheel. His dark hair tousled by a salty breeze. His gaze steady on the endless waves ahead. A pirate king in his element, all leather and steel. She shifted her weight, her coat brushing the wood. Her fingers tapping a quiet rhythm as she watched him, a faint smile tugging her lips.

Around her, the deck buzzed with the crew's morning bustle. Billy hauled a thick coil of rope over his shoulder, grunting as he kicked a stray knot aside with a heavy boot, his beard flecked with salt and sweat. "Move yer arse, Smee, ye're blockin' me path!" he barked, dodging Smee, who scrubbed the planks with a mop, sloshing soapy water in wild arcs that splashed across the deck.

Smee yelped, "Oi, watch it, Billy, I'm cleanin' here!" as he slipped, catching himself on a barrel with a splash that soaked his boots and drew a curse.

Nearby, One-Eyed Jack sat cross-legged, mending a torn net with deft fingers, his dagger glinting as he sliced a thread, muttering, "Bloody fish'll rue the day they tangled with me." Black Tom perched silently by another barrel, sharpening his knife with a slow, deliberate rasp, his scarred face impassive but his eyes flicking toward the helm now and then.

Their chatter hummed low, curses, grumbles, and the occasional laugh, blending with the creak of rigging and the distant cry of a gull wheeling overhead.

The air carried the tang of sea and grog, a new day unfurling with promise after the lingering shadow of the singing curse. The crew had shaken off its eerie grip, but a restless energy lingered, a spark of camaraderie ready to flare.

Billy paused, wiping his brow, caught Desylva's stare at Killian. "Still moonin' over the cap'n, eh, lass?" he teased, loud enough to draw a snicker from One-Eyed Jack, who flicked his dagger with a smirk. Smee glanced up, grinning wide, "Ain't moonin' if it's return'd, lad. She's got 'im hooked proper too. Hooked, get it?" earning a sharp, "Stow it, ye daft git!" from Billy, though his own grin betrayed him as he shook his head.

Desylva ignored them, her alto rising soft and warm, cutting through the deck's clamor as she began to sing, her voice a thread of gold weaving through the dawn. Her song spilled out, tender yet bold, her eyes locked on Killian as she leaned harder against the rail, her hand tracing its edge like a caress. Her voice carried over the deck, a quiet storm rising.

Desylva
One day my rogue came sailin' near,
Aboard a ship o' black,
With hook in hand and eyes so fierce,
He stole my heart, no lack!

He strode the deck, a pirate bold,
His grin a stormy claim,
And in his gaze, my fate was told,
He set my soul aflame!

Billy glanced up from his rope, a smirk splitting his grizzled face as he muttered, “Aye, that’s the Cap’n, hook and all, right as rain!” He dropped the coil with a heavy thud, leaning on the mast to listen, his rough hands tapping the beat against the wood. Smee paused mid-scrub, his mop dripping as he grinned wide, whispering to One-Eyed Jack, “She’s singin’ ‘bout ‘im again, ain’t that sweet as grog?” One-Eyed Jack snorted, tugging a knot tight in the net, “Sweet? It’s bloody sappy, but I’ll allow it, got a good ring to it.” Black Tom’s knife slowed, his head tilting slightly, the rasp softening as her words sank in, his dark eyes narrowing with interest.

Desylva’s voice, tender yet fierce, wrapped ‘round the ship like a warm gale.

Desylva
Aye, he came with a gale and a cheer,
Killian bold, my rogue so dear!
His steel and fire, they won me through,
A pirate’s love, wild and true!

She swayed, her hair lifting in a sudden breeze. Her storm magic stirring faint sparks along her fingertips, a shimmer of power dancing in the dawn’s golden light.

Smee rocked back on his heels, swaying with his mop, giggling, “She’s got the winds singin’ too, look at that!” One-Eyed Jack nodded slow, his eye glinting with rare approval, muttering, “Tune’s got bones, I’ll give ‘er that, beats yer caterwaulin’, Smee.” Billy picked up the hum, his gravelly voice a low undercurrent, nodding toward Killian as if the captain could hear the tribute.

Desylva steped forward from the rail, her cloak swaying with each purposeful stride, her gaze unwavering on Killian, her voice stronger.

Desylva
Through cannon’s roar and thunder’s din,
He carved a path to me,
No prince in silk, but clad in sin,
A scoundrel o’ the sea!

His voice did call, his hand did seize,
My storm he dared to tame,
With every clash, my heart he frees,
And claimed me in his name!

She brushed her fingers over her cursed mark, the blue glow pulsing faintly beneath her sleeve.

Black Tom’s knife stilled entirely, his dark eyes narrowing as he watched, a rare flicker of curiosity breaking his stoic mask. Billy crossed his arms, rumbling, “That’s the truth o’ it, Cap’n tamed a tempest, didn’t he? Ain’t no small feat!” Smee clutched his mop to his chest, swaying harder, “Oh, it’s like a ballad, ain’t it? Makes me wanna cry me eyes out!”

One-Eyed Jack rolled his eye, snapping, “Cry later, ye sop, let ‘er sing, damn ye!” though his own foot tapped the deck in time, betraying his gruff front. Her voice rose like a cresting wave, filling the morning air.

Desylva
Aye, he came with a gale and a cheer,
Killian bold, my rogue so dear!
His steel and fire, they won me through,
A pirate’s love, wild and true!

She smiled, a spark of lightning flickering overhead as her magic flared.

Billy's hum grew louder, a rough harmony weaving in, while Smee swayed so hard he nearly tipped over, catching himself with a yelp, "Steady now, don't wanna miss this!" One-Eyed Jack grunted, "Fool'll dance 'imself overboard one day, mark me," but kept nodding along, his smirk softening. Black Tom thumped his barrel once, a silent salute, his smirk easing as he watched her power ripple through the air. Her tone dropped intimate and low, her voice a whisper carried on the breeze.

Desylva
No fairy tale, no gentle knight,
But a pirate's claim in the dead o' night!
His hook's my anchor, his heart's my sea,
Together we sail, unbound and free!

She leaned closer to the rail again, her body angled toward Killian, he glanced back from the helm, catching her eye, a smirk tugging his lips as he tipped his head in quiet acknowledgment, his hook glinting as he adjusted the wheel.

Billy chuckled deep, "Look at that, Cap'n's smitten as she is, plain as day!" Smee clasped his hands, sighing, "Ain't it romantic, lads? Like a tale from the bards!" One-Eyed Jack snorted, "Romantic? It's a bloody pirate song, keep it sharp, ye daft sod!" but his grin betrayed him, wide and genuine. Black Tom's knife resumed its slow rasp, a faint nod marking his approval as he watched the pair.

Desylva's voice, full and fierce, rang over the deck.

Desylva
Aye, he came with a gale and a cheer,
Killian bold, my rogue so dear!
His steel and fire, they won me through,
A pirate's love, wild and true!

She finished, her eyes bright with the dawn, her storm magic settling as the sparks faded from her hands. Killian stepped down from the helm, the Starward Compass activating to hold the course. He strode toward her, his boots thudding purposeful on the planks.

The crew broke into soft cheers. Billy clapped his meaty hands, bellowing, "Aye, lass, that's a tune to wake the sea and shake the skies!" Smee whooped high and shrill, waving his mop like a flag, "Beautiful, bloody beautiful, it is!" One-Eyed Jack grunted, "Proper tune, that, got grit and guts," lifting his mug in salute. Black Tom thumped his barrel twice, a rare double-tap of praise, his smirk steady as he watched.

Killian reached her, pulling her close with his hand, his hook resting light on her hip as he pressed her against the rail. "Singin' my praises again, love?" he teased, voice low and warm, a glint of mischief in his dark eyes. She grinned, brushing his jaw with her fingertips, "Had to, you're worth it, every damned note." He chuckled, dipping his head to kiss her fierce and sure, the rising sun framing them in a halo of gold.

Billy hollered, "There's the Cap'n. Seal it proper, ye mad bastard!" Smee clapped again, "Oh, that's the stuff o' legends, right there!" One-Eyed Jack smirked, muttering, "Aye, they're a pair alright, storm and steel," while Black Tom thumped once more, the crew's quiet awe settling over the deck as Killian and Desylva stood together, their bond a storm no mystery could break.

The kiss broke with Desylva's laugh still ringing across the deck, bright and wild, her hands lingering on Killian's chest, fingers curling into the leather as the crew's cheers faded into a warm, contented hum.

Billy clapped rope dust off his hands with a loud smack, grinning like a proud father, while Smee beamed, rocking on his heels, his mop forgotten in a puddle. One-Eyed Jack grunted his approval, flipping his dagger once before sheathing it with a flourish, and Black Tom's knife glinted in the dawn light as he smirked, giving the barrel a soft

tap. The sea stretched gold beneath the ship's steady sway, the sun climbing higher, bathing the ship in a glow that turned the sails to shimmering ebony.

Killian stepped back, his smirk softening into something raw and unguarded, his eyes locked on Desylva with a fire that outshone the dawn. "Aye, lass, you've sung your piece, now hear mine," he said, his voice a low growl of intent, thick with a pirate's edge and a lover's depth. He strode to the edge of the quarterdeck, his coat flaring behind him like a storm cloud, boots striking the planks with purpose.

The crew hushed, heads turning. Billy straightened, muttering, "Cap'n's got a song, eh? This'll be good," while Smee clutched his chest, whispering, "Oh, blimey, he's gonna sing for 'er!" One-Eyed Jack leaned forward, his patch catching the light as he growled, "Better be worth the listen." Black Tom's smirk widening as he waited.

Killian raised his baritone, bold and unyielding, cutting through the morning air.

Killian
Look out o'er the waves, lass, the sea's my fight,
I've carved through hell's own dark, my hook in sight,
But in your tempest eyes, I've found my shore,
A gale o' fire I'd die and kill for more!
There's no storm too fierce, no sea too wide,
I'd face the deep with you by my side!

He swept his hook toward the horizon in a wide arc, the steel flashing like a beacon, then pointed it straight at Desylva, his hand clenched as if gripping a lifeline through a squall.

The crew stilled, caught in the weight of his words. Billy swayed, his grizzled face softening, while Smee clutched his mop like a talisman, eyes wide and glistening. One-Eyed Jack's patch glinted as he nodded slow, muttering, "Aye, that's the Cap'n, pure steel." Black Tom thumped his barrel once, a steady beat anchoring the song.

Killian (deep, fierce)
Every storm I sail, I sail for you,
Every blade I swing, I swing it true,
There's no tide I'd brave, no fight I'd dare,
Without your spark, lass, I'd not care!
Take my heart, my steel, my soul's own hue,
Every storm I sail, I sail for you!

He stepped down from the platform, pacing toward her with deliberate strides, his boots thudding like cannon shots.

Billy grinned wide, rumbling, "That's it, Cap'n, sing it proud!" Smee sniffled, wiping his nose on his sleeve, "Oh, Cap'n, ye'll break me heart with that!" One-Eyed Jack clapped a slow beat on his knee, his growl joining the tune, "Bloody hell, he's got the fire for 'er." Black Tom's thumps steadied into a rhythm, his eyes glinting with rare warmth as Killian closed the distance.

Killian's voice turned husky, his gaze never leaving Desylva, each word a tether.

Killian
Search the blackened brine, you'll see me stand,
A man with naught but grog and a hook for a hand,
Yet your lightning calls, it lights my way,
Through cannon's roar, I'd chase your wild fray!
Your mark may glow, your winds may tear,
But in your storm, lass, I've no despair!

He raised his hook high, mimicking a lightning strike that split the air, then tapped his chest hard with it, the clang of steel on leather echoing. Desylva grinned, her cursed mark sparking faintly under her sleeve as if answering him, her storm magic humming in the dawn.

Billy leaned forward, “Look at that, her storm’s singin’ back!” Smee clutched his mop tighter, “It’s like magic, lads, pure magic!” One-Eyed Jack muttered, “Aye, true as steel, he’s got ‘er soul in that hook,” his voice gruff but awed. Black Tom’s thumps grew sharper, matching the pulse of Killian’s song.

Killian’s voice a thunderous vow that shook the deck.

Killian
Every storm I sail, I sail for you,
Every blade I swing, I swing it true,
There’s no tide I’d brave, no fight I’d dare,
Without your spark, lass, I’d not care!
Take my heart, my steel, my soul’s own hue,
Every storm I sail, I sail for you!

He closed the gap, his hand brushing her arm, his hook glinting as he swept it toward the sea in a grand gesture.

Smee sniffled louder, “Oh, Cap’n, ye’re killin’ me!” Billy’s grin widened, his voice a low rumble, “That’s a pirate’s oath, right there, none finer!” One-Eyed Jack growled, “Proper words, cuts deeper’n a blade,” his eye fixed on the pair. Black Tom’s thumps synced with Killian’s steps, a steady drumbeat as he reached her.

Killian’s voice, raw and resolute, baring his soul.

Killian
Look into my soul, it’s scarred and worn,
A pirate’s life through battles torn,
But you’ve claimed me whole, my stormy queen,
With thunder’s might, the fiercest I’ve seen!
I’d sail forever, through death’s cold grin,
For you, my love, I’d always begin!

He stopped before her, his hook tracing the air near her face in a slow, reverent arc, his hand hovering over her heart, trembling faintly.

The crew held their breath, the deck falling silent save for his voice and the sea’s soft murmur. Billy whispered, “Blimey, he’s layin’ it all out,” his hands stilled. Smee’s eyes welled up, “It’s too much, lads, too much!” One-Eyed Jack nodded, “That’s a man what’s fought for ‘er, every bloody word.” Black Tom’s smirk faded to a rare, quiet respect, his knife resting idle on his knee.

Killian’s baritone filling the dawn with unshakable resolve.

Killian
Every storm I sail, I sail for you,
Every blade I swing, I swing it true,
There’s no tide I’d brave, no fight I’d dare,
Without your spark, lass, I’d not care!
Take my heart, my steel, my soul’s own hue,
Every storm I sail, I sail for you!

He pulled her close, his hand cupping her face, his hook settling at her waist, and kissed her fiercely, deep and unrelenting.

The crew erupted, Billy whooping loud enough to wake the dead, “That’s our Cap’n, sung it and sealed it!” Smee clapped wildly, nearly dropping his mop, “Grand, aye, grandest thing I ever heard!” One-Eyed Jack growled, “Proper pirate heart, that, cuts to the bone!” lifting his mug high. Black Tom thumped his barrel twice, grinning wide, a rare flash of teeth breaking his stoic mask.

Desylva melted into the kiss, her hands gripping his coat, her laugh muffled against his lips as she pulled back, whispering, “You’re mad, Killian.” He smirked, “Only for you, love.”

The Jolly Roger rocked gently beneath them, the sun climbing higher, painting the sea in molten gold. The crew's cheers settled into a warm buzz, their grog raised in silent toast. Billy bellowing, "To the Cap'n and his storm!" Smee echoing, "Aye, to 'em both!" One-Eyed Jack grunting, "Best damn pair on the seas," and Black Tom thumping once more, the rhythm fading into the morning.

Their song hung in the air, a testament to a bond forged in storm and steel, unshaken by any unseen foe, as Killian and Desylva stood entwined, the dawn their witness.

Two days later

The Jolly Roger drifted under a starlit sky, the sea lapping lazily against the hull as the crew sprawled across the deck, their tankards half-empty and their spirits lower still. The air was thick with the scent of salt and stale rum, the ship's gentle rocking a dull rhythm that matched their grumbling.

Billy kicked a barrel, his voice sharp as he barked, "Days o' nothin' but fish and flat seas, where's the plunder, Cap'n? Where's the fight?" The men muttered agreement, their eyes darting to the helm where Killian stood, his silhouette framed against the night, Desylva at his side leaning on the rail.

Killian turned, his hook glinting as he rested it on the wheel, his hand brushing Desylva's arm. "You want a fight, Billy? Take it up with the wind, it's been too bloody calm for my likin' too," he growled, though a smirk tugged at his lips. Desylva straightened, her gray eyes narrowing as she shot back, "Calm's my doing, love, you'd rather I call a gale to drown us all?"

The crew chuckled, but the tension lingered. Smee piped up, scratching his beard, "Ain't no storm we fear, lass, but this quiet's killin' us. Give us somethin', a tale, a scrap, anythin'!"

"Somethin', eh?" Killian stepped forward, his coat swishing as he descended to the deck, the crew parting like waves before him. He clapped a hand on Smee's shoulder, his voice dropping low and teasing, "Shall storm and I spin a yarn?" The men perked up, tankards clinking as they shouted, "Aye, Cap'n!" and "Sing us a shanty, Desylva!" She smirked, folding her arms, "Only if you sing with me, Killian, I ain't carryin' this crew's spirits alone." The challenge hung in the air, her magic humming faintly, a breeze rustling the sails as if daring him to refuse.

Killian laughed, a deep, rolling sound that cut through the night. "A duet, then, you'll not outshine me, lass." He strode back to the helm, the crew scrambling to gather round, their grumbles replaced by eager grins. "But if I'm to sing, you dogs best join in, raise your voices or I'll raise me hook!"

The men roared approval, some mock-saluting as they settled in, eyes bright with anticipation. Desylva tilted her head, her voice soft but edged, "Better make it good, love, or I'll whip up a squall to match their mood."

The sea stirred slightly, a ripple of her power, as Killian's gaze locked with hers, a spark of mischief igniting between them.

The crew's restlessness shifted to excitement, their shouts of "Sing, Cap'n! Sing, lass!" echoing across the deck.

Killian moved behind Desylva at the helm, his presence warm and commanding as he leaned in close, his hand settling on her waist, his hook resting lightly near the wheel. "Let's give 'em a tale o' the sea, eh?" he murmured, his breath tickling her ear, the ship steady beneath them. She nodded, a smile playing on her lips as the breeze sharpened, her magic ready to weave with his words.

The crew hushed, their spirits teetering on the edge of the performance to come. Billy clapped his hands, breaking the quiet, "On with it, then!"

The Jolly Roger swayed gently under a starlit sky, the sea lapping soft and calm against the hull, whispering in anticipation as the crew leaned in, tankards raised.

Killian pressed closer to Desylva, his chest against her back, his hand resting on her waist, his hook glinting faintly near the wheel, his voice dropping to a soft, intimate growl as he prepared to sing. He leaned in close. His breath warmed her ear as he began singing softly, his voice rich and low.

Killian
I'll show you lass, a stormy new sea,
Where waves do crash and winds run free,
With hook in hand, I'll carve the way,
Through tempest's roar, we'll sail today!

He swayed with her, his chest pressed to her back, the ship rocking slightly as the crew turned from their posts, tankards in hand, drawn by the melody. Desylva turned her head slightly, her gray eyes catching his as she joined in, her voice weaving into his.

Desylva
A thrilling tide, where lightning gleams,
I'll call the gale to chase our dreams,
The skies will dance, the thunder sing,
A pirate's life with storm I bring!

She raised her arms, stepping forward from his hold, and the breeze sharpened, clouds gathering overhead as a soft rain began to fall, her storm magic answering their song.

The crew whooped as she spun back to Killian, her fingers trailing his chest. He caught her waist again, pulling her close as they sang together.

Both
A stormy new sea, a wild horizon gleams,
With every swell and squall, we're livin' pirate dreams,
No ports can hold us, no chains can bind our spree,
A stormy new sea, just you and me!

Their voices harmonized, their steps a swaying dance away from the helm, the ship tilting with the rising waves. The rain pattered lightly, a tender mist cloaking them, the crew swaying along, caught in the romance. Killian's voice rose again.

Killian
Through cursed isles, with you I roam,
The Jolly Roger's our true home,
Your eyes like stars, your tempest's might,
Guide me through the darkest night!

He strode to the rail, gazing out as if spotting those isles, then turned to her with a smoldering look, his hook resting at her hip. The crew clapped, some whistling as he pulled her back into his arms. Desylva countered.

Desylva
With every clash, our hearts entwine,
Your hook, my storm, a fate divine,
The seas may rage, the skies may fall,
Together, love, we'll conquer all!

She pressed a hand to his chest, her magic flaring as thunder rumbled low, the sea swelling beneath them. Killian lifted her briefly, her legs kicking playfully as they spun, the rain intensifying into a steady drum, mirroring their shared heartbeat. Their voices soared together.

Both
A stormy new sea, a wild horizon gleams,
With every swell and squall, we're livin' pirate dreams,

*No ports can hold us, no chains can bi*nd our spree,
A stormy new sea, just you and me!

Killian twirled her out, then pulled her back into his arms, his hook braced against the mast as she leaned against him, their faces inches apart. The crew erupted in cheers, stomping the deck as the ship rocked in time with the song's crescendo. Desylva's magic pulsed, lightning flickering faintly in the clouds, illuminating their entwined figures.

The rain pulsed with their rhythm, a gentle curtain wrapping the Jolly Roger in a lovers' veil, the air thick with salt and their unspoken vows. The song's final notes lingered as Killian held her gaze, his hand cupping her face while she smiled, her storm magic humming softly in the air. The crew's applause grew louder, some banging mugs on barrels. The ship swayed like a cradle, waves lapping with tender insistence as her magic wove a cocoon around their performance, the night alive with their story.

Desylva gave a playful curtsy, and Killian bowed with a flourish, his hook glinting as the rain eased to a drizzle, her magic settling into a sated calm. The crew surged forward, slapping their backs and shouting praise, their spirits lifted by the duet's tale of love and adventure. The deck buzzed with laughter and chatter as Killian pulled Desylva close, planting a kiss on her lips.

The sea steadied beneath them, the clouds parting to reveal a starry sky. The Jolly Roger rocked gently, a floating stage for their shared moment, the air still humming with the echoes of their song as they stood together, basking in the crew's raucous joy. The crew's cheers still echoed as Killian stepped forward alone, leaving Desylva leaning against the mast with a smirk, the Jolly Roger steady beneath a clearing sky. He raised his hook, silencing the men with a wicked grin.

Killian (growling)
I know you dogs think piratin's a game,
But I've a plan to stake my claim,
The seas'll bow, the navies fall,
With hook and steel, I'll rule you all!

He paced the deck like a predator, his voice dark and commanding, the crew leaning in as he pointed his hook at them, promising glory. The sea began to churn, Desylva's magic stirring faintly in response to his fire, a breeze whistling through the sails as he sang of conquest.

Killian (voice booming)
So raise the red, my hearty crew,
The storm's a-comin', swift and true,
Desylva's thunder, my command,
We'll plunder rich from every land!

He leapt onto a barrel, thrusting his hook skyward as the crew echoed.

Crew (fists pounding the air)
Raise the Red!

The wind sharpened, rain slashing down as Desylva's storm magic flared, her eyes glinting with amusement from the sidelines. The ship rocked with the swelling waves, thunder rumbling low as Killian strutted, his coat billowing, rallying them with tales of plunder. The crew roared, stomping the deck, the tempest growing with Killian's bravado.

Killian (sly)
You'll see my grin when cannons roar,
I've sailed through hell and back for more,
The merchants quake, the gold's in sight,
With her wild gale, we'll strike it right!

He mimed firing a cannon, then spun to the rail, gazing out as if spotting prey, his hook slashing the air. The sea surged, waves crashing against the hull as he sang of riches. The crew cheered, some drawing cutlasses to wave,

caught in his spell. Desylva's magic lashed the air, lightning cracking overhead, illuminating his figure as he leapt down, pacing among them. The ship bucked beneath his fierce energy, rain soaking his hair.

Killian (grinning wickedly)
So raise the red, my hearty crew,
The storm's a-comin', swift and true,
Desylva's thunder, my command,
We'll plunder rich from every land!

He climbed the rigging, his hook glinting as he hung there, barking orders like a captain in battle.

Crew (fists pounding the air)
Raise the Red!

The storm hit a fever pitch, wind screaming through the night, waves pounding the ship as Desylva's power mirrored his ferocity. Thunder boomed with each beat, the deck slick with rain as they chanted, drunk on his promise of wealth. Killian's eyes locked on Desylva, a nod acknowledging her role in their reign, her smirk widening as she watched him command. He dropped to the deck.

Killian
Be prepared, you scurvy knaves,
For loot that piles in golden waves,
Her lightning cracks, my hook'll gleam,
We're the terror of the sea's dark dream!

His tone turned menacing, stalking among the crew as he painted visions of gold, his hook slashing the air like a threat. The lightning flashed rapid and wild, Desylva's magic peaking as the sea roared its approval. The crew growled along, their faces alight with greed and fear. He spun to the helm, gripping it as if steering through a gale, the ship pitching beneath him, the tempest a living beast at his command. The crew's shouts grew louder, feeding off his dark charisma.

Killian
So raise the red, you rogues, beware,
The seas'll tremble, skies'll tear,
With storm and steel, our tale's been sown,
Our names forever known!

He thrust his hook high, his voice a triumphant roar as the crew bellowed.

Crew (fists pounding the air)
Raise the Red!

The storm hit its zenith, lightning blinding the deck as waves slammed the hull, Desylva's magic unleashing a final gust before calming. He leapt to the deck with a flourish, the rain tapering off as the crew exploded into cheers, stomping and shouting his name. Desylva stepped forward, smirking as she joined him, the sea settling beneath them.

The crew surged around, slapping his back, their spirits ablaze with his pirate king's promise, the Jolly Roger steadying as the night reclaimed its calm.

Later: Killian & Desylva's Cabin

The cabin door slammed shut with a thunderous crash, the ship lurching beneath their boots as they entered. Killian tore off his coat, the heavy leather ripping free with a coarse rasp, revealing the taut, scarred expanse of his chest. Desylva flung her cloak aside, its buckles jangling as it crumpled in a heap, the fabric snagging briefly on her boot before settling in the lantern's dim glow. They kicked off their boots in a chaotic clatter, leather soles skidding across the planks, leaving scuff marks that the enchanted oak floor's runes faintly shimmered to mend, their silvery veins pulsing to restore the polish.

He shoved her against the wall, his hand clamping her wrist in a bruising grip that screamed raw intent. The sea erupted into a savage roar, waves smashing the hull as her storm magic surged, a feral tempest mirroring her unleashed desire. Her lips smashed into his, a fierce, bruising assault, her free hand ripping at his shirt as she yanked it off, exposing his sweat-slick skin to the cool air, her purr scorching his mouth, “Raised the red, eh, Captain? Let’s see ye hoist somethin’ stiffer!” His laugh was a dark, guttural growl, his hook digging into her hip, pinning her to the wall, the sharp edge biting her as he snarled back, “Got a mast primed to pierce, lass. Hope you can ride the swell!”

The ship rocked violently, wind shrieking through the night, rain hammering the deck as her gray eyes blazed, challenging him to match her fire.

He tore her at shirt with a savage jerk, revealing her flushed breasts and the glowing cursed mark beneath her sleeve, and let it fall to the floor. He spun her roughly, slamming her chest-first over the desk. Her palms slapped the enchanted oak, fingers curling into claws, the desk’s runes flaring silver to heal a splintered gouge from her nails. His hook pressed into her back while his hand unbuckled his belt, the leather snapping free with a whip-like crack, his pants slithering down to pool at his ankles, baring his hardened length. He pressed hard against her, his breath scorching her neck while he rasped, “Been teasin’ me with that storm all night, lass. Time to take your plunderin’ like a good wench!”

She threw her head back with a sharp, sultry laugh, hips grinding back against him as she shot, “Plunder me deep, love, or I’ll sink ya with a squall you’ll never outrun!” The sea swelled into a raging maelstrom, waves pounding the ship as her magic whipped the tempest into a frenzy. He ripped her pants down, baring her to him. His hook carving a jagged groove into the desk, its runes glowing to mend the splintered wood as he thrust into her with a brutal, punishing drive. Her moan ripped out, loud and ragged as his thick length speared her, stretching her wide. The thunder boomed overhead, drowning her cry as he groaned deep and primal, buried to the hilt in her tight heat.

The air crackled with sweat and raw lust, her body jolting with each of his relentless thrusts. His hips snapped forward, driving into her with a force that rocked the desk, its runes pulsing faintly to repair microfractures. His moans rough and guttural as her walls clenched around him, hot and slick. “Bloody hell, lass. You’re a wild haul,” he growled, teeth nipping her ear, “think you can weather this storm?” Her moans sharpened into piercing cries with every plunge, her nails gouging the wood, the desk’s runes shimmering to seal the scratches as she gasped, “Keep poundin’, Killian. I’m all yours!”

The ship bucked beneath them, waves crashing with brutal fury, her magic lashing the storm into a chaotic roar. Lightning flared in jagged bursts, illuminating her arched back as he slammed into her, his hook scraping her thigh, the cold metal a thrilling sting against her burning skin. Her screams echoed, raw and desperate as his thrusts grew harder, deeper, splitting her open with each merciless stroke. He moaned louder, a ragged “Des!” tearing from his throat as her pulsing heat dragged him under.

He flipped her onto her back with a feral twist, pinning her wrists above her head against the desk. His hand locked them tight as he thrust into her again, a single, savage plunge that buried him balls-deep, her scream shattering the air as her body jolted, impaled on his rigid length. “Boarded you now, love, ready for a proper pillage?” he snarled, his grin wicked as he drove into her, hips pistoning with brutal rhythm. Her moans broke into staccato wails, her legs clamping around his waist as she bucked up to meet him, gasping, “Pillage me raw, Captain, give me your full cannon!”

The ship shuddered, thunder rattling the timbers as her magic unleashed a deafening roar. Rain poured in sheets beyond the hull, wind howling as he pounded into her, his moans rising into a rough chorus with each thrust, reveling in her tight, quivering grip. His hook gouged the desk beside her, splintering wood, its runes weaving silver threads to restore the surface. Her cries turned frantic, the window rattling as water seeped through, its enchanted glass runes glowing faintly to mend a hairline crack, the storm a mirror to their wild, unbridled clash.

Their rhythm grew frenzied, a primal rut of lust and fury. His lips ravaged her throat, sucking hard enough to bruise as he growled, “Sing me a storm, wench, let’s rattle the stars!” Her scream erupted, jagged and wild as he thrust deeper, splitting her with a punishing stroke that drew a guttural moan from his chest, her soaked heat milking him relentlessly. “Keep that rhythm, love, I’m crestin’ the edge!” she cried, voice breaking into sharp gasps.

The ship rocked, waves smashing against the hull as her magic flared, lightning slashing the sky in jagged arcs. His hand gripped her hip, yanking her up to meet his brutal thrusts. Her nails raked his arms, drawing blood as the storm hit its violent peak. The desk groaned, splintering under their weight, its runes flaring to mend the cracks as they chased the brink, rain falling in a deafening deluge that drowned out all but their ragged breaths and the tempest's wrath.

Her body convulsed beneath him, a piercing scream tearing from her throat as she cried, "Killian!" Her walls spasming around him as he thrust one final, bone-deep stroke, a guttural roar ripping from his chest as he spilled into her, his moans choking off into ragged gasps as her heat pulsed around his throbbing length. The sea peaked in a deafening surge, lightning blinding the cabin as her magic unleashed a final, ferocious gust, waves slamming the hull before subsiding into a restless calm.

The storm fractured, rain easing to a faint patter as her mark dimmed. His lips softened against her neck, his breath hot and uneven as he released her wrists, his hand sliding to cradle her waist while his hook rested beside her, their sweat-slick bodies pressed together as they panted in the aftermath. The ship steadied beneath them, the weather softening with her sated breath.

As Killian's strength returned, he gathered her into his arms with a gentle grunt, her body pliant and warm against his, and carried her to the bed. They sank into the mattress, pulling the crimson linens over their damp skin, her head nestling into the crook of his shoulder, her fingers tracing idle patterns on his chest. His arm curled around her, his hook resting lightly on her hip, their legs entwining as their breaths slowed, syncing in the quiet. The bed's runes glowed faintly, mending a final nick from his hook's earlier scrape, their warmth lulling them into a deep, shared slumber, wrapped tightly in each other's arms.

The Jolly Roger swayed gently, timbers creaking a soft lullaby, the sea lapping the hull in a serene murmur as they slept, their bond a sanctuary in the fading storm.

Crew Quarters
(Simultaneous with Cabin Scene)

The ship trembled as the storm raged, the timbers creaking under the battering waves while the men clustered around a battered table, tankards sloshing with each violent pitch. Billy slammed his mug down, grinning toothily as thunder shook the walls, "Listen to that, mates. Cap'n's givin' her a real poundin'!" The crew roared with bawdy laughter, Smee wiping ale from his beard as he cackled, "Aye, and she's summonin' a gale to match, reckon they're rattlin' the planks more'n the sea!"

The wind shrieked as the storm echoed Killian and Desylva's wild fervor. Lightning flared, casting flickering shadows as the men leaned in, their voices booming over the tempest.

One-Eyed Jack, his eye glinting with wicked glee, slapped the table, "That's no scrap. Cap'n's hook's too busy buryin' treasure, and she's firin' back with thunderbolts!" Black Tom, mute but expressive, grinned wide and mimed a vigorous thrust with his hips, earning a round of hoots and cheers from the crew.

The ship lurched hard, a deafening crash of thunder sparking whistles and shouts of "Go Cap'n!!" Billy chortled, "That's Desylva for ye, whippin' up a storm to keep him honest, bet she's got him sweatin' cannonballs!"

The storm's ferocity peaked, the quarters quaking as the men traded lewd jibes, their spirits soaring despite the chaos rocking the ship around them.

(After the Cabin Scene)

The storm had dwindled to a soft drizzle, the Roger settling into a gentle sway as the crew lounged across their bunks and crates, the air still thick with the night's rowdy energy. Billy leaned back, puffing his pipe as he mused, "Well, mates, that duet turned into a proper ruckus. Cap'n and the lass gave us a tale to sing 'til the rum runs dry!"

Smee nodded, scratching his chin, "Aye, storm's hushed now, means they've knackered each other good. Never seen a tempest drop so fast after roarin' like that." The men chuckled, the faint creak of the ship beneath them a calm counterpoint to the earlier fury, their tankards near-empty but their chatter still lively.

Black Tom smirked, tapping the table with a knowing nod, his silent agreement drawing grins as he gestured a crumbling motion, implying the desk was matchwood now. One-Eyed Jack leaned forward, his voice sly, “Reckon they’ll be croakin’ shanties tomorrow, or just lickin’ their wounds? Cap’n’s hook don’t play gentle, and she’s got a bite to match!” Billy blew a smoke ring, grinning, “They’ll sing, Jack. Those two bounce back like a cannonball off steel. Bet ye a shillin’ Desylva’s brewin’ a breeze to stir us up come dawn.”

The quarters hummed with easy banter, the men wagering on how long the peace would hold before their captain and his storm lass kicked the seas into chaos again, their spirits buoyed by the night’s wild saga etched into the ship’s battered frame.

The Siren’s Heart (Day 30)

The Jolly Roger rocked gently at Siren’s Port’s weathered docks, the enchanted hull creaking under the weight of furled sails, the canvas taut against the early morning sky, streaked with clouds heavy with the promise of rain. Lanterns swung from the rigging, casting pools of golden light across the deck’s scarred planks, where seawater pooled in the grooves, reflecting the distant flicker of the port’s torchlit streets. The air carried the sharp tang of salt and tar, mingling with the faint sweetness of rum barrels stacked below. The town’s lantern-lit streets flickered in the distance.

The Shattered Hull Tavern (Early afternoon)

The Shattered Hull Tavern crouched at the edge of Siren’s Port, its weathered timbers groaning under the weight of a salt-crusted sign swaying in the briny gusts, its iron hinges creaking like a ship’s lament. Lanterns swung from blackened beams, casting a flickering amber glow across scarred tables littered with tankards and fish bones, the air thick with the tang of ale, sweat, and the sea’s restless churn beyond the warped windows. Shadows danced in the corners, where sailors and rogues whispered tales of curses and treasures, their voices a low hum beneath the crackle of a hearth spitting embers onto the stone floor.

Killian and Desylva sat at a corner table, their silhouettes framed by the firelight, his black leather coat gleaming with sea spray, her hair spilling like ink over her shoulders, her cursed mark pulsing faintly beneath her sleeve, a blue glyph sparking with restless storm magic. Across from them slouched two grizzled locals, their faces weathered as driftwood, eyes glinting with the wary cunning of men who’d sailed too long in cursed waters.

One, a wiry man with a salt-bleached beard named Tobin, leaned forward, his voice a gravelly whisper, as if the tale might summon spirits. “Ye’ve heard of the Siren’s Heart, haven’t ye? A relic from old Silas, the sorcerer what ruled these shores centuries back. They say he forged it in a storm’s fury, bindin’ its power to his will. When death came for him, he sealed it in a box carved with runes, hid it deep in the port’s bones… alleys, caverns, or worse. No one’s found it, not in three hundred years. Some call it a myth, a drunkard’s yarn, but others…” He glanced at his companion, a burly man named Gavyn, whose fingers tightened around his tankard, knuckles whitening.

Gavyn’s voice rumbled, low and heavy, his eyes darting to the tavern’s shadows. “Aye, others hunt it still, diggin’ in cellars, divin’ in reefs. The legends don’t agree on its form. Some swear it’s a ring, wrought of blackened silver, its gem a shard of storm-forged crystal, pulsin’ like the sea’s heart. Others say a gauntlet, etched with runes that burn like fire, fittin’ the hand like a second skin. Its power? That’s where tales twist. One yarn says it bends the will of any soul… king, pirate, god, or simple man… makin’ ‘em dance to the wearer’s tune. Another claims it unveils minds, lettin’ ye hear thoughts like whispers on the wind. There’s darker tales, too. Some say it curses the wearer, bindin’ their soul to Silas’s ghost, doomed to roam the port forever.” His voice dropped, the firelight catching a flicker of fear. “Whatever it is, it’s power no mortal should wield.”

Killian’s blue eyes gleamed with intrigue, his hook tapping the table with a soft clink, the sound sharp in the tavern’s din. “A ring or gauntlet, eh? Control minds or read ‘em? Sounds like a prize worth chasin’, if it’s not just tavern smoke.” His grin was roguish, but his gaze flicked to Desylva, a silent question sparking between them. “What say you, love? A relic like that could tip the scales against our foes.”

Desylva leaned forward, her storm-gray eyes narrowing, her mark sparking a faint gust that rattled the tankards, sending a chill through the air. “If it’s real, it’s dangerous. Mind control? Readin’ thoughts? I’d rather trust my storms

than a sorcerer's trinket. But if it's out there, we can't let it fall to the likes of Rumpel or Regina." Her voice was fierce, a low thunder, her hand brushing Killian's, their fingers entwining, a shared resolve igniting. "What else do the legends say? Where'd Silas hide it?"

Tobin shrugged, scratching his beard, his eyes wary. "Some say under the port, in caverns where the sea weeps. Others reckon it's in the Siren's Call, that cursed tavern where shadows move on their own. Silas was sly, his runes could trick the devil. Ye'd need more than luck to find it." Gavyn nodded, draining his tankard. "And courage. Folk who hunt it don't come back the same. If they come back at all."

Killian's grin widened, his hook glinting as he raised his mug, the ale catching the firelight. "To courage, then." He clinked mugs with Desylva, her smirk a mirror of his, her mark pulsing brighter, a faint crackle of lightning in her eyes.

They drained their drinks, the ale's bite sharp on their tongues, and rose, their boots thudding on the creaky floor as they strode out, the tavern's murmurs fading behind them.

The air hit them with a briny sting, Siren's Port's streets sprawling before them, the promise of the Siren's Heart a spark in their rogue hearts, a challenge to outwit the shadows lurking in the port's depths.

The Jolly Roger (Dusk)

The crew's restless murmurs rose like a tide, their boots scuffing the deck as they awaited their captain and his tempest, their eyes darting to the town's shadowy skyline, where a single dark cloud loomed, its edges pulsing with an unnatural violet glow, a sinister hum vibrating through the humid air.

Smee paced the deck, his hands wringing his hat, his face flushed with worry, sweat beading on his brow despite the evening's chill. "Should've been back by now! Hours it's been since they went into that cursed port. Somethin's amiss, I tell ye. Cutthroats, sorcerers, or worse in them alleys!" His voice cracked, high and frantic, his eyes darting to the taverns' distant glow, his mind conjuring visions of ambushes in the port's twisting lanes, his dagger trembling in his grip.

One-Eyed Jack leaned against the mast, his leather coat creaking, his eye glinting with impatience, a smirk twisting his scarred face. "You're fussin' like a fishwife over a squall. Cap'n's got his hook, sharp enough to gut any rogue, and Desylva's storms could drown this town in a blink. They're likely hagglin' over rum or sharin' a pint in some den. They'll swagger back when they're good and ready, mark me." His gruff confidence steadied the crew, his hand resting on his cutlass, though his eye flicked to the violet-edged cloud, a flicker of unease and doubt crossing his features.

Black Tom sat cross-legged on a coil of rope, his massive frame hunched as he sharpened his cutlass with slow, deliberate strokes, the blade's edge catching the lantern light in glinting arcs. His dark eyes scanned the horizon, silent as always. A muscle twitched in his jaw as he studied the cloud's unnatural pulse, its violet glow casting eerie shadows across the dock's warped planks, heavy with menace like a predator circling its prey.

Billy perched high in the crow's nest, his wiry frame swaying with the ship's gentle roll, squinted through the dusk, his torch casting a faint glow against the darkening sky. "That ain't no natural storm!" he shouted, his voice piercing the crew's banter, pointing to the cloud as a massive lightning strike tore through it, its jagged violet arc crackling with a deafening boom that shook the docks and rattled the Jolly Roger's timbers, shaking lanterns and sending a rum bottle rolling across the deck. "Look at that beast. Fixed over the town like a curse! I'd wager my lute, they's caught in it!"

The crew froze, faces illuminated by the strike's eerie glow. Smee's paling to a ghostly white, One-Eyed Jack's smirk fading to a grim line, Black Tom's hand pausing mid-stroke, Billy's gaze locked on the cloud, now swirling with a sinister hum that vibrated through the ship's enchanted runes. "And that's no ordinary lightning," Billy urged, sliding down the rigging, his boots thudding on the deck. "It's trouble, thick as tar. We head for that cloud now, or we're leavin' 'em to the wolves!"

His words ignited the crew, Smee clutching his dagger with newfound resolve, One-Eyed Jack straightening with a growl, Black Tom sheathing his blade with a nod, their worry forging a unified charge toward the port's heart, the Jolly Roger's deck creaking as they thundered down the gangplank, the violet storm beckoning them into the fray.

Town

The crew's boots pounded the slick cobblestones. The town's labyrinthine alleys twisting before them like the veins of a sleeping beast. The violet cloud loomed overhead, its glow casting ghostly shadows across shuttered windows and rotting crates, the air thick with a metallic tang and the faint crackle of arcane energy. Distant thunder rolled, a low growl that shook the stones, while the port's usual clamor, hawkers' cries and drunken laughter, fell silent, replaced by an oppressive hush, as if the town held its breath under the storm's weight.

One-Eyed Jack took point, cutlass drawn, its blade glinting in the cloud's eerie light. His eye darted between darkened doorways and overhanging roofs where shadows seemed to writhe, scanning for any sign of an ambush. "Stay sharp, lads. This port's a den of vipers, and that cloud's no accident," he growled, voice rough as gravel. He kicked aside a splintered crate just as a cloaked figure darted into an alley, the flicker of steel in their hand sparking a fresh surge of caution. "Eyes open," he continued, "or we're gutted before we find 'em." His boots crunched over broken glass, the sound sharp in the stillness.

Black Tom flanked him, his towering silhouette a silent threat, his dark eyes scanning rooftops where the cloud's violet pulses danced across shingles, his cutlass gripped tight, its edge honed to a razor's sheen. His silence was a storm of focus, his massive hands steady, though a faint tremor betrayed his unease as the air grew colder, a chill unnatural for the humid night.

Smee trailed behind, his dagger clutched in sweaty hands, as he muttered, "Oh, Cap'n, what've ye stumbled into? Dark magic, I'll wager. Curses thicker than fog!" His voice quavered, barely audible over the wind's rising howl, carrying a strange metallic bite that stung his throat. He flinched as a gust tore through the alley, rattling shutters and sending a tattered sailcloth flapping like a ghost.

Billy led the charge, his wiry frame darting ahead, his torch casting flickering light across the cobblestones as he halted at a crooked crossroad, where the alleys branched into a maze of shadows. He pointed to a derelict tavern, The Siren's Call, its sign, a faded mermaid with hollow eyes, creaking ominously and swaying as if mocking them. Its windows scorched by lightning strikes that left blackened streaks across its warped timbers.

"There!" he hissed, his voice low but urgent, his eyes locked on the cloud, its violet heart pulsing heaviest above the tavern, its hum vibrating through the stones. "That's where the cloud is sittin' heaviest. They're trapped there, I'd bet my blade!"

The air thrummed with unnatural energy. A gust of wind carried a faint hum of magic. Desylva's familiar winds absent, a chilling sign her storm magic was bound. Smee's voice cracked, "Her gales ain't blowin'. Somethin's caged her power!" One-Eyed Jack snapped, "Quit blabberin', Smee. Move, or they're done for!"

The Siren's Call

One-Eyed Jack's boot splintered the tavern's door, the wood shattering with a crack that echoed like a cannon shot, and the crew plunged into a haze of smoke and shadow, the air thick with the scent of charred wood and dark magic. Their hearts pounding with the fear that their captain and his tempest were trapped. The tavern was dark, but a shadow moved.

A cloaked figure lunged from the gloom, a dagger flashing toward Black Tom, grazing his arm with a shallow cut, blood beading on his skin. Black Tom silently grunted, as One-Eyed Jack tackled the assailant, pinning him against a wall with a snarl. "Where's our Cap'n?" he roared, his blade at the figure's throat. The figure hissed, "Below, too late!" before vanishing in a puff of acrid purple smoke, Regina's mark unmistakable.

The tavern's interior was a ruin, overturned tables and shattered bottles glinting in the dim light, a circle of glowing runes etched into the floor, pulsing violet, Regina's mark, her purple smoke lingering in the air, and laced with Rumpelstiltskin's golden threads weaving through the shadows like a spider's web.

“Bloody hell, a trap!” Billy cursed, dodging a thread that lashed out, sparking against the wall with a hiss. Black Tom’s cutlass slashed a thread, its snap flaring like a struck match, revealing a hidden staircase descending into darkness, its steps slick with seawater and pulsing with the same violet glow.

Billy pointed, “A staircase.” Everyone looked where Billy pointed. “They’re down there, I feel it!” Smee wailed, his voice shaking as thunder roared above, the cloud’s hum intensifying, rattling the tavern’s bones.

The cloud’s thunder echoed above as One-Eyed Jack raised his blade and shouted, “For the Cap’n!” They plunged down the staircase, the air growing colder, heavier, the runes’ glow a beacon of danger. Each step deeper into the port’s underbelly was a descent into a maze of menace, the crew’s hearts pounding with the desperate resolve to save their captain and his tempest from the trap’s tightening jaws.

The staircase spiraled into a cavern beneath the tavern. Its walls slick with seawater that dripped in echoing plinks, the air thick with the briny tang of the deep and the acrid bite of dark magic. Flickering runes carved into the stone pulsed with violet light, casting writhing shadows that danced like specters across jagged stalactites.

In the cavern’s heart, Killian and Desylva stood bound, chained by golden threads that shimmered with Rumpelstiltskin’s enchantment, their glow weaving a net around the pair. Regina’s shadow serpents slithered across the floor, their scales glinting like obsidian, their hisses a venomous chorus that chilled the air. Rumpelstiltskin’s cackle echoed from the shadows, a high, mocking trill as he tightened the threads, his golden eyes glinting with malice.

Killian strained against the bonds, his hook sparking as it caught a thread, his face bloodied from a brawl, a cut above his brow oozing crimson, his black coat torn at the shoulder. “You’ll pay for this, witch!” he snarled at Regina, his voice rough with defiance, his blue eyes blazing despite the shadow venom darkening his arm, its sting burning through his veins.

Desylva stood beside him, her hair damp with sweat and salt, her storm-gray eyes blazing like a tempest caged, her cursed mark pulsing faintly, stifled by runes that glowed with dark magic. “Your runes won’t hold my storms long, Regina!” she spat, her voice a low thunder, her body tensing as she fought the threads, a faint gust stirring the cavern’s stagnant air.

Regina smirked, her purple cloak billowing as she summoned a serpent, its fangs grazing Killian’s arm, deepening the venom’s shadow, his jaw clenching in pain.

One-Eyed Jack roared, bursting into the cavern, his cutlass slashing a serpent’s head clean off, its body dissolving in a puff of smoke. “Get away from our Cap’n, you slimy curs!” he bellowed, his eye blazing with fury, his blade a silver arc in the rune-light.

“Your Captain’s finished, and his witch too,” Regina purred, her voice dripping venom, her hand weaving a spell to tighten the net.

Black Tom hurled a dagger, pinning a golden thread to the wall, its snap sending a shockwave that dimmed the runes, a faint breeze stirring as Desylva’s power flickered awake. Smee, trembling but resolute, tossed a vial of seawater from his belt, shouting, “Salt breaks magic, don’t it?” The liquid hissed on the runes, their glow faltering, Desylva’s winds surging stronger, rattling loose stones across the floor.

Regina’s smirk twisted, her voice sharp. “You think your rabble can defy me?” She summoned another serpent, its coils lunging for Billy, who dodged with a nimble leap, yelling, “Keep at the chains, Tom!” Black Tom’s massive hands tore at the golden threads, his growl matching the serpents’ hiss, his strength snapping another strand, Desylva’s eyes meeting his with a fierce nod, urging him on.

The crew’s grit clashed with the trap’s fury. One-Eyed Jack’s blade carved through another serpent, its hiss cut short. Black Tom’s strength hauling at the chains, their unity a tide against their foes’ malice. Smee’s rope tripped Regina’s step, her curse muffled as she stumbled.

The cavern quaked as Regina’s smoke surged. Rumpelstiltskin’s threads weaving a tighter net, his cackle rising, “The Siren’s Heart will be mine, and your souls with it!” But Desylva’s winds broke free, her hair whipping like a

storm cloud as she unleashed a cyclone, its roar shaking the cavern, her voice fierce, “Now, Killian!” The runes shattered in a burst of violet sparks, Killian’s hook slashing the last thread, freeing them as he pulled her close, her storm-gray eyes blazing with relief, her hand gripping his arm, steadying his venom-weakened stance.

The crew fought back-to-back, a whirlwind of steel and grit. One-eyed Jack’s blade felled another serpent, shouting, “Run, Cap’n!” as Black Tom smashed a rune with his fist, the stone cracking under his strength. Smee’s rope snared Regina’s ankle, her scream echoing as she and Rumpelstiltskin fled in a swirl of purple and gold smoke, the cavern’s ceiling groaning, stalactites trembling. Billy led the charge to the surface, yelling, “Move, or we’re buried!” as the walls shuddered, dust and pebbles raining down.

They scrambled up the collapsing staircase. Billy’s sharp eyes caught a glint in the debris. A small, rune-carved box, its blackened silver surface pulsing with a faint teal glow, etched with swirling patterns that seemed to writhe like waves. He dove to snatch it, his fingers brushing its cool, humming surface, the weight heavier than its size suggested, as if it held a storm within. He turned it in his hands, admiring its intricate carvings. A mermaid’s tail, a lightning bolt, a heart pierced by a hook. His grin boyish despite the cavern’s collapse. “What a beauty!” he muttered to himself, tucking it under his arm.

As they broke free, the violet cloud dissipated, its thunder fading into a distant growl, their escape a desperate sprint from the trap’s crumbling jaws.

The Jolly Roger

The air was heavy with the scent of tar, salt, and the faint ozone of Desylva’s returning winds. The port’s skyline faded into shadow, its lantern-lit streets quiet, the menace of the trap left behind in the cavern’s ruins. The Jolly Roger loomed at the docks, her hull a beacon of safety under a clearing sky, the violet cloud now scattered into wisps, the stars piercing through like silver blades. The ship’s runes glowed faintly, their teal light pulsing along the timbers, a heartbeat of resilience against the night’s ordeal.

Main Deck

The crew stumbled aboard, their scars told the tale… cuts from serpents, burns from runes, but their captain and his tempest were back. The deck, slick with seawater, hummed with their return, creaking under the crew’s boots, a song of survival.

Killian supported Desylva as they boarded, her hair matted with sweat and salt, her storm-gray eyes dim but defiant. Her cursed mark sparking faintly, stirring the sails with a gentle gust. His arm bore the shadow venom’s dark stain, a throbbing ache beneath his torn black coat, but his grin was roguish, his voice rough with relief. “Told you we’d outrun ‘em, love,” he murmured, his blue eyes locking with hers, a spark of their shared fire igniting. She smirked, leaning into him, her voice a low tide. “Aye, pirate, but it was close. This crew’s got more heart than Regina’s serpents.” Her hand gripped his, her warmth steadying his venom-weakened frame.

One-Eyed Jack’s gruff laugh cutting the tension, his eye glinting, “That’s the way, lads! We plucked ‘em from the devil’s jaws!” He clapped Billy’s shoulder, praising, “Sharp eyes, boy, spottin’ that staircase!” Black Tom secured the ropes, his massive hands deft despite a fresh cut on his arm, his silence a steady anchor as he nodded to Killian, a rare glint of relief in his dark eyes. Smee babbled, clutching an obsidian shard from the cavern, its edges glinting in the lantern light. “Them shadows nearly had us, Cap’n!” His voice quavered, but his grin shone with pride, his hat askew as he wiped sweat from his brow.

As they gathered on the deck, Billy leaned against the rail, his wiry frame restless, his sharp eyes narrowing as he tossed the rune-carved box between his hands, its teal glow pulsing faintly. “What happened back there, Cap’n? How’d they get the jump on you?” he asked, his voice edged with curiosity, the box’s weight a quiet mystery in his grip. Smee piped up, his hands flapping, “What was the Siren’s Heart they were after.”

Killian’s jaw tightened, his hook glinting as he leaned against a barrel, his voice low and sharp. “We heard the tale in The Shattered Hull. Silas’s relic. A ring or gauntlet, power to bend wills or read minds, hidden in a rune-box somewhere in the port. We went to the Siren’s Call chasin’ a lead, pokin’ into cellars and whisperin’ with rogues. Thought we’d outsmart the locals, find the box before it fell to the wrong hands.” He paused, his eyes flicking to

Desylva, a shadow of frustration crossing his face. “They had the same idea. Rigged the tavern with their cursed runes, ambushed us with shadows before we could blink.”

Desylva’s storm-gray eyes darkened, her hand gripping Killian’s tighter, her mark sparking a faint crackle that stirred the sails. “Their magic bound my storms, caged ‘em like a bird in a net. Coward’s work, lurin’ us then springin’ their trap. They wanted it to control the seas, maybe more, rule us all, bend every soul to their whim.” Her voice was fierce, a low thunder, her hair catching the lantern’s glow like a storm cloud. “We were diggin’ into old maps, questionin’ barkeeps, chasin’ rumors of Silas’s caverns. Thought we were close till their serpents struck.”

Killian’s grin was sly, his hook tapping the deck. “It’s power no one should wield. Not us, not them. Legends say it could make a man a god or a ghost, dependin’ on the tale.” Desylva nodded, her voice sharp. “They’d rule the seas and beyond if they got it. We can’t let that happen, not after we’ve fought their kind before.” One-Eyed Jack snorted, his hand steady on the helm, the Roger gliding free of the port’s grasp. “Bloody sorcerers, always schemin’.” Smee’s eyes widened, clutching his shard. “Glad you’re back. No relic’s worth losin’ ye!”

Killian’s arm tightened around Desylva, his whisper low yet fierce. “No trap holds us long.” She leaned into him, their victory a spark in the night, the sea their path forward.

The crew nodded, their bond tighter for the fight, the Jolly Roger’s deck a haven as they sailed into the night, the Siren’s Heart’s mystery lingering like a shadow on the horizon.

Billy leaned against the rail, the rune-carved box glinting in his hands, its teal glow casting eerie light across his freckled face.

The crew’s chatter faded as Desylva’s storm-gray eyes locked on the box, her cursed mark flaring brighter, a blue flame that sparked a gust, rattling the rigging. “Where’d you get that, Billy?” she asked, her voice sharp with suspicion, the air humming with her magic’s restless pulse.

Billy grinned, tossing the box lightly, “Snatched it from the cavern’s rubble as we ran. Found it glintin’ in the wreckage, like it was callin’ me.” His eyes bright with curiosity. Desylva, raising an eyebrow, “Can I see it?” Billy stopped tossing the box and offered it to her “Sure. Maybe you can figure how to crack it open. It’s locked tighter than a kraken’s grip.”

Desylva reached for the box, her fingers brushing its cool, humming surface, and her cursed mark erupted in a blaze of blue light, a crackle of lightning arcing from her wrist to the box’s runes. The carvings glowed brighter, the mermaid’s tail shimmering, the heart pulsing like a living thing, and with a soft click, the box sprang open, a gust of briny wind bursting forth, carrying the scent of ancient seas and ozone. The crew gasped, stepping back as the lantern light dimmed, the deck bathed in the box’s teal radiance.

Inside lay the *Siren’s Heart*. A blackened silver ring, its band etched with runes that writhed like waves, a storm-forged crystal at its center pulsing with a deep, oceanic hum, its light shifting from teal to violet, as if alive. The air thickened, the Jolly Roger’s timbers creaking as the ring’s power stirred, a whisper of voices… Silas’s, perhaps, or the sea’s… murmuring in the crew’s minds, faint but commanding, urging obedience. Desylva’s eyes widened, her mark sparking wildly, her winds surging, whipping the sails into a frenzy. “It’s real,” she breathed, her voice a mix of awe and dread. “The Heart. Its power’s alive, tryin’ to pull at us.”

Killian’s hook steadied her hand, his blue eyes narrowing as he studied the ring, its glow reflecting in his gaze. “Careful, love. That’s no trinket. It’s got Silas’s curse written all over it. I feel it, tuggin’ at my will, like a siren’s song in my head.” His voice was grim, his jaw tight as he fought the ring’s pull, the whispers urging him to claim it, to bend the crew to his command. “Close it, Des, now. We can’t let it take hold.”

She slammed the box shut, the runes dimming, the whispers fading, though the air still hummed with residual power, the sails settling as her winds calmed. Smee clutched his hat, his voice quaking. “Blimey, Cap’n, that’s the Heart, ain’t it? Could’ve turned us into puppets!” One-Eyed Jack growled, his eye fixed on the box, “Bloody thing’s trouble. Toss it overboard!” Black Tom’s silent nod agreed, his hand gripping his cutlass, ready to strike the box if it stirred again. Billy’s grin faltered. “It’s powerful, alright, but maybe we could use it. Against the Crocodile?”

Killian's grin was sharp, his hook tapping the box, its metal clinking. "Temptin', lad, but power like that's a curse dressed as a prize. We'll keep it locked till we know its game. Silas's magic don't play fair." Desylva's eyes flashed, her voice fierce. "Aye, it stays shut. No one wears it. Not us, not them. We've fought too hard to be anyone's pawn."

The crew nodded, the box's weight a shared burden, its teal glow a silent promise of danger as the Jolly Roger sailed on.

Departure (A Few Hours Later)

The Jolly Roger glided into open water, Siren's Port a fading shadow on the horizon, its lantern-lit streets swallowed by the night's embrace. The sea stretched boundless, its dark waves flecked with starlight, the air crisp with salt and ozone, the winds stirring the sails with a gentle hum. Regina and Rumpelstiltskin's ambush had crumbled, their magic no match for the crew's loyalty, the *Siren's Heart* now locked in a chest below, its whispers stilled yet its presence lingering like a sleeping storm, its power a riddle meant to be unraveled only under gentler, safer stars.

Billy stood at the bow, his wiry frame silhouetted against the starlit sea, his sharp eyes scanning the horizon, the memory of the cavern's collapse etched in his tense shoulders. "No more clouds tonight, lads," he called, his voice steady but laced with vigilance, his torch casting a faint glow across the deck. "Reckon we've earned a clear sky." The crew exhaled, their laughter rough but warm, their bond forged tighter by the fight. One-Eyed Jack tossed Smee a rag to clean his dagger, its blade still flecked with serpent ash, his gruff voice teasing, "Wipe it proper, Smee, or it'll curse ye!" Black Tom sharpened his cutlass, his massive hands steady, a nod to Killian signaling their shared triumph, the port's perils a fading echo.

Killian guided Desylva to the starboard rail, his hand brushing her cheek, her storm-gray eyes meeting his with a warmth that drowned the ordeal's chill, her hair catching the breeze like a dark wave. Her winds stirred the sails stronger now, a gentle push propelling the Roger forward, the ship responding like a living thing. "We're whole again, love," he murmured, his voice raw with relief, his hook resting at her waist, the cool metal a contrast to her warmth. She leaned into him, her fingers tracing the bandage on his arm, the shadow venom's sting fading under her touch. "Aye, pirate, thanks to the crew. And you," she replied, her voice soft but fierce, her mark sparking faintly, a gust swirling around them, carrying the scent of rain.

The crew settled around a fire pit, its flames crackling in a battered iron brazier, casting flickering light across their scarred faces. One-eyed Jack's gruff tales of serpent-slaying drew chuckles, his eye glinting with pride, while Smee babbled about dodging runes, his relief palpable. Black Tom's silence was a steady anchor, his blade's rhythmic sharpening a counterpoint to Billy's lute, its soft chords weaving a melody of survival.

The Jolly Roger sailed steady, her timbers a refuge, the sea's gentle lap a promise of peace.

A few hours later: Killian & Desylva's Cabin

The cabin glowed in the flickering dance of two enchanted glass lanterns, their rusted frames swaying with the ship's gentle roll, casting warm amber pools across the rune-carved oak walls, their teal glyphs pulsing like a heartbeat synced with the sea's rhythm. The air was thick with wet wood, briny tang, and the sharp ozone of Desylva's storm magic, her winds a low hum warming the space despite the night's chill, the sea's restless churn slapping the hull beyond the window, flecked with starlight and foam.

Killian shut the door with a heavy thud, its runes flaring teal to seal their solitude, the sound muffled by the ship's creaking timbers. Desylva stood before him. She discarded her damp cloak, letting it fall in a sodden heap, revealing her linen shirt clinging translucent to her curves, seawater outlining every line, her trousers sodden, hugging her thighs. Her dark hair fell loose, damp strands framing flushed cheeks, her storm-gray eyes softening as they met his blue gaze, raw with relief and hunger, the shadow venom's chill lingering in her trembling frame, her cursed mark sparking faintly beneath her sleeve, a blue glyph pulsing with restless storm magic.

"Thought I'd lose you to those serpents, love," he murmured, his voice a husky growl, stepping closer, his black leather coat dripping seawater that pooled on the tarred floor, glistening in the lantern's glow. His hook caught the edge of her shirt, its cool steel grazing her collarbone, sending a shiver through her. "Can't have my tempest snuffed out by a witch's trick, now can I?" His grin was roguish, laced with innuendo, his eyes glinting like the sea under moonlight.

She smirked, her fingers tugging at his coat's buttons, each pop deliberate, her touch teasing as she peeled the sodden leather away, revealing his scarred chest, muscles taut beneath salt-streaked skin. She purred, her voice a low thunder, her mark sparking a gust that rattled the charts on the desk. "As long as you are at my side, I can weather anything they throw at us." Her hands slid under his shirt, nails grazing his ribs, drawing a sharp gasp from him. Her touch igniting a fire that burned through the venom's sting. The fabric tearing slightly as she yanked it over his head, tossing it to the floor with a wet slap.

They kicked off their boots, the squelch of leather echoing, leaving wet prints that shimmered on the rug. His fingers unlaced her blouse with practiced ease, his hand brushing her skin, the linen falling like shed waves, exposing her breasts, her nipples hardening in the cool air. His hook traced her spine, its steel cool and thrilling, while his hand fondled her breast, thumb circling a peak, eliciting a soft sigh from her lips, her storm-gray eyes darkening with desire. "You're a siren yourself, Des," he teased, his voice dripping with double entendre, "luring me to wreck on your shores." Her laugh was husky, her fingers unlacing his breeches, peeling them down to reveal his arousal, her touch grazing him lightly, drawing a low groan, the ship rocking slightly as her winds stirred.

Her trousers slid down, her skin glowing in the lantern's flicker. His hook tracing her spine, its cool steel drawing a shiver, her storm-gray eyes locking on his, a tempest of desire swirling within. Her breath hitched, the ordeal's weight melting under his gaze, his blue eyes raw with relief and hunger. Her mark sparking a faint gust that rattled the window's enchanted glass. Their lips met in a hungry kiss, tasting of salt and defiance.

She pushed him toward the bed, the enchanted oak frame creaking, its runes glowing to mend a nick from his hook. He rolled her onto her back. Her hair cascaded over the bed, a dark wave against the rough sheets, her nails digging into his shoulders, leaving faint crescents as his lips trailed fire down her neck, tasting the salt and ozone on her skin, each thrust a vow of survival and love.

His hand roamed down her side, fingers tracing the curve of her hip, while his hook pinned her wrist above her head, the steel firm yet gentle, her pulse racing beneath it. "Keep teasin' me, love, and I'll make you beg for the tide," he whispered, his lips brushing her ear, his breath hot, sending a shiver through her. His hand slid lower, fingers fondling her entry, teasing her slick warmth, circling with deliberate slowness, her hips arching into his touch, a gasp escaping as her mark flared, a gust rattling the lanterns, their light flickering.

Her eyes blazed, her voice a seductive challenge. "You think you've got me anchored, Captain?" With a swift twist, she flipped him onto his back, the mattress yielding under his weight, runes flaring to heal a scratch from his hook. She straddled him, her thighs gripping his hips, her dark hair cascading like a storm cloud, her cursed mark pulsing blue. Her hands caressed his arousal, fingers stroking its length, teasing the tip with a gentle squeeze, drawing a shuddering moan from him, his blue eyes half-lidded with pleasure. "My turn to steer, pirate," she purred, guiding him to her entry, holding him as she lowered herself, sliding down slowly, her warmth enveloping him inch by inch, a sigh spilling from her lips as she pressed down, his moan raw as her weight settled, the ship lurching with a sudden squall, waves crashing louder outside.

She rode him, hips rolling with a fierce grace, her hands braced on his chest, nails digging faint crescents, her storm-gray eyes locked on his, her winds howling through the rigging, rain pelting the deck in sheets. The Roger rocked wildly, timbers groaning, runes glowing brighter to steady the hull, the stern window's glass shimmering as it mended a crack from the storm's force. "Des," he groaned, his hand gripping her hip, guiding her rhythm, his hook tracing her thigh, its steel sparking desire. She leaned down, kissing him fiercely, tongues tangling, tasting salt and defiance, her sighs mingling with his gasps, thunder rumbling outside as her mark flared, lightning streaking the sky.

With a growl, he flipped her onto her back, the bed creaking, runes flaring to mend a gouge from his hook. He hovered above her, his lips trailing fire down her neck, nipping her collarbone, his hand fondling her breast, squeezing gently, drawing a moan. "Time for me to take the helm, love," he rasped, his voice thick with innuendo, his blue eyes burning. He teased her entry, rubbing his tip against her slick warmth, slow and torturous, her hips arching, a pleading gasp escaping as her mark sparked, a gust shaking the cabin. He entered her slowly, a tender, deliberate push, filling her. Her warmth enveloping him, her inner walls pulsing around him, a cry breaking from her throat as the ship pitched, waves crashing against the hull in a rhythmic roar, rain lashing the window.

Their rhythm built, with the ship's sway, timbers groaning under a sudden squall summoned by her magic. His thrusts deepening, forceful yet controlled, her legs wrapping around him, pulling him closer, her nails raking his

back, leaving red trails that faded under her touch. The storm outside surged, lightning illuminating their entwined forms in jagged flashes, the Roger rolling with their urgency, its runes pulsing to mend a splintered crack in the desk. “Harder, Killian,” she gasped, her voice a desperate spark, that lit the air, her winds surging, a gentle cyclone swirling around them, scattering charts across the desk with a rustle. Her mark blazed blue, sparking where their skin met, heightening every thrust. He obliged, thrusting hard, each motion a vow, his growl weaving with her moans, the air prickling with static, sails flapping wildly above.

The ship pitched wildly, sails flapping as her winds howled through the rigging, rain pelting the deck in sheets, lightning streaking beyond the window, illuminating their entwined forms in jagged flashes. Their pace quickened, her moans weaving with the storm’s roar, the air prickling with static as thunder shook the cabin, the Jolly Roger rolling with the swelling waves, its runes glowing brighter to steady the hull. Killian’s growl was low, his hand gripping her hip, his hook bracing the bed’s frame, sinking faintly into the enchanted oak, its runes flaring to mend the gouge.

Her climax crashed like a tidal wave. Her body arching, inner muscles clamping onto him in fierce, rhythmic pulses, a primal cry tearing from her throat, her storm-gray eyes blazing with ecstasy, jagged lightning arcs sparking from her fingertips, singeing the air with ozone, her mark erupting in a brilliant blue blaze that lit the cabin, casting their shadows on the walls. The storm roared, a thunderbolt splitting the sky, its boom rattling the hull, waves pounding the ship, the stern window’s runes glowing to seal a fresh crack, the bed’s frame creaking as runes mended a gouge from her thrashing dagger. Her gasps melted into the gale’s howl, her body trembling, sweat glistening on her skin, her hair splaying across the crimson linens like a dark tide.

His release followed, spurred by her pulsing warmth, his thrusts quickening, a searing flood surging through him, each pulse a primal wave that tore a guttural roar from his throat, his blue eyes locked on hers in raw triumph and love, his hand gripping her hip with bruising force, his hook sinking faintly into the bedframe, runes flaring to heal the nick. Sweat and seawater streamed down his brow, his chest heaving, the storm peaking outside, thunder echoing his pulse, waves crashing in rhythm, the Roger’s timbers groaning as if sharing his release, the window’s glass shimmering to mend another crack.

They collapsed, breathless, the seas calmed, the Jolly Roger settling into a soft roll, the storm’s echoes fading into a gentle lap of waves. Her body nestled against his, her hair clung to her flushed skin, her storm-gray eyes half-closed, sweat glistening along her brow, her mark’s glow softening to a gentle pulse, as she brushed his lips with a tender kiss, the weather easing with her sigh. He sank beside her, his chest heaving, his hook resting across her waist, cool against her fevered skin.

Her fingers tracing his scar from the shadow serpent, now fading under her touch. His lips brushing her forehead, his arm tightening around her. “My wild storm,” he murmured, his voice raw with adoration, kissing her forehead, his lips lingering, tasting salt and rain. “My anchor,” she whispered, her voice soft with exhaustion, a tender kiss brushing his lips, her fingers tracing his chest, entwining with his. Her smirk was playful, her winds easing to a gentle breeze, stirring the charts lightly. her hair splaying across his skin, their breaths syncing with the ship’s creak.

The Roger settled into a soft roll, the storm fading to a patter of rain, waves lapping gently, the runes’ teal glow dimming as the ship steadied, the enchanted oak a heartbeat beneath them. His hook tracing lazy circles on her hip, sparking a laugh from her. She nestling closer, her hair splaying across his chest, their breaths syncing with the ship’s creak.

The lantern’s amber glow cast shadows of their entwined forms, the Jolly Roger’s timbers a heartbeat beneath them, the sea’s song their peace. In their cabin, they were whole, their love a storm no rune could bind, a fire no shadow could quench, a haven reclaimed in the starlit night.

The Jolly Roger sailed steady through the night under the command of the Starward Compass.

Next Day (early afternoon)

The ship lay anchored in a quiet cove, her hull cradled by glassy waters that mirrored a starlit sky, the sun burning like a golden fire above, its light weaving through the sails’ edges. The air was crisp with the briny tang of the sea, softened by the earthy musk of kelp and the faint smoke of a fire pit crackling on the deck, its iron brazier spitting embers that danced upward, mingling with the stars. The ship’s runes pulsed faintly, their teal glow a steady

heartbeat along the timbers, the deck's scarred planks creaking under the crew's sprawled forms, their laughter a rough hymn to survival, echoing across the cove's stillness.

Main Deck

Killian leaned against the mainmast, his patched black coat swaying in the gentle breeze, his blue eyes tracing Desylva as she perched on a barrel, her hair catching the sunlight like a dark wave, her storm-gray eyes scanning the heavens, a faint smile curving her lips. Her cursed mark sparked softly, summoning a gentle gust that cooled the crew's aches, rustling their tattered clothes.

He joined her, his hand brushing hers, fingers entwining, his grin tired but true, the shadow venom's sting a fading ache. "We outran the storm, love," he murmured, his voice rough with relief, his hook resting at her hip, its cool steel glinting in the sunlight. She smirked, nudging him, her touch a steady anchor. "Aye, pirate, and the lads lit the way," she replied, her voice soft but fierce, her winds carrying a hint of rain, soothing the deck's scars.

One-Eyed Jack lounged by mainmast, sharing a jug of rum with Black Tom, his gruff tales of serpent-slaying drawing chuckles, his eye glinting with pride as he recounted pinning Regina's lackey. "Sliced that snake's head clean off, I did! No witch bests us!" he boasted, his laugh rumbling like distant thunder, the rum's warmth flushing his scarred face.

Black Tom nodded, his massive frame relaxed, his dark eyes reflecting the flames as he sharpened his cutlass, its rhythmic scrape a counterpoint to the crew's banter, a silent salute to their triumph. Smee sprawled on a coil of rope, spinning a nervous yarn about dodging runes, his voice high but proud. "Thought we were done for, lads, but I tossed that seawater, and poof! Runes fizzled!" His grin shone, his hands flapping, the obsidian shard tucked in his belt glinting faintly.

Billy sat cross-legged near the bow, polishing a dagger with a rag, its teal glow dim but persistent, his sharp eyes scanning the horizon, the memory of the cavern's collapse etched in his tense shoulders. "Reckon we'll crack that Heart's secret, Cap'n?" he asked, his voice edged with boyish curiosity, his lute resting beside him, its strings humming faintly in Desylva's breeze. "That ring's got power, but it's trouble, ain't it?"

Killian's grin was sly, his hook tapping the barrel. "Aye, lad, it's a storm we'll tame on our terms. Silas's magic don't scare us. Not after last night." Desylva's eyes flashed, her mark sparking. "It stays locked till we know its game. No one bends our wills," she said, her voice a low thunder, her hand tightening on Killian's.

The crew's voices wove a rhythm of rebuilding strength. The cove's stillness a reprieve, the Jolly Roger's creak a lullaby of survival.

Desylva leaned into Killian, her storm-gray eyes meeting his with quiet warmth as her fingers traced the bandage on his arm, the venom's mark fading. "They came for us, Killian," she murmured, her voice soft with gratitude, her winds stirring the sails in a gentle breath. He nodded, slipping his arm around her, his lips brushing her hair, the scent of rain and leather filling his senses. "Aye, love, they did. But we're a family. No one gets left behind. They'll always be there for us, and we'll always be there for them," he replied, kissing her gently. Killian held her close, the Jolly Roger a haven under their command.

A Visit to Māyathrall (Day 45)

The Jolly Roger lay anchored in a secluded bay, her black hull rocking gently with the tide's soft pull, a silent shadow against the midnight sea, a cradle in the dark. Her timbers creaked like old bones in the still night, each groan a low, resonant vibration that traveled through the deck planks, carrying the scent of aged oak and tar. The sea a vast mirror reflecting the moon's silver sliver, casting pale, ethereal light over the deck, where dew beaded on the planks like scattered pearls, glistening with a cold, liquid sheen that caught the faint starlight. The sky a scattering of stars that pierced the velvet sky like distant promises, their twinkling light cutting through the inky blackness, casting long, wavering shadows across the rails and coiled ropes heavy with moisture. The air was thick with the salty tang of brine and the faint, earthy whisper of nearby pines from the encircling cliffs, carrying a chill that seeped into the bones like icy fingers, the only sounds the soft lap of waves against wood, rhythmic and soothing, each slap sending

a fine mist of saltwater into the air, the occasional creak of rigging settling in the still night, like sighs from the ship's enchanted soul.

The deck was deserted save for the faint glow of a single lantern swaying from the mast, its wick flickering with a warm amber light that cast long, wavering shadows that danced like restless spirits across the dew-slick planks, the flame hissing faintly as it consumed the oil.

Crew Quarters

The crew slumbered in their hammocks, the air thick with the musty scent of unwashed bodies, salt-soaked clothes hanging from hooks, and the faint tang of rum lingering from evening toasts, the confined space amplifying every breath and rustle.

Smee's snores rumbled like distant thunder, a deep, guttural vibration that shook his hammock slightly, his round face slack in sleep, beard twitching with each exhale, drool pooling at the corner of his mouth. One-Eyed Jack muttered curses in his sleep about lost wagers, his grizzled features twisting in dream-frustration, his patch askew, revealing the scarred socket beneath, his hand clenching sporadically as if grasping phantom dice. Billy curled with his lute clutched like a teddy bear, his freckled face peaceful amid tangled blankets, breaths light and even, the instrument's strings humming faintly with the ship's motion, his small frame rising and falling like a buoy on gentle waves.

Black Tom lay still as a statue, his massive frame barely stirring, his scarred chest rising and falling in silent rhythm, eyes closed but senses ever-alert even in repose, his harpoon propped within arm's reach. “Quiet night,” Smee had grumbled before turning in, his voice hoarse from the day's yarns, “too quiet for pirates.” The others had chuckled wearily, their laughter fading into yawns, bedding down without suspicion, the dim lantern casting a warm, flickering glow over their forms, shadows playing across sweat-streaked faces and callused hands.

Quarterdeck

The wheel stood unattended, its spokes worn smooth from countless hands gripping them through storms and calm alike, the polished wood cool to the touch under the moonlight, the ship at peace under the watchful eye of the night. The air still and expectant, carrying the faint creak of the helm as waves lapped against the hull.

Killian & Desylva's Cabin

Killian and Desylva lay entwined under linens twisted into knots that mirrored their bodies' earlier fervor, the fabric damp with sweat and clinging to their skin like a second layer. The lantern's dim glow flickering across their bare skin, casting soft highlights on the curve of her hip and the scars on his chest, the air heavy with the lingering scent of rum on his breath, salt from the sea that clung to their bodies, sweat from their heated union, and jasmine oil from Desylva's skin that left a floral, exotic undertone wafting with every shift.

Killian slept deeply, his chest rising and falling steadily. Desylva’s skin flushed against his, limbs tangled in a lover's knot, the gentle rock of the ship lulling them into deep slumber. His arm draped possessively over her waist, fingers splayed against the soft curve of her hip, his hook resting harmlessly on the pillow, its steel curve glinting coldly in the lantern's faint light, his breathing steady and deep, blue eyes closed in rare, unguarded peace, stubble shadowing his jaw like a dark promise.

Desylva stirred suddenly, her body tensing like a coil under strain, her storm-gray eyes snapping open—not with the soft warmth of waking beside her pirate, but raging with an unnatural tempest, swirling vortices of lightning and thunderclouds trapped in her irises, crackling with raw, otherworldly power that lit the dim cabin in erratic blue flashes, illuminating the scattered clothes strewn across the floor like battlefield casualties and empty rum bottles on the table reflecting the glow. Her cursed mark flared to life, casting an intense blue glow that pulsed through the room, bathing the timbers in sapphire light that illuminated like a spectral lantern, and cast flickering shadows on the wooden walls, that danced wildly across the mahogany bookshelf and enchanted glass stern window, the light cold and unnatural, raising goosebumps on her bare skin. Her hair lifted slightly as static hummed in the air, crackling faintly like distant thunder, charging the atmosphere with ozone. It was as if the cabin itself stirred awake, the enchanted wood vibrating subtly in response to her power.

She rose in a trance-like state, movements fluid yet mechanical, as if pulled by invisible strings, slipping from Killian's embrace without a sound, the sheet pooling at her feet like discarded waves. She grabbed a long shirt from the chair, Killian's own, oversized and carrying his scent of leather and sea, and draped it over her curves, the fabric whispering against her body, clinging slightly to her still-damp skin from earlier sweat.

Without a word or glance back, she exited the room, her bare feet silent on the cool planks, the runed oak door creaking softly behind her, leaving Killian undisturbed in his dreams, the blue glow of her mark trailing like a spectral aura. “Des,” he murmured faintly in his sleep, shifting but not waking.

Quarter Deck

Desylva emerged from the companionway, the wooden planks cool and slick under her bare feet, each grain pressing into her soles. The night air kissing her exposed legs through the thin shirt with a chill she didn't feel, the fabric brushing her thighs with every step. The starlight cast her in a ghostly pallor, the moon's sliver glinting like tiny diamonds. Her eyes still stormed with unnatural fury, gray irises roiling like thunderheads, miniature bolts crackling within, illuminating her face in flashes that highlighted her sharp features and cast eerie shadows under her cheekbones.

Her mark flared brighter now, casting an eerie blue glow that danced across the planks like a beacon in the dark and illuminating the rails, mast, and coiled ropes near the rail, in erratic flashes that danced across the planks and dormant sails like a ghost, the light cold and pulsating, making the shadows writhe as if alive, the air around her humming with static that raised the fine hairs on her arms.

She moved with ethereal grace, steps deliberate and unhurried, her magic awakening. She conjured a breeze with an absent wave of her hand, the wind rising from nowhere, a swirling gust that rustled the rigging and carried the faint, ominous rumble of distant thunder. The air charging with ozone that tingled on the tongue. Her hair began to whip wildly around her face, flying tendrils that lashed her cheeks like black whips, carrying the scent impending rain. Her mark flared even more intensely, the blue glow illuminating her vacant expression, pulsing like a living heart that cast shifting patterns on the deck.

She headed to the helm, bare feet silent on the planks, each one leaving a faint, glowing imprint that faded slowly. The ship responding to her presence, timbers creaking faintly as if awakening from slumber, the deck vibrating slightly under her feet with a low hum. She waved her hand, directing her power toward the anchor, blue energy arcing from her fingers like lightning, tracing arcane patterns in the air that crackled and sparked, “Rise,” she whispered tonelessly, though no one heard, her voice echoing faintly in the night like a distant echo.

The massive iron chain rattled to life, links clanking as it hauled itself up from the depths with a grinding groan that echoed through the bay, water cascading from the flukes like a midnight waterfall, that splashed onto the deck in cold sprays, misting the air with salty droplets.

Another wave of her hand and the sails unfurled with a sharp snap, billowing full as the breeze strengthened into a wind, the canvas straining against invisible forces with a taut whip, the scent of canvas and tar filling the air as they caught the gust. The ship groaned as it began to move, waves churning beneath the hull with increasing force, foam flecking the surface like white lace.

She took the wheel, the runes flaring silver in response to her touch, the wood warming under her palms with a subtle vibration. Her fingers gripped the spokes with unyielding strength, steering with unnatural precision, eyes fixed on the horizon, storm raging within them, hair still flying, mark flaring and pulsing in rhythmic bursts that lit the deck like a lighthouse beacon.

The Jolly Roger glided forward under her command, through the bay's calm waters into the open sea, the wake trailing phosphorescent foam that glowed faintly in the dark.

She remained in the trance-like state, her hair flying wildly, like dark banners in the conjured wind, eyes raging with tempests, mark flaring and pulsing like a heartbeat of doom, the vessel cutting through the waves toward an unknown horizon. The deck titled as the sails caught wind, timbers creaking loudly as the Jolly Roger picked up speed, waves slapping harder against the hull with increasing force.

Killian & Desylva's Cabin

The sudden movement of the ship as it caught the open current, jolted Killian awake. His blue eyes snapping open in the dim lantern light, instincts honed by years at sea kicking in like a drawn blade. He reached instinctively for Desylva, his hand finding only cool, empty sheets where her warm body had been moments before, or so it seemed in his sleep-fogged mind.

"Des?" he murmured, voice thick and rough with sleep and confusion, sitting up quickly, the mattress shifting under him. His blue eyes scanned the cabin, the lantern's wild swing casting erratic shadows across the rumpled bed and scattered clothes.

The cabin swayed as the ship titled again, confirming the ship was under way, the stern window showing stars streaking as they moved. Sails flapping overhead, anchor chain's echo still ringing. The unnatural quiet and motion set his nerves on edge. "Desylva?" He realized she was gone, and the ship was moving without his order, a spike of concern sharpened his gaze.

“What in the bloody hells…” he growled. his voice low and urgent, hook glinting in the lantern light, concern twisting in his gut like a knotted rope, heart pounding like a war drum, with a mix of worry and readiness. He threw off the covers, swinging his legs out of bed, the cool air raising goosebumps on his bare skin that still bore some marks from the earlier passion.

His naked form moved with urgent grace as he grabbed his breeches from the floor and hastily yanked them on, the leather cool and rough against his thighs, then buckled his belt. He shrugged into his shirt, buttons fastened crookedly in his rush and threw on his coat. His boots thudded as he laced them with quick tugs, He grabbed his cutlass from the desk, the blade's weight reassuring in his hand and belted it at his hip with a metallic clink.

With a final glance at the empty bed, he burst out the door, the ship's unnatural speed adding to his unease.

Quarterdeck

Killian burst from the companionway, his boots thudding on the planks, his cutlass at his side, the wind hitting him like a slap, whipping his coat and ruffling his hair. The sails were full and taut, the ship cutting through open water under starlight, the sea's spray misting his face with salty chill. His blue eyes scanned the darkness, locking on Desylva.

She stood rigid at the wheel, her silhouette ethereal against the starry horizon and moonlight, hair whipping wildly, mark flaring blue like a lantern in fog, the wheel steady under her grip, her long shirt billowing like a ghost's shroud, hair wild in the breeze.

“Desylva!” he called, voice serious and edged with confusion and concern. He approached, “Lass, what’re you doin’? We’re sailin’. … Talk to me! Is this some spell gone wrong?”

She didn’t turn, didn’t answer, her posture rigid, eyes locked ahead with that stormy rage swirling violently in their depths, mark flaring blue, like a beacon of warning, casting erratic shadows. As he neared, he noticed the unnatural glow, the way she steered without seeing. Her stormy eyes—clouds churning, lightning flashing within—and her flaring mark, the blue glow intense and otherworldly.

“Des, snap out of it. … Something’s wrong, love. Come back to me! Whatever's pullin' you, fight it!” he said, voice softening with worry. He reached her, placing a hand on her shoulder, warm, but unresponsive. He felt the unnatural heat radiating from her mark.

Before he could say more, she spun with inhuman speed, her hand slamming into his chest like a thunderclap, eyes flashing with tempest fury. Her palm pressed firmly, a surge of power erupted, sending him flying across the deck in a blur of wind and force, his body slamming against the main mast with a bone-jarring thud that knocked the breath from his lungs, wood creaking in protest under the impact.

“Des, gods, what…” he gasped, trying to rise. She outstretched her hand, levitating him, her mark blazing brighter, blue magic humming around him like chains, lifting him effortlessly, pinning him upright against the mast, his back slamming into wood with a crack, ribs protesting.

“It's me. Love. Killian! Stop this!” he rasped, struggling against the invisible bonds. With her other hand, she unveiled a rope from the nearby rail, the line uncoiling like a serpent under her command, snaking through the air like a living thing to bind him tightly to the mast, loops wrapping his arms and torso with unyielding strength, the coarse fibers rough and biting against his skin, cutting into his arms.

“Listen to my voice, love! Whatever's got you, you're stronger!” Killian gasped, struggling against the ropes, his voice strained with concern. He'd never seen her like this, her power turned against him, his heart pounding with fear for her, not himself. She'd always been reachable, her storms calmable by his touch or words.

She turned back to the wheel, hands reclaiming the spokes, trance unbroken, eyes stormy, mark pulsing brighter, hair flying wildly, the wind howling under her command, continuing to sail the ship into the night plowing through waves that began to churn rougher.

Crew Quarters

Below deck, the motion of the ship roused the crew from their hammocks, the creak of timbers and the slap of waves against the hull pulling them from sleep like a rude awakening.

Smee bolted upright in his hammock, rubbing his eyes groggily. “What the… Why’s the ship movin'! What's the Cap'n thinkin', settin' sail in the dead o' night?” he yelped, his voice high with alarm, scrambling to his feet, boots tangling in his blanket. Billy tumbled from his hammock, hitting the deck with a yelp. “Cap’n must’ve decided on an early sail. Kinda odd even for him. But why now and what’s the rush?”

One-Eyed Jack growled from his bunk, sitting up with a curse, “Mad as a hatter. Feels like we're haulin' ass! He’s probably chasin' some ghost or treasure,” Black Tom sat silently listening to the creaks above, his dark eyes alert.

Smee scratched his beard thoughtfully. “Come to think of it, didn’t Cap’n mention somethin’ about havin’ the deck to himself and the lass for a bit o’ privacy.” One-Eyed Jack nodded and smirked "Think I heard him say he wanted to take her out for a midnight spin." Billy, yawning from his corner, propped up on an elbow. "Sounded like romantic plans.”

Smee added, “Best not interrupt if they're... occupied.” One-Eyed Jack snorted, lying back down. “Let ‘em have their moonlit romp. Last time we poked our noses in, she near blew us overboard with a glare.” Billy giggled, climbing back in. “Their *‘tactics’* sessions shake the whole Roger. … Probably why we're movin' so fast!”

Smee chuckled. “Sleep it off, boys. Cap’n knows what he's doin'.” Black Tom nodded silently, settling back without a word, his massive frame relaxing as the others muttered agreements and drifted back to sleep. One-Eyed Jack mumbled. “Wonder where we’ll end up this time?”

The ship’s motion lulling them despite the odd hour, assuming their captain's whims, drifting off amid the creaks and sways, oblivious to what was really happening on deck.

Deck (2 Hrs Later)

The Jolly Roger cut through open seas, now surrounded in a deep, unnatural fog conjured by Desylva. The mist thick and swirling like living smoke, clung to the rails and beyond like ghostly veils, visibility reduced to just the deck, obscuring the stars and horizon so Killian couldn't discern their path, sounds muffled to eerie echoes. The ship's lanterns casting eerie halos that barely pierced the veil, the sails flapping faintly in a guided wind. The air clammy and cold against the skin, carrying the metallic tang of magic. Her eyes still raged with tempests, mark flaring brighter and pulsing like a frantic blue heartbeat, that lit the fog in eerie flashes, casting shifting shadows that danced across the deck and made the rails seem to twist.

The ship arrived at its destination, slowing with a gentle groan as if exhaling, a faint bump as the keel grazed shallow sands.

With a wave of her hand, blue magic arcing like sparks, she dropped the anchor, the chain rattling down into the unseen depths with a distant splash that echoed through the fog. A flick of her wrist furled the sails with a sharp snap, canvas folding neatly like obedient wings as her wind died. Another wave unsecured the gangplank from its lashings and lowered it. Its wood thunking against an invisible dock on the unseen shore, the only sound in the oppressive quiet.

She released the wheel and approached Killian, who was still bound to the mast, his muscles strained from hours of futile struggle, ropes biting into his skin leaving red welts. “Des, my love, fight it! Whatever's got you, I'm here. We can fight this together. Come back to me! Remember our nights, our sparring fights. You're my storm, not this! You’re in there I know it.” he pleaded, voice serious and laced with fear, "I've never seen you like this. You've always come back, always let me calm the gale. Don't let it take you from me!" his voice thick with worry, concern etching deep lines on his face, his arms straining against the ropes that bit into him, his hook scraping wood uselessly in frustration, his heart twisting.

She reached him, her expression blank and distant, her eyes still stormy. mark still blazing. “Please. … Look at me, really look. It’s Killian, your pirate. … This ain't you. You're stronger than this curse or spell! … Remember us, the waves we’ve conquered. … Think of the Roger, the crew, us!” he urged softly, desperately, voice breaking with love and fear. His blue eyes locked on the storm in hers, pouring his will into the words.

She grabbed the collar of his coat with both hands, fingers clenching tight, the fabric wrinkling under her iron-strong grip, pulling him slightly forward against the ropes. He searched her eyes for any sign of recognition, as he spoke lovingly, voice softening to a tender growl, “I love you, lass. Through every storm. Every realm. … You’re my compass, my anchor. I need you. … Come back to me, Des. … Feel my heart, it's yours.”

Her eyes flashed, and she crushed her lips to his in a fierce, hard kiss, as if drawing power and strength from him like lightning grounding through a rod, the contact electric, her mouth hungry and demanding, tongue invading possessively with desperate intensity, tasting of salt and wild magic. Her body pressed flush against his bound form, breasts heaving against his chest through the thin shirt. The blue glow from her mark intensified, sending a jolt through him, energy surging between them in visible sparks that crackled like fireworks, the fog swirling wildly around them.

He instinctively kissed back, deeply, desperately, tongue tangling with hers in a passionate duel, tasting salt and storm on her lips, his unbound heart reaching hers through the connection, pouring love and will into every brush, every press, hoping to reach her core, his bound body straining toward her, the ropes creaking under the pull. “That's it, love. Take what you need. Feel me, come back,” he murmured against her mouth between breaths.

She pressed up against him fully, bodies molding through clothes, heat building despite the fog's chill. Her curves grinding into him instinctively. The kiss deepening as power flowed. His strength anchoring her. She broke the kiss abruptly, gasping. Her eyes flickered, returning to normal gray, the storm in her irises receding like clouds parting after a squall. Confusion flooded her features. “Killian?” she whispered hoarsely, voice questioning, soft and disoriented. She started blinking as if waking from a nightmare.

He sighed in profound relief, “Aye, love. It's me. … You're back. … Gods, you scared me.” She looked around the deck, hands still on his collar. "What... where are we? What happened?" Killian replied gently, "You were in some trance, love. … But you’re back now. … That's what matters."

She suddenly fell to her knees with a hand to her head, screaming as pain lanced through her, a raw, guttural, agonizing cry that echoed across the water. The ship shuddered violently, timbers groaning as if sharing her agony, waves churning briefly. Desylva collapsed forward, unconscious.

The fog lifted rapidly, revealing a mysterious island shore under starlight.

The ropes fell from Killian, recoiling neatly by the rail as they were released from her magic. He dropped to his knees, cradling her in his lap, arms wrapping tight around her form, stroking her hair with gentle fingers, his voice soft and loving, “Des, love, stay with me. You're safe, I'm here. I’ve got you. Breathe, love. Whatever it was, it's gone now. Feel my arms, hear my voice. I love you, through it all.” He held her close, his heart pounding, whispering endearments, his hook gently tracing her arm, willing her to wake.

Crew Quarters (A few minutes later)

The crew stirred fully awake. The ship's unnatural quiet and faint echo of Desylva's scream pulling them from uneasy slumber, hammocks swaying as they sat up, rubbing sleep from their eyes in the dim lantern light, the air stuffy with lantern smoke.

Smee raised an eyebrow, “What was that?” One-Eyed Jack furrowed, "Sounded like the lass." Billy smirked, “Cap’n got ‘er screaming again!” Smee, voice full of concern, “That didn’t sound like a good scream.” Billy raised an eyebrow, “Ye sure on that? Ye think you know her screams?”

Smee opened his mouth to reply but then realized that the ship had stopped. “We're not movin'. Feels like we've anchored. Felt like we sailed half the night! Where in the realms has Cap'n taken us this time? Be it treasure or trouble.” One-Eyed Jack growled, stretching his stiff back. “Feels wrong. Too still. Like we’ve washed up somewhere we shouldn’t. Probably chasin' some phantom again. … Somethin’ ain’t right. better check before we end up cursed.” Billy yawned, swinging from his hammock with a groan. “Cap’n must’ve found a spot. But it’s quiet up there. Too quiet. What if it's sirens or worse?” Black Tom nodded silently, grabbing his harpoon, his massive frame rising with quiet alertness.

Smee scratched his beard thoughtfully. “Reckon the Cap’n knows what he’s doin’. Let’s head up. See what mad realm he’s dragged us to this time.” One-Eyed Jack nodded, buckling his belt. “Aye, if it's trouble, best be ready. Last time the lass went stormy, we nearly lost the mast.” Billy yawned, stretching. "Hope we’re not at some cursed isle that he found for a lark. Let's see what fresh hell awaits." They exchanged wary glances, none of them eager, but all loyal, pulling on coats and boots and filing out.

Deck

The crew emerged from their hatch. starlight sharp overhead, the air crisp with pine and salt, cool and still with a faint, eerie whisper on the wind. The ship anchored off a mysterious moonlit island shore lined with jagged rocks and dense woods looming beyond a sandy beach, the waves lapping gently against the hull.

Their eyes first locked on Killian cradling Desylva near the mast, her head in his lap, his hand stroking her hair tenderly, whispering softly, thinking it a tender, romantic moment that made them pause, exchanging awkward glances. Smee whispered, “Shh. Look at ‘em, sweet as rum, whisperin’ secrets.” One-Eyed Jack nodded quietly, respecting the intimacy, murmuring low, “Like a lover's vigil. Best not interrupt." Billy grinned softly, “Told ya. … Bet they were stargazin’.”

One-Eyed Jack squinted at the island, jagged rocks like claws, trees twisted like tormented souls under moonlight. His eye widened in horror as he realized where they were. “Wait… that silhouette… that shore, those… by the depths, that’s Māyathrall! Why in all the hells would the Cap’n bring us here? This ain't no lover's cove. Place is cursed as a siren's song!”

The others froze and exchanged shocked glances. Smee paling, “Māyathrall? Illusion Isle? Thought it was a sailor’s yarn! Why here of all places? It’s suicide.” One-Eyed Jack nudged them urgently, voice low but sharp, panic edging in. “The Isle is poisoned. Legends say it feeds on magic, lures folk in with trances and conjures illusions that trap ye. … Not a spot for a midnight tryst! Has the Cap’n gone mad?” Billy shivered, “No wonder it's so quiet!” One-Eyed Jack grunted warily, “Dangerous ground. Why risk it? What’s Cap’n up to?”

Smee’s brow furrowed as he noticed that Desylva’s form seemed limp in Killian’s lap and Killian’s face seemed etched with worry. “Somethin’ ain’t right; Look at her, pale as a ghost, and Cap’n’s face… like he’s seen a demon.” He ran over, boots thudding, calling, “Cap’n! What happened? She alright? Looks like she’s seen the depths!”

The crew followed in a rush, clustering around. Smee knelt beside Killian. “Talk to us, Cap’n. What's goin’ on?” Killian looked up, his blue eyes shadowed with a mix of relief and worry, his hand still stoking her hair, his hook still around her waist. His voice was tight with concern "Not sure, Smee. She was in a trance. Like somethin’ possessed her. Storm in her eyes, mark blazin’. … She sailed us here, bound me to the mast when I tried to stop her. Kiss snapped her out of it, but then she screamed and collapsed. She's still out cold. Never seen her like this. I’ve always been able to reach her. To…”

Billy nodded, “Sounds like a curse or siren call.” One-Eyed Jack muttered, “Place feeds on weaknesses.” Smee's eyes widened. "A trance? Legends say this isle calls folk with magic. Maybe it got her. … Ye said the kiss snapped her out?” Killian nodded. Smee, ever the romantic, smiled and suggested, “True love’s spark. Try it again, Cap’n, might shake the last of it loose, bring her fully round.” Billy added, “Aye, true love’s stronger than illusions. Kiss her again, Cap’n!”

Killian cupped her face gently, and leaned to kiss her, soft at first then deepening with desperate love, his lips warm and insistent. A wave of true love's magic erupted, rippling out in a warm radiant shockwave that blanketed the deck in a golden glow that spread outward from the ship in every direction, rippling the water and scattering lingering fog. The air shimmering, winds stirring, the island's woods rustling as if awakening. Desylva stirred, kissing back fiercely, pulling him closer, her hands fisting his coat, the kiss intensifying with passion and relief, tongues tangling, breaths mingling.

The crew cheered raucously, Smee whooping, “That’s our Cap’n. True love conquers!” One-Eyed Jack slapping Billy’s back, “See? Stronger than any curse!” Black Tom nodding approvingly.

Killian pulled back, cupping her face in his hand, thumbs brushing her cheeks, tears of joy starting to form in his eyes. "Des, love, you're back," he whispered, voice thick with emotion, his blue eyes searching hers. Desylva blinked, realizing she was on deck, confusion furrowing her brow, no memory of the trance or journey. "Killian? What... How did I get here? The last thing I remember is falling asleep in the cabin, then nothin'. Why am I on deck?"

She sat up slowly, her hand to her head, the mark dim now. Killian helped her to her feet, his arm around her waist. his voice soft and gentle, “You were gone, lass. Somethin’ took hold. Some sorta trance. You raised the anchor, sailed us here, even bound me to the mast when I tried to stop you. Scared the hell out o' me.” His voice softened with love, hook gently tracing her arm, “But my kiss brought you back.”

She shook her head, disbelief in her gray eyes. "I... I did that? To you? Gods, Killian, I'm sorry. I don't remember any of it.” Killian pulled her close, kissing her forehead. "No apologies, love. Somethin's pullin' you here. We'll face it together."

She looked around, disoriented, then at the island. “Where are we?” Killian, for the first time since arriving, glanced shoreward, noticing the jagged cliffs and twisted trees, his face hardening, brow furrowing. Simultaneously, Killian and the crew muttered, “Māyathrall,” their voices laced with unease. "The Isle of Shadows," Killian added. Desylva frowned. "I've never heard of this place. What is it?" Killian turned back to Desylva, "Cursed place, love, full of dark legends.”

Smee explained superstitiously, “Ghosts o’ betrayed pirates, begging for release, treasures that scream when ye touch ‘em, and vanish like smoke and ash at dawn. Fool’s gold for fool souls. … Ships vanish, and souls get trapped here forever.”

One-Eyed Jack nodded and added gruffly, “Heard it calls lost souls! Drivin’ men mad with their own voices, whispering secrets, regrets, and truths they can’t bear, tricks ye into chasin’ phantoms till ye waste away or throw yerself to the rocks, or sea!” Billy softly whispered, “Illusions that feel real? Ghosts that repeat yer sins? Why drag us here? What called ye?"

Desylva's mark flared faintly, a pull tugging at her. “I… I don’t know. … But I must’ve had reason… Something over there called me here. But why?” Killian, hand steady on hers, “We’ll find out. Can’t ignore a summons like that. Could be a trap or a key.”

The crew exchanged uneasy glances. Smee whining, “Now? In the dark? Too early for ghosts, curses, and this madness, Cap’n. Sun ain’t even up!” One-Eye Jack raised his eyebrow, “Why risk it? Isle’s eaten better men! We should be sleepin' off rum, not chasin' curses.” Billy relented first, “If the lass says go…” Black Tom grunted agreement. One-Eye Jack relented, "Guess it’s better than sittin' here waitin' for ghosts."

Desylva nodded. “The gangplank’s down. That means we’re meant to investigate. Whatever pulled me wants me. Wants us. We have to see what it is.” Her hand instinctively went to grab her dagger, when it wasn’t there, she

glanced down at herself. Her eyes widened as she realized she was in nothing but Killian's oversized shirt, the hem barely reaching mid-thigh, her legs bare, no boots, no pants, no dagger at her waist.

A slow, wicked smirk curled her lips. She leaned in close to Killian, voice dropping to a husky, teasing purr meant only for him. "Well, pirate… seems you've already had your way with me once tonight. Give a girl a chance to get properly dressed before we storm the island, hmm?" Her gray eyes danced with playful heat as she trailed a finger lightly down his chest. "Don't go anywhere without me, love. I'd hate to miss the fun."

Killian's grin turned roguish, eyes darkening with appreciation. "Wouldn't dream of it, tempest," he murmured, voice low and rough. She gave him one last lingering look, full of promise, then turned and sauntered toward the companionway, the oversized shirt swaying against her thighs with every deliberate step, her bare feet padding softly on the deck.

The crew suddenly found the deck planks, the rigging, the horizon, anything, extremely fascinating. Smee coughed violently into his fist, Billy's ears went bright red and he stared intently at the deck suddenly fascinated by a knot in the wood, One-Eyed Jack cleared his throat three times in quick succession while pretending to inspect a cannon, and even Black Tom shifted his weight and looked away with deliberate slowness, his massive shoulders stiff with awkwardness. The silence was deafening, broken only by the soft lap of waves against the hull.

Killian watched her go, his gaze fixed on the confident sway of her hips, the way his shirt barely skimmed her thighs, a quiet, fierce relief settling deep in his chest. *She's back*, he thought, the knot of worry loosening. *My storm's back to herself*. A small, private smile tugged at his lips as she disappeared below deck.

A few moments passed. Billy's sharp eyes flicked toward Killian. He tilted his head, a small, mischievous smile tugging at his mouth. "Uh… Cap'n?" he said quietly, nodding toward Killian's shirt. "Your buttons are… crooked. Like, real crooked."

Killian looked down, realizing half the fastenings were done up wrong, one side higher than the other, the collar twisted slightly, the shirt gaping awkwardly in places, clearly the hasty work of someone who'd been far more focused on things other than clothing. He muttered a quiet curse under his breath, quickly undoing and re-fastening the buttons, fingers moving deftly. "Right. Thanks, lad… Can't go storming a cursed isle looking like I just rolled out of bed." He finished with a quick tug, the shirt now neat and proper, regaining some composure.

While they waited, Killian's gaze drifted toward the companionway, the worry creeping back into his expression. He spoke quietly, almost to himself, but loud enough for the crew to hear. "I'm worried about her, lads. Whatever took hold of her… it was strong. … Strong enough to sail us here… bind me like I was nothin'. … I don't know what this island's going to throw at us, but I hope to hell we can beat it. … I can't lose her."

Smee stepped closer, voice gentle but firm. "We'll beat it, Cap'n. We always do. … You've faced worse than cursed isles and come out swingin'. And she's the strongest we've ever sailed with. … Together? Ain't nothin' that can stand against the two of ye." One-Eyed Jack nodded, gruff but certain. "Aye. You've beaten curses, krakens, dark magic, and bloody Neverland itself. This place? … Just another shadow. You'll cut through it, Cap'n. You always do."

Billy grinned, trying to lighten the mood. "And if it tries any tricks, we've got the best Cap'n in all the realms and the fiercest storm-witch. … Nothing gets in your way when you're fightin' for each other." Black Tom gave a single, slow nod, his silent way of saying he agreed, that he believed in them completely.

Killian exhaled, a small, grateful smile tugging at his lips. "Thanks, lads. Means more than you know."

A few moments later, the companionway doors opened and Desylva emerged from below in her usual attire. Fitted leather pants tucked into sturdy boots, dark tunic cinched at the waist, cloak draped over her shoulders, dagger sheathed and securely belted at her waist, the hilt gleaming faintly in the starlight. Her hair was quickly tied back, though a few wild strands still escaped. She looked every bit the fierce storm-witch again. She walked straight to Killian, her gray eyes steady as they met Killian's eyes with a small, determined nod. "Right," she said, voice calm and sure. "I'm ready now."

Killian took her hand, his grip firm and protective. “Then we go together, love. … Stay sharp, lads, legends don’t lie.” He led her to the gangplank. The crew reluctantly followed, boots thudding, muttering, “Aye Cap’n…” The island's woods looming dark and its whispers growing louder in the wind.

The Island

The coarse sand of the shore crunched under their boots like brittle bones, the gangplank's wood creaking ominously behind them as the last man stepped off, the sound swallowed by the thick, oppressive silence of the island. The beach gave way quickly to dense underbrush, twisted pines looming like sentinels with gnarled branches clawing at the starry sky, rustling in a breeze that carried faint, eerie murmurs, their needles sharp and black against the moonlit backdrop, twisted roots snaking across the ground like veins.

The air was heavy with the damp scent of moss, decaying leaves, and an undercurrent of something metallic—like old blood long dried—mixed with the sharp tang of pine resin that stung the nostrils. Moonlight filtered in dappled patterns through the canopy, playing tricks on the eyes, turning roots into coiled serpents ready to trip and shadows into lurking figures that seemed to shift just out of sight.

They pushed forward along a barely visible path, overgrown with twisted vines and thorny brambles that snagged at cloaks and breeches like grasping, skeletal fingers, tearing small rips and drawing beads of blood from careless arms that stung in the chill night air. Their lanterns, held high, cast jittery pools of yellow light that danced across bark etched with faint, glowing runes, ancient symbols pulsing blue like echoes of Desylva's mark, flickering in time with her own as if the island recognized her power. Shadows danced like mocking spirits as they shared legends nervously.

Smee whispered nervously, “Illusions start soft and sweet, show ye what ye crave, then twist to nightmares, drivin’ ye mad!” One-Eyed Jack grunted, his cutlass drawn, eye scanning the darkness. “Conjures yer deepest desires fears, and darkest thoughts. Then snatches ‘em away, leavin’ ye chasin’ phantoms till ye starve! Echoes bouncin’ back, louder each time, till ye’re screamin’ to drown ‘em out.” Billy shivered, voice low, “Ghosts that look like family, whisperin’ lies, callin’ your name till ye join ‘em in the dirt!” Black Tom nodded silently, harpoon ready, his dark eyes alert to every rustle.

Smee looked around and whispered low, “And the trees move. Snare ye if ye're not watchful. Ships vanish 'cause crews enter in and never come out, turned to ghosts wanderin' the woods.” One-Eyed Jack, grumbled softly, “Legends say this was once a haven for dark sorcerers. … Cursin' any who land here. … Seein’ ghosts, souls trapped in eternal torment within illusions, whisperin' madness till ye forget the world and join 'em.” Billy, voice a mix of joy of fear added, “And forbidden artifacts that grant power but steal yer soul.”

One-Eyed Jack, eyeing the path and trees carefully, “Old sailors nicknamed this place Madness Isle. … Why here? What’s callin’ her?” Billy shivered, his voice low, "Could be tied to her mark. The isle calls to cursed ones, feeds on their power.”

Desylva's mark flared in response, its blue glow guiding them, lighting the path, her gray eyes narrowing. “It’s pulling me forward. … Like a thread in my chest.”

The whispers started softly at first, faint echoes carried on the breeze that rustled leaves overhead. For Smee, a lost love calling his name in a voice sweet as honey, promising forgiveness; for One-Eyed Jack, a betrayed comrade's accusation, the words "You left me to die" slithering through the trees; for Billy, the sound of a child's laughter turning to sobs of abandonment.

Their resolve tested as they pressed on.

Killian murmured encouragements to Desylva, “Focus on me, love. My hand in yours, that's real.” He squeezed her hand tighter, his voice low and steady. His touch warm and grounding. “Stay close, love. … Whatever whispers, they ain't got the truth of us. We’re stronger together. Remember. Us against the realms. No illusion takes you from me."

She squeezed his fingers in return, drawing strength from the contact “Aye, pirate. Your voice drowns any illusion.”

Clearing

They reached a clearing, the woods parting suddenly to reveal a cozy-looking cottage, flooded in moonlight, nestled in the center like a forgotten gem, a warm glow from mullioned windows spilling golden light, smoke curling from the chimney like a beckoning finger. Its thatched roof sagged slightly under moss, low and inviting. Its walls of weathered stone draped in ivy that rustled like whispers and glowed faintly silver. The air sweet with woodsmoke and the scent of fresh-baked bread wafting incongruously sweet, a stark contrast to the isle's dread

Smee muttered nervously as he lifted his lantern higher, the light trembling in his grip, "Ain't what I expected. Looks inviting, too inviting for this cursed Isle. Smells like me mum's kitchen. Fresh bread and cinnamon. Too good to be true." One-Eyed Jack responded with a skeptical grunt, his eye narrowed and cutlass half-drawn, voice gruff with suspicion, "Trap if I ever saw one. Who builds a home on madness isle? Bet it's an illusion waitin' to snap. Lures ye in with comfort, then twists the knife when yer guard's down."

Billy shivered, clutching his lute tighter, "Why'd she bring us to a cozy trap? Looks like a spider's web spun of dreams." Smee nodded vigorously, "Madness, pure and simple." One-Eyed Jack growled low, "Eyes open. If ye see food, don't trust it. Could be poisoned or vanish when ye bite." Black Tom grunted in agreement, harpoon ready, his massive frame a silent wall of readiness.

Desylva's mark flared brighter, blue light casting long, eerie shadows across the crew's faces, pulsing in time with a low, resonant hum emanating from ahead, like a heartbeat calling her forward. "This is it," she said, voice steady but edged with compulsion, "Why we're here. Something inside calls… we have to enter, find out what. It feels… like home but twisted … Familiar yet wrong." She headed forward, steps determined despite the uncertainty in her eyes, her cloak swirling around her legs in the breeze. Killian followed close, "Stay sharp, lads. Could be illusions. … Des, if it feels off, we turn back. No arguments."

The crew muttered amongst themselves, voices low and tense as they reluctantly followed, harpoons and blades ready, One-Eyed Jack whispering grimly, "If it's a trap, remember, aim for the eyes. First ghost gets me blade!"

As they approached, the cottage door creaked open on its own with an inviting sigh, warm golden light spilling out like a beckoning embrace, the scent of fresh bread and woodsmoke wafting stronger, curling around them like a promise.

Cabin/Cottage

As they crossed the threshold, rusted hinges groaned like a sigh of relief, or warning, releasing a puff of thick, choking dust mingled with the musty scent of aged wood, forgotten herbs. The warm golden light inside enveloping them instantly, chasing away the island's chill like a comforting embrace. The interior was dimly lit by a single, flickering candle on a scarred oak table, its flame unnaturally tall and wavering, casting long, writhing shadows, impossibly cozy, defying every dark legend, polished oak beams overhead, a hearth crackling in the corner with a fire that sprang to life as they entered, burning steady and inviting, unnatural blue and green as if fueled by magic rather than wood, the heat cloying and oppressive, raising the hairs on their necks and making sweat bead on skin despite the island's chill outside. The air was rich with cinnamon, pine, and the sweet aroma of fresh-baked bread cooling on a table laden with steaming mugs of mulled wine that smelled of cloves and honey, the steam curling upward in lazy spirals. A plush rug lay before the fire, soft underfoot like velvet moss, inviting tired feet to rest. Walls were lined with shelves of ancient dusty tomes bound in weathered leather, that seemed to whisper when brushed by air, their spines etched with runes that glowed faintly in sickly greens and purples. and glowing crystals that pulsed softly like heartbeats. Vials of swirling liquids that glowed with unnatural hues, emerald greens and pulsing crimsons, bubbling with trapped lightning that crackled silently, pulsing crimsons thick as blood that seemed to beat like hearts, and inky blacks that absorbed light like voids. Dried herbs hung from the rafters, like withered corpses, their leaves curling in eternal agony, releasing a mix of soothing scents that calmed frayed nerves despite the crew's wariness and acrid scents of nightshade and mandrake that clung to the throat.

In the center stood a massive, ancient, ornate mirror framed in twisted silver vines that seemed alive, thorns sharp and glinting, and carved with swirling storms and pirate ships in intricate detail. Its glass surface shimmering unnaturally with a silvery ripple, like disturbed water. As they gathered, the mirror reflected not the room and their images, but swirling mists that thickened and cleared in hypnotic waves, drawing eyes inexorably. The Mirror showed everyone something different.

> **Killian's visions**: his naval days dissolving into pirate fury. Milah's blood pooling on deck as Rumpelstiltskin ripped out her heart and crushed it, the loss of his hand in graphic detail, the pain lancing like fire through his arm, vengeance burning cold. Then redemption's spark. Rescuing Desylva. Her storm calming his rage in stolen nights, bodies entwined in the cabin, her nails raking his back in ecstasy, his hook tracing her curves with possessive chill, whispers of love amid gasps and moans that echoed through the ship.
>
> **The crew's flashes**: Smee's loyal heart breaking in past betrayals, One-Eyed Jack's lost eye gouged in a brutal brawl with blood pouring hot down his face, Billy's songs born from orphan loneliness on cold streets, Black Tom's mute strength forged in silent suffering, scars telling tales of torture that left him voiceless.
>
> **Desylva's Visons**: Veyra's raging seas, waves towering like mountains crashing against cliffs in explosive sprays of white foam. Her meeting Killian, him rescuing her from the rock and pulling her aboard the Jolly Roger. Their first clash of steel and magic, sparks flying as sword met lightning-charged dagger, eyes locking in raw, consuming passion, bodies slamming together amid rain-lashed decks, clothes tearing in desperate need, skin slick with rain and sweat as they claimed each other fiercely under thunder's roar.

The visons ended and the mirror went dark. Desylva approached the mirror, her mark blazing blue, syncing with the mirror's glow, her eyes widening, the scent of salt and rain suddenly filling the room, mingling with the fire's warmth. Another image of Veyra filling the mirror, an image everyone could see.

“Veyra,” she whispered, voice trembling with a mix of awe and fear, stepping closer, the glass humming with magic that vibrated through the floorboards like a distant drum. Killian tensed, hand on her shoulder, his touch firm and reassuring. “Careful, love, Mirrors like this ain’t for admirin’. Could be a trick. Stay with me.”

The crew fanned out warily. Smee sniffing the wine suspiciously, “Smells too good. Poison? Or illusion to lure us?” One-Eyed Jack fingering his dagger, “Eyes open. This ain’t no tea party. Mirror’s glowin’ like her mark. Bad sign.” Black Tom eyeing the shadows, harpoon ready, Billy gaping at the mirror, “It’s movin’. Like it's alive!”

The mirror spoke. A voice like crashing waves echoing in their minds, Desylva's deceased mother appearing in the glass, ethereal and sad, her form translucent, hair whipping in an unseen wind, eyes the same stormy gray as Desylva’s. “Daughter… the curse that marked you calls you home. The Storm Mother demands balance. Your power unbound threatens the realms. Return or lose it all.” A new vision flashed vividly.

> Veyra in turmoil, storms raging unchecked, villages flooded by monstrous waves that crashed over cliffs with bone-shattering force, lightning striking homes in explosive bursts, setting thatch ablaze in roaring fires, people screaming as gales tore roofs away, people huddling in terror, the seas boiling with unchecked fury. Then shifting to the Jolly Roger splintering in a cataclysmic storm, sails ripping like paper, crew drowning in churning depths. Smee flailing, Billy sinking, One-Eyed Jack clinging to debris; Killian fading in shadows, his form dissolving like mist, blue eyes dimming to emptiness as curses pulled him under, Desylva's screams echoing as he vanished.

“The mark grows too strong. Bind it in Veyra, or watch all you love unravel,” the apparition warned, voice laced with sorrow and urgency. Desylva gasped, hand reaching toward the glass, tears welling, “Mother? But you’re… gone. How? And these visions… They can’t be real!” The apparition nodded sadly. “An echo, child. Bound to this isle by the Storm Mother's will. The illusions here reveal truths. The mark was meant for Veyra's guardians, not wanderers.”

Desylva raised an eyebrow, her storm-gray eyes narrowing with sharp disbelief as the weight of the apparition’s words settled over her like a sudden squall. All these years, she had carried the burning conviction that Myrra had

cursed her with this mark—that cruel sorceress's final act of ownership, seared into her flesh during that desperate struggle in the tower.

The glyph on her wrist had always felt like a brand of captivity, a chain forged in shadow and malice. "Wait… you mean this mark was not from her?" she breathed, voice cracking with a mix of shock and dawning hope, her fingers instinctively tracing the glowing lines that pulsed faintly beneath her skin, warm and alive like a second heartbeat. She stared at it, her breath catching. "All these years..." she whispered, the words barely audible. "All these years I thought that mark was hers." Her hand trembled as she traced the glowing lines. "I hated her for it. Every time it flared. Every time it hurt. Every time it reminded me of the tower." Her voice cracked. "I told myself she branded me. Claimed me." The storm in her eyes flickered uncertainly. "And now you're telling me it was never hers at all?"

Silence settled across the cottage.

Killian stepped closer immediately, his hand settling over hers where it rested on the mark. His grip was warm, steady, grounding. "Love," he said quietly, blue eyes fixed on hers. "Myrra still stole years from you. She still chained you, used you, tried to make that mark a weapon." His thumb brushed gently across her knuckles. "This doesn't change what she did."

Desylva swallowed hard. Killian continued, voice low and certain. "But maybe it changes what you are."

She looked up at him.

"You spent years believing this was a curse from her." His gaze drifted to the glowing glyph pulsing beneath her skin. "But it wasn't, love. She just let you think it was. Let you carry that weight while she used it against you."

The words struck her like a wave against stone. Not Myrra's curse. Not Myrra's brand. Not Myrra's ownership. Something older. Something that had been hers long before the tower. Long before the chains. Long before the fear.

Desylva lowered her eyes to the mark again, watching its blue light pulse softly beneath her skin. "Then all this time..." she whispered, staring at the mark. "I hated this part of me because I thought it came from her."

The apparition nodded slowly, her translucent form shimmering with sorrow, the unseen wind still whipping at her ethereal hair. "The mark was always a part of you, daughter. Hidden deep under your skin, waiting. It was never meant to be visible when your powers lay dormant. It is the ancient sigil of Veyra's guardians… The Storm Mother's chosen. When Myrra grabbed your wrist while you were touching the Storm Crystal… something awakened. The two forces collided. Her dark magic tried to claim it, to twist it into a weapon of control, but it only forced the mark to the surface. It has been yours since birth."

Desylva stared down at her mark, the blue glyph flaring brighter under her gaze, sending faint sparks dancing along her fingertips like captured lightning. The revelation hit her like a breaking wave—years of resentment, of feeling violated and owned, unraveling in an instant. Killian looked from the apparition to Desylva, his blue eyes darkening with protective concern, jaw tightening as his hook shifted at his side, the cool steel glinting in the mirror's fading glow. He stepped closer, his hand brushing her arm, grounding her with his solid warmth.

The apparition sensed the rising tension in him and continued, her voice gentle yet urgent, laced with the distant roar of waves. "Your bond with the pirate weakens its chains. Love tempers the storm within you, keeps the wild power from consuming everything it touches. But you must return to Veyra to seal it properly… or the storms will consume everything. The realms. The Roger. Him." Her translucent eyes softened with sorrow. "You must choose, daughter. Power… or love."

The words hung heavy in the air, thick with the scent of brine and old magic, as the mirror's surface rippled once more, the weight of destiny pressing down on them like an oncoming gale.

Desylva turned to Killian, her storm-gray eyes swirling with conflict and deepening affection, tears glistening like captured rain on her lashes. Her voice broke, raw and trembling, as the weight of the apparition's revelation crashed over her like a breaking wave. "It's why I came… Something called me back to Veyra all this time. But I won't leave

you. There must be another way. I can't lose you… not after everything we've fought for." Her hand reached for his, fingers lacing tightly, her cursed mark pulsing warmer against his skin as if seeking his strength.

Killian cupped her face tenderly with both hand and hook, his callused thumb gently wiping away the tears tracing down her cheeks, the cool curve of his hook brushing her jaw with careful reverence. He pulled her close, forehead resting against hers, his blue eyes burning with fierce determination and love so deep it bordered on desperation. "There's always another way, love," he growled, voice low and rough, thick with emotion. "And we will find it. Together. No curse takes you from me. I'd sail through every hell, every realm, every storm the gods can throw—if it means keeping you." His breath mingled with hers, warm and rum-scented, grounding her even as the mirror's visions flickered threateningly at the edge of their sight.

The crew rallied around them like a living shield, their loyalty a tangible force in the dim cottage. Smee stepped forward first, his stout frame puffed with pride, ruddy face shining with unshed tears as he raised his mug. "We're family now! Echoes and curses be damned—we ain't lettin' no ghost or glass take ye from us!" One-Eyed Jack's gravelly voice cut in, insistent and fierce, his eye blazing as he gripped his dagger. "We've faced worse than some talkin' mirror and its tricks. Let's shatter this bloody glass and be done with it!" Billy, ever the romantic with his freckled cheeks flushed, bounced on his heels and urged eagerly, "True love beat it before, Cap'n! Kiss her again. Show the bloody illusion what real power looks like!" Smee nodded vigorously in agreement, nearly spilling his rum. "Aye, Cap'n! Break the hold with a proper smooch! We're all rootin' for ye!"

Killian and Desylva leaned closer together, their foreheads touching, the moment charged with raw romantic tension that made the air feel thicker, heavier, electric with anticipation, like ozone before a strike. His piercing blue eyes locked with her stormy gray ones, a spark of unwavering love passing between them—fierce, unbreakable, forged through blood, realms, and shared tempests— like the first distant rumble of thunder. "Yes, my love," she whispered, voice trembling with need and vulnerability, her fingers curling tighter into his coat, "kiss me. Prove it's real. Prove we're stronger than any curse."

He didn't hesitate. Killian captured her lips in a passionate kiss — soft and tender at first, almost reverent, his mouth warm and tasting of salt, aged rum, and the faint sweetness of the night air. The stubble on his jaw scraped deliciously against her softer skin as he tilted his head, deepening the kiss with fierce hunger. His hand slid into her dark hair, fingers tangling possessively, gripping just tight enough to send sparks racing down her spine. His tongue sweeping against hers in a claiming dance that drew a soft, needy moan from deep in her throat. Her arms wrapped around his neck, pulling him impossibly closer, her body pressing flush against his as her cursed mark flared bright blue between them.

As their kiss intensified, a powerful warm shockwave of true love's magic surged outward from where their lips met. It bloomed like molten sunlight pouring through their veins — a deep, enveloping heat that flooded every inch of their bodies, spreading from their joined mouths down through their chests, limbs, and fingertips in rich, golden waves. The warmth was intense yet comforting, like stepping into a sun-warmed sea after a cold swim, sinking into their bones and chasing away every lingering chill. It pulsed with living energy, raising gooseflesh across their skin while leaving a lingering, humming heat that made their hearts race faster and their bodies press even closer.

The air around them shimmered faintly with visible ripples of soft blue and gold light, carrying the clean scent of fresh rain, sea salt, and blooming night flowers. Desylva's storm magic answered instinctively, sending soft crackles of harmless blue sparks dancing along their joined bodies like living fireworks. The world narrowed to the heat of his mouth, the scrape of his stubble, the steady thunder of their heartbeats syncing together, and the overwhelming rush of pure, unbreakable love that made every curse feel distant and powerless. For a breathless moment, the chill of the cabin, the mirror's ominous glow, and the night itself seemed to hold its breath around them. Everything dissolving into the heat of their connection, true love's magic surging like a tidal wave that made the very air hum.

The crew watched in awed silence for a heartbeat before erupting into cheers, but for Killian and Desylva the sound was distant, muffled by the intimate storm they had created between them.

As they kissed, the voice in the mirror echoed once more, resonant and approving, warm as a mother's final blessing, "You have passed the test. True love defies illusion's grasp. You have my blessing, daughter… and the Storm Mother's grace." The mirror shattered in a brilliant burst of blue light, crackling shards exploding outward before dissolving like mist into harmless, sparkling motes that drifted through the air like sea foam on the wind. The

curse's hold broke with a final, sighing whisper that faded into silence, the oppressive weight lifting from the room like a storm finally spent.

The fire in the hearth died abruptly, plunging them into sudden darkness broken only by the faint blue afterglow of Desylva's mark and the distant lantern light filtering through the cracks. The cottage's lingering warmth faded to a cool, salty chill, the magic ebbing like a spent spell, leaving only the scent of smoke and sea in its wake. The crew exhaled collectively, tension breaking into relieved laughter and back-slaps as they moved toward the door.

Killian broke the kiss slowly, resting his forehead against Desylva's once more, his breath ragged, blue eyes soft with awe and love. "See, love?" he murmured, thumb stroking her cheek. "We're stronger together. Always." Desylva smiled through fresh tears, her storm settling into a gentle, contented hum as she nodded, fingers still curled in his coat. Hand in hand, with the crew clustering protectively around them, they exited the cabin hastily, stepping back into the night air where the sea whispered approval and the stars seemed a little brighter overhead. The illusion was broken. Their bond, unbreakable.

Clearing

The heavy wooden door swung shut behind them with a resounding thud that echoed like a final warning through the clearing, now cold and dim under starlight. The sound lingered in the sudden stillness, heavy and final, as if the island itself had drawn a last, reluctant breath. The cottage's warm glow — once inviting with the scent of fresh bread, spiced wine, and crackling hearth fire — extinguished like a snuffed candle, its whispers silenced forever, plunging the space into cold, starlit dimness. The comforting aromas vanished in an instant, replaced by the sharp, crisp bite of pine resin, damp earth, and salty sea mist that stung their nostrils and cooled their flushed skin. The illusions shattered completely, leaving only the chill reality of the island behind. The air grew lighter, the walls flickered once more, then dissolved into drifting motes of silver-blue light that faded on the breeze, leaving only the raw, weathered skeleton of an ancient, abandoned structure overgrown with moss and vines. The oppressive weight that had pressed on their chests lifted, the air growing lighter, fresher, as if the island had finally exhaled its long-held breath.

Desylva pulled back slightly from Killian's embrace, her storm-gray eyes wide with lingering awe and relief, her voice soft but certain as she looked up at him. "It worked… the visions lied. All of it — the pull, the threats, the fear of losing everything — it was just an illusion trying to tear us apart."

Killian smiled at her, his blue eyes warm and steady, one arm wrapped firmly around her waist as if to anchor her against any lingering shadows. He brushed a stray lock of dark hair from her face with his thumb, the callused pad gentle against her cheek. "Aye, love. Our bond's stronger than any curse, any illusion, any pull from the past. We faced it together, and we won." He leaned in, pressing a tender kiss to her forehead, his lips lingering as he breathed her in — salt, storm, and the faint trace of ozone still clinging to her skin.

The crew rallied close around them, their presence a solid wall of loyalty and relief cutting through the chill night air. Smee wiped at his eyes, muttering, "We're family now… echoes be damned." One-Eyed Jack grunted fiercely, "We've faced worse. Good riddance to that cursed glass." Billy, still buzzing with excitement, added with a grin, "True love beat it again!"

Back to Roger

Desylva leaned heavily on Killian as they made their way back along the winding forest path, her steps steadier now but still supported by his strong arm around her waist. Her cursed mark dimmed to a faint, exhausted pulse beneath her sleeve. Her voice remained soft but carried quiet certainty as she looked up at him through the dappled starlight filtering through the canopy. "That was… my past calling, trying to pull me back to Veyra. The Storm Mother, the crystal, all of it. But I choose us. Our love shattered the illusion."

He kissed her temple tenderly, his lips warm against her cool skin, his arm tightening around her as if to shield her from any lingering pull. "You won't lose me, love. We broke it together. Nothing pulls us apart — not curses, not islands, not even the stars themselves." His voice was low and fervent, rumbling through his chest where she leaned against him. She looked up at him, her gray eyes soft with lingering emotion and deep gratitude. "I felt it, Killian. The pull to return, to seal the mark in Veyra. But losing you… I couldn't bear it." He brushed another strand of hair

from her face, his hook gently curving along her jaw. “You won’t. We’re bound deeper than any mark. Wherever the winds take us, we’re together.”

The crew walked close, protective and relieved, Billy muttered, shivering, “That was too close.” Smee wiped his eyes as he remarked, "Thought we'd lose ye both to that mirror's tricks." One-Eyed Jack grunted, "Real love's stronger than any glass curse." Billy strummed a soft, triumphant note, "A tale for the ages. True love defeats the isle's madness!" Smee puffed, “Glad that's over. Illusions gave me the creeps! Felt like me old regrets were breathin’ down me neck.” One-Eyed Jack nodded, “Back to the Roger. Before more tricks show. What a night. Thought we were done for!” Billy whooping, “We won again! True love beats illusions!”

Their steps hurried through the woods, branches snapping underfoot like brittle bones, vines retreating as if afraid of their victory. The path felt lighter now, the island’s oppressive weight lifted, the eerie whispers gone, the air clearing and sweetening with every stride as they emerged onto the familiar shore.

The Jolly Roger waited like a faithful steed at anchor, her lanterns beckoning warmly through the lifting mist, black hull gleaming under starlight, the sea calm and inviting once more. Waves lapped gently against her hull in a welcoming rhythm, as if the ship herself sighed in relief at their return. The crew boarded with lighter hearts, the gangplank creaking familiarly beneath their boots, the enchanted timbers humming softly in greeting. Home. Together. Unbroken.

The Jolly Roger (Gangplank/Main Deck)

The crew boarded quickly, the gangplank creaking under their eager steps, the deck welcoming them with familiar groans of timbers and the soft slap of water below. Killian barked orders with renewed vigor, his voice carrying across the deck, "Raise the gangplank, lads! Hoist the anchor, unfurl the sails. … Let's leave this cursed rock behind before dawn brings more trouble! Smee, check the rigging. Jack, secure the hold!”

The crew obeyed with brisk efficiency and palpable relief. Smee hauled the plank with grunts, "Aye, Cap'n. Good riddance to whispers and mirrors that see too much!" One-Eyed Jack and Billy uncoiled lines, sails snapping full with a thunderous flap that caught the wind like eager wings, Black Tom heaving the anchor chain with rippling muscles, the links clanking upward in rhythmic pulls that echoed triumphantly across the water.

Killian and Desylva headed to the quarterdeck, his arm around her waist protectively, fingers splaying possessively as if to ward off any lingering shadows, her body leaning into his with a need that spoke of lingering fear and overwhelming desire. He teased playfully, voice low and roguish to chase the last of the dread, his hook tracing her side with cool intent, “Next time you want to steal the ship or bind me to the mast, love, no need to scare the hells out o’ me. Just ask nicely. I wouldn’t mind the tyin’ part again… under better circumstances. Maybe with you doin’ the bindin’ next time, silk ropes and all.”

She grabbed his collar with a smirk, pulling him down for a fierce kiss, lips crushing against his, tongues dancing passionately, her body pressing flush against his, curves molding to his hard lines in a heated claim. Her mark flared faintly in response to his heat, blue light pulsing softly as tongues tangled with desperate passion, a moan escaping her into his mouth. "Careful, pirate. Or I'll do it now, right here, let the crew watch you surrender to me." He growled into the kiss, deepening it with hungry possession, his hand fisting in her hair, hook pressing her closer till she gasped, "Tempt me, tempest. You know I love your storms. Wild and untamed, just like you."

The crew cheered louder from the main deck, Smee waving his hat and hollering, “That’s how ye break a curse!” One-Eyed Jack flashed a rare smile, “True love’s the best weapon.” Billy jumped to the rigging and yelled, “Kiss her again, Cap’n!”

Desylva whispered, “With you, pirate, no curse stands a chance. But next time I tie you up… it’ll be for fun.” He grinned, “Promise?” as he kissed her again, the stars watching.

Departure (a few moments later)

The Jolly Roger caught full wind, sailing away from the isle, cutting through waves with renewed vigor. The isle shrinking to a foreboding silhouette under the moon, the horizon swallowing its whispers, the night a bond-strengthening tale in their legend.

Next Day

The Jolly Roger lay at anchor in the sheltered embrace of a secluded cove, her black hull a sleek shadow against water that shimmered like molten gold in the slanting afternoon sun. She rocked gently with the slow, hypnotic pulse of the tide. The deck was deserted, silent save for the soft creak of rigging, the occasional drip from the anchor chain, and the faint, contented hum of the runes along the rails, glowing a gentle blue as if the ship were basking in the golden warmth, her timbers soaking up the sun like a great beast at rest.

The sea was mirror-calm, every gentle swell reflecting the sky in perfect, liquid glass, the surface so still it seemed the ocean itself had paused to breathe. The sun hung low but still fierce, its light pouring across the deck in thick, honeyed beams that turned the salt-crusted planks to warm amber and set the coiled ropes aglow with soft halos. The cove itself was breathtaking. The shore curved in a perfect crescent of pale sand, so fine it looked powdered, fringed by emerald foliage that spilled down from low cliffs and clusters of wild sea roses that nodded lazily in the breeze. Seabirds wheeled overhead, their cries distant and musical, white wings flashing against the deepening blue of the sky. The air was balmy, heavy with the clean scent of salt and sun-warmed wood, laced with the faint green perfume of the pines and flowering vines that spilled down the low cliffs encircling the bay.

Galley

The galley was awash in the rich, honeyed light of late afternoon pouring through the potholes, turning the long oak table into a slab of molten gold and setting the hanging lanterns to a soft, sleepy glow. The air was thick with the comforting aromas of fresh-baked bread, grilled fish drizzled with lemon and sea herbs, roasted root vegetables, and the deep, malty warmth of ale drawn from the tapped barrel in the corner. Plates clinked, knives scraped, and low, contented laughter filled the space as the crew sat shoulder-to-shoulder around the main table, elbows planted, devouring the meal with the hearty hunger of men who'd spent the morning under the sun.

Billy tore off a hunk of crusty bread, talking around a mouthful. "This cove is paradise. … Sand so soft you could sleep on it for a week. We shoulda stayed ashore longer." Smee nodded vigorously, cheeks bulging, foam clinging to his mustache. "The Cap'n and Miss Desylva looked ready to claim the whole beach as their own private kingdom earlier." He waggled his eyebrows, voice dropping to a theatrical whisper. "Did ya see how he was starin' at her? Like she was the only treasure left in the realms."

One-Eyed Jack snorted, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "Starin'? Mate, they were practically devourin' each other with their eyes. Bet the sand's still smokin' where they stood." Black Tom, silent as ever, simply lifted one scarred brow and took a long, deliberate pull from his tankard, the faintest upward twitch at the corner of his mouth speaking volumes. Billy grinned, leaning forward. "I'm tellin' ya, the way she smiled when he whispered somethin' in her ear? Pure lightning. Poor Cap'n never had a chance."

At a smaller table, Killian and Desylva sat close, knees brushing beneath the wood, sharing a single plate of fish and bread, their movements slow and deliberate. Killian's hand rested on her thigh, thumb tracing lazy, possessive circles through the leather of her pants, his blue eyes never leaving her face. Desylva speared a piece of fish on her dagger, offering it to him with a teasing smirk, her storm-gray eyes glinting in the warm light. "You eat like a man who's been starved," she murmured, voice low and intimate. Killian caught the bite between his teeth, lips brushing her fingers deliberately, his gaze darkening. "Starved for more than fish, love." She laughed softly, the sound rolling through the galley like distant thunder, warm and private. Her free hand slid up his chest, fingers curling into the open collar of his shirt, tugging him closer until their foreheads nearly touched. "Patience, pirate," she whispered, lips brushing his. "The afternoon's still ours."

The crew finished their meal with satisfied sighs, plates scraped clean. Smee wiped his mouth, glanced at Killian, and cleared his throat. "Uh, Cap'n? Mind if we take the skiff back ashore for a few hours? Stretch the legs some more?" One-Eyed Jack added quickly, "Won't be long. Just need a little more solid ground under the boots."

Killian's eyes flicked up, a slow, knowing grin spreading across his face. He glanced at Desylva, who gave the slightest nod, her fingers still playing with the laces of his shirt. "Go on, lads," Killian said, voice rough with amusement. "Enjoy the beach. We'll… manage without you for a while."

Billy whooped softly, already on his feet. “Bless ya, Cap’n!” Black Tom rose without a word, giving a single respectful nod. One-Eyed Jack clapped Smee on the shoulder as they filed out, boots thudding on the planks. The galley door closed behind them with a soft click, leaving only the gentle rock of the ship and the warm afternoon light.

Desylva waited exactly three heartbeats before rising from her chair. She moved with deliberate grace, hips swaying, until she stood between Killian’s knees. Slowly, she sank into his lap, straddling him, her thighs bracketing his hips, her hands sliding up his chest to frame his face. Killian’s arms went around her waist instantly, strong and possessive, pulling her flush against him, his hook cool against the small of her back, his hand splaying wide and warm across her spine.

“Alone at last,” she purred, her voice velvet and smoke, her storm-gray eyes locked on his. Killian’s gaze burned. “About damn time, love.”

She reached down, took his hook in both hands, cradling the cool steel as if it were living flesh. Her thumbs stroked along the curve, gentle, reverent, sending faint pulses of her storm magic through the metal—soft, loving currents that traveled up his arm, through his shoulder, straight to his core. Killian flinched, a sharp inhale hissing through his teeth, his hips jerking involuntarily beneath her, a low, guttural moan rumbling in his chest. “You know what that does to me,” he rasped, voice wrecked, blue eyes gone dark and molten. Desylva’s smile was wicked, triumphant. “Yes,” she whispered, leaning in until her lips brushed his ear. “I know exactly what it does.”

His arms tightened around her, crushing her against him, the steel of his hook cool and unyielding. In one fluid motion he rose, lifting her with him, her legs instinctively locking around his waist. He set her on her feet only long enough to take her hand in his as he tugged her toward the door. “Well, witch,” he growled, voice thick with hunger, “prepare to summon a maelstrom.” He dragged her out of the galley, the door banging shut behind them, the runes on the frame flaring bright blue as the ship seemed to hum in anticipation.

Killian & Desylva’s Cabin

The door clicked shut behind them with a soft, final thud, the latch catching with a metallic snick that seemed to echo their shared anticipation, the faint salt-laced breeze still whispering through the stern window. The ship rolled gently beneath them, a slow, sensual sway that matched the rising heat between them, timbers creaking low and intimate like whispered promises, each groan vibrating through the planks like the deep, the hull sighing against the water as if the Jolly Roger herself breathed in time with their rising desire. Faint rumbles of distant thunder lingered on the horizon. The air thickened with rising heat, The lantern burned low and golden, its flame dancing languidly, throwing warm, shifting pools of light across the cabin walls, empty rum bottles glinting amber, tangled sheets still rumpled and damp, the faint scent of sweat, jasmine oil, and sex hanging thick in the air like perfume. Desylva’s inner storm answering the call, a soft cool, briny breeze slipping through the open stern window to stir the heavy curtains and carry the salty tang of the sea mingled with the electric crackle of ozone that always clung to her when desire ran hot.

He turned to her the moment the door clicked shut, blue eyes smoldering with dark, patient hunger, the lantern’s low glow glinting against the sweat-slicked hollow of his throat as he stepped close—close enough that she could feel the radiant heat rolling off his body, smell the heady mix of leather, sea-salt, gunpowder, rum, and the raw, musky scent of aroused male skin—but not quite touching. He moved slowly, didn’t rush. Why rush when he could savor.

He backed her against the door with slow, deliberate menace, palm braced beside her head, hook hovering just over her hip without making contact, letting the cool steel tease the air between them. the faint metallic chill raising goosebumps along her side even before it touched, the promise of that cold bite making her pulse throb low in her belly. His body crowded hers letting the heat between them build like a gathering squall.

“You’ve been driving me mad all day, love,” he murmured, voice a low, rough velvet growl that vibrated through her chest, breath brushing hot and rum-scented against her lips, carrying the faint bite of spiced liquor and the underlying musk of his arousal. “Every time you leaned in close, every time those gray eyes promised trouble… I could feel myself getting harder, straining against the leather, aching to pin you down right there. To feel your thighs wrap around me. … Had to bite my tongue not to growl right there in front of the lads. To watch them pretended not to notice how wet you’d get,” he added, voice a rough caress that sent shivers racing down her spine.

His hook caught the edge of her cloak dragging it down her shoulders with torturous deliberation, the fabric whispering against her skin like a lover's breath, sliding over the sensitive peaks of her nipples through her shirt, the friction making them tighten further before the cloak pooled at her feet with a soft thump. The cool air rushed in, kissin her newly bared arms and throat, raising goosebumps along her flesh, but his body heat immediately pressed closer, a wall of hard muscle and raw want hovering just inches away, the scent of him enveloping her—sweat, leather, storm, and the sharp, intoxicating edge of male desire.

"That kiss on deck… the way you tasted me like you were starving… it took every ounce of control not to throw you over my shoulder right there, drag you down here, strip you bare, and bury myself so deep you'd feel me for days."

Her lips curved into a slow, wicked smile, gray eyes smouldering like storm clouds before lightning and darkening with heat as she reached for the collar of his coat, fingers deliberate and teasing. "You think you're the only one aching, pirate?" she purred, voice low and sultry, leaning in to drag the flat of her tongue along his collarbone, tasting the sharp salt of his skin mixed with the faint smokiness of gunpowder and the heady warmth of aroused flesh. She felt him shudder, felt the quick hitch in his breath, the tremor that ran through him.

Her gaze flicked down to the obvious bulge straining his breeches before sliding back up to meet his eyes. "Poor pirate," she purred, tilting her chin just enough that her mouth hovered a whisper from his. "All that restraint must be torture. I felt you thicken against my thigh when I pressed close… felt that wicked hook digging into my hip. Did you imagine pinning me against this very door? Spreading me wide and plundering me senseless? Or were you picturing something… slower? More cruel?"

His chuckle was dark, dangerous. "Cruel?" He let the hook trail feather-light along the outside of her thigh, never quite touching, just close enough to make her skin prickle. "Oh, I've got cruel in mind, tempest. Been thinking about stripping you slow, piece by piece… making you wait til you're begging for my mouth, my fingers, my anchor. Thinking about how wet you'd be by the time I finally let you have it."

She arched a brow, fingers drifting to the top button of his coat, with agonizing slowness, the leather parting with soft pops that echoed in the quiet. "Bold words for a man who's still dressed." Another button. "You talk a good game, Hook… but can you deliver?" She worked the next fastening. "Or are you all talk and no follow-through?"

She slid the coat from his shoulders, letting it drop beside her cloak with a soft thump, then yanked his shirt free over his head, exposing every inch of scarred, sun-darkened chest, palms gliding up his sides with possessive hunger. Her nails grazing his skin just enough to leave faint red trails that bloomed like secret promises, scraping over ribs and scars, drawing a low, guttural groan from deep in his chest. The warmth of his flesh contrasting the cool air.

Her touch ignited sparks that mirrored the faint thunder outside, his muscles tensing under her touch like a bowstring pulled taut, the faint tremor in his frame betraying how close he already was to losing control. "You're thicker now, aren't you, pirate?" she seductively purred, drawing a low hiss from between his teeth.

The ship rolled gently, pressing their bodies closer, the motion syncing with their rising breaths, a distant rumble of thunder answering her quickening pulse, the lantern flame flaring brighter as her magic stirred faintly in response to her arousal, casting shifting shadows across their skin that danced like flames.

His eyes flashed. His hand cupped her chin, thumb tracing her lower lip with slow, deliberate pressure, parting it slightly so he could feel the heat of her breath against the pad, the faint wetness of her tongue brushing him. "Feel for yourself, tempest. Feel how thick and hard you make me, how desperate." He caught her wrists gently and guided her hands down to the front of his breeches, bringing her hand down to press firmly against the thick ridge behind his laces. He sighed at her touch, voice dropping an octave. "That's what your teasing does to me."

Her breath hitched, but her smirk never faltered. She palmed him through the leather—thick, rigid, throbbing like a second heartbeat under her touch—and gave a slow, deliberate squeeze that made his hips jerk forward, a bead of sweat tracing down his temple to disappear into the stubble along his jaw, the faint salt of it sharp in the air.

He growled, voice rough with need, "Been throbbing since you kissed me. … That storm in your eyes calling to mine. Promising to wreck me, to milk every drop from me til I'm shaking and begging for more."

She moaned softly at the feel of him, stroking firmly through the fabric, feeling him twitch and harden further, the heat radiating through the leather like a brand, the faint dampness of precum beginning to seep through, darkening the leather in a small, telling patch. “Greedy pirate,” she teased seductively, unlacing his breeches with nimble fingers, shoving them down his hips until they pooled at his boots.

His arousal sprang free—long, thick, flushed dark at the head with veins pulsing visibly, already glistening with precum that beaded at the tip like liquid silver, the musky scent of his arousal rising sharp and heady between them, mingling with the jasmine still clinging to her skin. She wrapped her hand around him, stroking once, slow and firm from base to tip, thumb swirling over the slick head, spreading the wetness, drawing a guttural moan from deep in his chest, his muscles tensing under her touch, hips canting forward into her grip. “Look at you… so hard, so ready… leaking for me already. Does it ache, love? Wanting to sink your anchor into my wet heat, to feel me clench around you, milk you dry?”

His eyes locked on hers with burning intensity, yanking her shirt over her head in one swift motion, baring her completely to the lantern’s glow—her skin flushed and dewy, breasts heavy and full, nipples tight and dusky from arousal, begging for his mouth, the faint scent of jasmine rising from her heated skin. He bent, taking one into hot, wet suction—tongue flicking relentlessly over the peak, teeth grazing just enough to spark pain-pleasure, while his hand kneaded the other, rolling the nipple between callused fingers with firm pinches that made her gasp and arch, her back pressing against the door. His hook traced the curve of her spine, cold steel dragging slowly downward with feather-light pressure, leaving a trail of goosebumps in its wake, the chill contrasting the heat of his mouth, then hooked around her waist to pull her flush against him, the contrast of metal and skin sending electric shivers straight to her core, her thighs clenching instinctively, a fresh rush of wetness slicking her folds.

“Gods, you taste like honey,” he rasped against her breast, voice muffled but vibrating through her, switching to the other nipple with hungry fervor, sucking hard enough to draw a whimper from her lips, the wet sound obscene in the quiet cabin, the faint salt of her skin mixing with the jasmine oil. “Sweet and wild. … Dripping for me already, aren’t you? I can smell how much you want me inside you. Can practically feel how soaked you are, how ready your tight channel is to take every inch of my ship.”

Her hands tangled in his hair, pulling him closer, her breath coming in ragged pants as the ship rolled again, pressing his hardness against her thigh, the motion of the sea matching the slow grind of their hips, the faint creak of the hull echoing the growing wetness between her thighs.

They shed the rest of their clothes in a hungry, intense dance. They kicked away their boots with impatient thuds. Her fingers shoved his breeches fully off, He knelt briefly, helping her out of hers, sliding them down her legs. His lips trailing hot, open-mouthed kisses along her inner thigh, tongue flicking dangerously close to her core, inhaling her musky arousal that made his head spin, the scent of her filling his lungs like a drug. Both naked now, skin against skin, heat against heat, the air charged with their mingled scents—sweat, jasmine, rum, and raw primal desire—the lantern light painting their bodies in shifting gold and shadow.

The ship rolled gently but insistently, pressing them closer, the motion of the sea matching the slow grind of their hips, a distant rumble of thunder answering her quickening pulse, the lantern flame flaring brighter as her magic stirred faintly. Her hands roamed with possessive need, nails raking down his back in red lines that stung deliciously, fingers digging into the firm muscle of his ass, urging him tighter against her, feeling his length throb hot and heavy between them, the slick heat of her arousal coating his shaft where it pressed against her belly.

He smirked, “Tell me, love… How wet are you right now, thinking about what I’m going to do to you now that our clothes are gone?” His eyes locked on hers. “Feel for yourself, pirate,” she requested, voice husky. “Been aching since you growled my name on deck.”

He slid his hand between her thighs, finding her drenched, swollen, and aching for him. Her folds slick and parting easily for him—two fingers slipping inside her tight heat with a wet slide, curling to stroke that ridged spot that made her knees buckle and a sharp moan escape her lips, her walls fluttering around him. “So wet, love,” he rasped against her throat, teeth grazing her pulse point hard enough to leave a mark, tongue soothing the sting, tasting the salt of her skin. He pushed his fingers deeper into her. “All this from kissin’ me on deck? Or did bindin’ me to the mast last night get you this wet, imagin’ me at your mercy?” She moaned, hips rocking into his hand, as his fingers worked inside her, the slick sounds filling the cabin, her arousal coating his fingers in glossy warmth, the scent of her rising sharp and intoxicating.

“Both,” she breathed, voice trembling with need, her hand wrapping around his length again—stroking firm and slow, thumb pressing into the sensitive underside, feeling him pulse and leak more precum that slicked her palm. “Seeing you helpless… knowing I could do anything to you… it made me ache, made me want to ride you right there.” Her free hand cupped his sac, rolling gently, nails scraping lightly over the sensitive skin, drawing another ragged groan from him, his hips bucking into her grip, the faint slap of skin on skin joining the creak of the ship.

His restraint frayed; fingers thrusting deeper, scissoring to stretch her, thumb circling her clit in relentless, slick spirals that had her whimpering, legs trembling, the wet squelch of his fingers inside her filling the cabin. “Drenched already, aren’t you?” he growled, nipping her earlobe, teeth grazing the soft flesh. “Like the sea herself, wet and ready for her pirate to plunder… to fill you till you overflow, till you’re dripping all over me.”

She cried out softly, head falling back against the wall, the wood cool and unyielding behind her, the faint grain pressing into her back like a lover’s firm grip. He fingered her a little longer, then withdrew his fingers, slick with her arousal, and brought them to her lips. “Taste how much you want me,” he commanded softly. She sucked them clean, tongue swirling around his digits, eyes locked on his—dark, hungry, loving. The sight snapped something in him. “Then stop playing and plunder me, Killian—now.” Killian’s growl was pure hunger. “With pleasure, love… you have no idea how much I’ve been looking forward to this.”

He backed her fully against the wall, the rough timbers pressing into her back like a lover's firm grip, lifting one thigh to hook around his hip, her wetness coating his length as he nudged her entrance. The broad head parted her folds slowly, teasing her clit with slick pressure before pressing in—just the tip at first, stretching her open with exquisite burn, her walls clenching greedily around the intrusion. “Feel that?” he whispered, voice strained, inching deeper with torturous control, the heat and tightness of her enveloping him inch by inch, the wet slide loud in the quiet cabin. “You're so tight, so wet for me.”

Her head fell back against the planks, a low, needy whine escaping her. “Killian… please…” She gasped, nails digging into his shoulders, the stretch a delicious ache that made her core throb, the ship rolling to press him deeper, a low groan of timbers matching her moan. He entered her fully in one long, smooth thrust, burying himself to the hilt with a shared groan—his low and primal, hers high and broken—the sensation of him filling her completely, stretching her walls, sending sparks of pleasure radiating through her body. Her tight, wet heat enveloping him completely.

He stayed still a moment, letting her adjust, forehead pressed to hers, breaths mingling hot and ragged, feeling every flutter and clench around him, the ship rolling to press him deeper. Then he began to move—slow, deep rolls of his hips, dragging out every inch with a slick slide before plunging back in, grinding against her clit with each stroke, the rhythm building like a gathering storm, the wet slap of their bodies echoing softly.

Outside, thunder rumbled low, the ship groaning as waves lapped harder, mirroring her rising passion.

“Killian…” she moaned, hips rising to meet him, the wall hard at her back, his body a solid, thrusting force. “Take me in, love!” he growled against her ear, voice rough with pleasure. “Feel every thick inch of me inside you… stretchin’ you… claimin’ you.” She clung to him, nails digging into his shoulders, hips rising to meet every thrust. “Yes. Oh gods, yes. … Deeper, love… harder…”

He obliged, pace quickening, thrusts growing sharper, the wet slap of their bodies echoing in the small cabin. The ship rocked in time with them, waves slapping the hull, timbers groaning as if the Jolly Roger herself joined their rhythm. Desylva’s breasts bounced with each powerful drive, nipples grazing his chest hair, the faint friction sending sparks through her. Killian’s hook braced against the wall beside her head, steel thunking into wood with every thrust, while his hand gripped her thigh, holding her open, fingers digging into soft flesh, leaving faint bruises she’d feel tomorrow.

Their bodies slick with sweat, the wood warming from the friction of her back sliding against it with each deep plunge, the grain pressing into her skin like a brand. His hand roamed, cupping her breast, pinching her nipple hard enough to draw a sharp cry, then soothing with his thumb in slow circles, dipping lower to circle her clit in time with his thrusts, making her walls flutter around him. “You like this, love?” he rasped, nipping her neck, marking her with love bites that bloomed red, the faint coppery taste of her skin on his tongue. “Me pinning you here, plunderin’ you slow

and deep against the wall… your storm building. … Feel how you clench around me every time I grind against your clit… you're dripping down my thighs, love. … Ready to fully break for me?"

She whimpered, legs trembling, "Yes. Don't stop. Gods, So close, Killian." He slowed deliberately, drawing out each thrust to torture her, grinding hard at the end, his hook scraping the wall with a screech that matched her frustrated moan. "Not yet, love. … Want you beggin' for it. … Want to feel you shaking before I let you come."

Her pleas turned desperate, hips chasing his, voice breaking on every word, "Please, Killian. … Don't tease. … Need you deeper. Need you to break my storm." He kissed her hard, swallowing her moans, tongue tangling with hers in a wet, hungry dance. He withdrew suddenly, her body clenching empty, a whine escaping her, and scooped her up in one fluid motion, strong arms lifting her like she weighed nothing, carrying her across to the desk in three long strides. The runes on the wall flaring to mend the marks left behind by his hook.

The transition was seamless, swift and hungry, her legs wrapped around his waist instinctively, his length still brushing her slick folds with every step, teasing her entrance without entering, making her whimper against his neck, nails digging into his back as he growled, "Prepare for another boarding."

He set her on the desk with a controlled thud, papers scattering like fallen leaves, ink bottle tipping over with a clink, black rivulets running across the surface like spilled secrets, the wood cool and smooth under her ass contrasting the heat between her thighs, as he lifted her effortlessly, setting her on the edge. He spread her wide, hooking one leg over his shoulder, the angle letting him plunge even deeper, hitting that spot inside her that made stars burst behind her eyes. He grew rough, his hips snapping forward with sharp thrusts, each drive forcing a gasp from her lungs, her breasts bouncing wildly, the desk creaking and thudding against the wall under the force, ink splattering with every impact like dark confetti, the wet slap of their bodies loud.

"Take it all, love. Feel me as I dive deep," he growled, hand gripping her thigh, fingers bruising as he held her open, hook braced on the desk for leverage, steel scraping wood with each powerful surge, his pace building to a frenzy that had her nails raking his arms, drawing thin lines of blood that only made him thrust harder. "You're so tight around me. Clenchin' like you never want me to leave… gods, I could plunder you like this forever." She cried out with each thrust, head thrown back, "Harder. Yes, there. Don't stop, pirate!" His fingers found her clit again, rubbing in tight, slick circles that had her trembling, edging her closer, the ship rolling harder now, waves crashing outside as her passion stirred faint thunder rumbles.

When her breaths turned to desperate sobs, he scooped her up again, lifting her off the desk, runes flaring to mend the surface. "Hold on, love. Not done with you yet," he growled. Her legs wrapped around his waist instinctively, his length still buried inside her as he carried her to the bed. Each step jostled him deeper with a wet slide, making her whimper against his neck, her nails digging into his back as he added, "Gonna make you come so hard the whole ship hears."

He threw her down onto the mattress, sheets tangling beneath her in a soft whoosh, hair fanning across the pillow like dark silk. She parted her thighs immediately, glistening and swollen from their passion, her folds slick and inviting, core aching for more. The sight of her making his length twitch with need, aching to get back inside her.

He hovered over her a moment, eyes devouring her—flushed skin, heaving breasts, the wet gleam between her legs—then knelt between her open legs, hooking both thighs over his shoulders, folding her nearly in half, the position exposing her completely. He thrust into her hard with deep, punishing strokes that made the bedframe slam against the wall with rhythmic bangs, runes flaring to stabilize. The entire cabin shook with their rhythm, her moans rising in pitch, desperate and raw as he plundered her relentlessly.

"Killian. Harder. So close," she begged, hands clawing at his back, nails leaving red welts, her body arching to meet every brutal drive. She butterflied her legs, opening wider, allowing him deeper access. She arched her back, raising to press closer to him. He moved his hand and hook under her to support her back and pull her even closer.

He drove into her without mercy, the wet slap of their bodies echoing, his balls slapping against her with every plunge, the pressure building unbearably, sweat dripping from his brow onto her skin, mixing with hers, the scent of their combined arousal thick in the air.

Her release crashed over her like a tidal wave. Her back arching off the bed, thighs trembling violently, body convulsing wildly, walls clenching around him in vise-like spasms, milking his length with rhythmic pulses that pulled him deeper, hot juices gushing in a slick flood that soaked his thighs and the sheets, every muscle trembling, nerves firing in electric ecstasy, a piercing scream of his name tearing from her throat as waves of pleasure radiated from her core, vision whiting out. The storm inside her erupting outward—lightning crackling behind her eyes, thunder rumbling through the ship, the lantern flaring blue-white for a heartbeat as her magic surged uncontrollably.

The sight and feel of her coming undone shattered his control. His hips stuttering as he pulled her closer to him and thrust once, twice more, erratic, then buried deep, right to the hilt. A primal roar escaped him as he erupted inside her. Thick ropes of hot seed pulsing into her depths, filling her completely, overflowing in slick warm spurts that trickled down her thighs, and around his base and dripping onto the sheets. His body shuddering with each jet, muscles locking in overwhelming release, a guttural groan tearing from his throat as he came hard, shuddering through every wave, seed pumping into her in long, forceful jets, veins throbbing as he emptied himself inside her.

They collapsed together, breathless and spent, sweat-slicked bodies entwined. Killian rolled them gently, pulling her atop his chest, his softening length still nestled inside her, their breaths mingling in ragged harmony. He stroked her back in long, soothing strokes, hook resting gently against her hip, its cool metal a contrast to his warm skin. “Gods, woman… you undo me every time,” he murmured, kissing her hair. She nuzzled his neck, content. “And you me, pirate… always.”

“You’ll be the death of me one day… and I’ll die happy.” he rasped, voice wrecked and reverent, pressing a kiss to her temple. She smiled against his chest, tracing lazy patterns over his heart. “Worth it,” she murmured, voice soft and sated. “Every storm, every scream… worth it for this.”

They lay entwined, the ship rocking them gently now, the lantern’s flame steady once more, outside calm and quiet, their breathing slowing into the deep, contented rhythm of lovers who have claimed each other completely.

Shore (a few hours later)

As the sun dipped below the horizon, painting the western sky in strokes of crimson and indigo, the last slanting rays igniting the cove in a final blaze of color before night began to roll in. The sandy shore glowed warm and soft, the pale grains still holding the day’s heat, while long shadows stretched from the pines and cliffs, turning the water to molten copper. The skiff rested nearby, its hull tilted slightly, ropes coiled neatly inside, the radiating warmth from hours in the sun. The air was cooler now, scented with woodsmoke, salt, and the faint green breath of the pines that fringed the cliffs above. Waves lapped gently at the shore, each one sighing against the pebbles, retreating with a soft hiss of foam.

The crew sat in a loose circle around a crackling fire, its flames dancing in hues of orange and gold, casting flickering shadows across their faces, flushed from ale and heat, and the surrounding cliffs, the heat warding off the chill that crept in with the tide. Their laughter low and easy, the day’s tension melted away by rum and the simple pleasure of solid ground.

Smee poked the embers with a stick, sparks spiraling upward. “Reckon it’s time we head back? Sun’s nearly gone.” he muttered, his voice a mix of reluctance and practicality, his eyes flicking to the skiff. One-Eyed Jack, leaning back against a rock, stretched his legs toward the fire, his scarred hands clasped over his knee, his eye reflecting the firelight like a glowing ember, as he grunted in agreement, “Aye. Been a good few hours. They’ve had their fun.” He smirked, glancing toward the anchored silhouette of the Jolly Roger, her lantern a distant golden pinprick against the deepening dusk. “Ship looked like it was ridin’ a full gale earlier. Tossin’ like a toy in a squall. They musta been tearin’ into each other, goin’ at it like wild animals.”

Billy, sitting cross-legged with his lute in his lap, strummed a soft chord, the notes mingling with the waves’ murmur, his freckled face alight with mischief. “Wild don’t even cover it. I swear the whole cove was shakin’. Cap’n must’ve been ridin’ her somethin’ fierce.” He laughed, his youthful voice bright, his wool hat slipping as he leaned forward, eyes wide with playful curiosity.

Black Tom nodded silently, his massive frame steady as he added wood to the fire, the flames flaring brighter, his scarred hands deft, his dark eyes glinting with quiet amusement, a faint smile curving his lips as he gestured toward the Roger with a tilt of his head.

Smee's cheeks went pink beneath his beard. "Oi, Billy! Mind your tongue. … Though… Bet the Cap'n was givin' her a proper plunderin'. Looked like a proper tempest." One-Eyed Jack snorted, his laugh booming. "Tempest? More like a full-on maelstrom. Poor ship's timbers were probably groanin' somethin' awful. Cap'n must've been diggin' for treasure deep." Black Tom simply raised one scarred brow, the firelight catching the amusement in his dark eyes as he gave a single, slow nod of agreement.

Billy grinned wider. "Think they're done? It's been quiet for a while now. No more lightnin', or wild tossin'." Smee tilted his head, listening to the calm night. "Aye, sea's gone still again. Reckon they've… finished for now." One-Eyed Jack chuckled. "Or they're just catchin' their breath. Either way, let's not keep 'em waitin' too long. Cap'n gets cranky when his rum goes warm." Billy laughed, slinging his lute over his shoulder.

Black Tom rose first, wordless, brushing sand from his pants and moving to the skiff. The others followed, gathering their gear, Billy's lute wrapped in oilskin, Smee's half-empty flask, One-Eyed Jack's whittling knife and a few carved bits of driftwood. They kicked sand over the fire's embers, the last sparks hissing out, the night suddenly darker, the stars brighter overhead.

"Right then," Smee quipped, clapping his hands and waddling toward the skiff, "Homeward bound." One-Eyed Jack smirked. "Before they start round two and we end up rowin' through another storm." Billy laughed, slinging his lute over his shoulder. "Wouldn't be the first time."

They pushed the skiff into the water, the hull scraping over pebbles with a gritty rasp, the waves welcoming it with a soft splash then climbed in, oars dipping into the black water with soft plops, The skiff rocked gently as the crew rowed in steady rhythm toward the Jolly Roger the stars their only witnesses, the night air cooling their flushed faces as the ship grew larger ahead, her lantern a welcoming beacon in the night.

Jolly Roger (Quarterdeck)

Killian and Desylva stood together at the starboard rail on the quarterdeck, the night air cool and crisp against their still-flushed skin, the moon's silver light spilling across the deck like molten metal, turning the planks to gleaming silver. The Jolly Roger rocked gently, her timbers sighing with each swell, the runes along the rails pulsing a soft, contented blue, as if the ship herself were purring in quiet satisfaction. The sea stretched dark and endless around them, stars reflected in its surface like scattered diamonds, the only sound the soft lap of water against the hull and the faint creak of rigging overhead.

Killian leaned on the rail, his black coat open, shirt laces loose, revealing the faint red trails of Desylva's nails on his chest, his hook resting lightly on the wood, steel catching moonlight, his blue eyes scanning the dark water, his hair tousled from their earlier passion. Desylva pressed close against his side, her head resting on his shoulder, hair spilling wild, her storm-gray eyes soft with lingering warmth, her leather cloak draped loosely, the faint glow of her cursed mark visible, pulsing slowly like a dying ember.

Their fingers were laced together on the rail, her thumb stroking over his knuckles, his thumb returning the caress, a quiet intimacy that needed no words.

Killian's eyes narrowed as he spotted the skiff cutting through the dark water, its oars rising and falling in steady rhythm, the crew's silhouettes black against the starlight. "Here come the lads," he murmured, voice low and rough, tinged with reluctant amusement, his arm slipping around her waist, pulling her closer, "Our moment's about to end, love."

Desylva lifted her head, her storm-gray eyes soft in the moonlight, a faint smile curving her lips. "Was nice of them to give us the ship for a while," she said, voice warm and husky. "They're good men… but being truly alone with you?" She turned into him, her free hand sliding up his chest. "That has advantages no crew can match," she smirked, her fingers brushing his chest, sparking faintly, her cursed mark pulsing in response.

Killian's grin flashed, slow and wicked, his blue eyes darkening as he looked down at her, his hand cupping her cheek. "Aye, it does" he rumbled, voice thick. "The crew's family, but I wouldn't mind stealin' more moments like this." He bent his head and kissed her—slow, deep, unhurried, his hand sliding to the small of her back, pulling her flush against him, his hook cool against her hip, her fingers tightening in his hair.

The kiss lingered, tasting of salt, rum, and the lingering heat of their earlier storm, the deck quiet around them, the ship rocking them together like a cradle.

The skiff bumped against the hull with a soft thud. One-Eyed Jack and Black Tom were first aboard, hauling the boat up with practiced grunts, ropes creaking as the skiff rose and settled into its davits, water dripping from its bottom in silver streams.

The rest of crew stumbled aboard, boots thudding on the deck, faces flushed from the row, sand clinging to their clothes. Billy vaulted over the rail, lute still slung across his back, his grin bright even in the dark. “Oi, Cap’n! Still at it? Didn’t leave ya enough time to finish?” he called, voice teasing.

One-Eyed Jack shot Billy a hard look as he secured the last knot. “Leave ‘em be, lad. They’ve earned every bloody second of lovin’ time they want.” His tone was gruff but fond, the firelight from the beach still smoldering in his eye. Black Tom nodded silently, his scarred hands tying the final knot, his dark eyes glinting with quiet approval as he glanced at the pair.

Desylva broke the kiss, her smirk playful as she glanced at Billy. “Watch it, boy, or my storm’ll toss you overboard.” Killian chuckled, his arm still around her. “Easy, love. He’s just jealous.”

Smee clambered up last, puffing slightly, “We plannin’ to stay anchored tonight, or should we make ready to shove off?” Killian, his arm still around Desylva, his voice rough but steady, “We’ll leave at dawn, Smee. No need to rush.” Smee beamed, rubbing his hands. “Right then! I’ll fetch some rum and get a fire goin’ on deck. Night’s turnin’ chilly.” He bustled toward the hatch, boots thudding.

A short while later (Main Deck)

Billy dropped onto a barrel near the mainmast, pulling his lute into his lap with a flourish. “Been workin’ on a shanty,” he announced, fingers already dancing over the strings. “Still a bit rough, mind ye.”

The crew gathered around, Smee returned with tankards of rum in his arms, their amber liquid glinting in the lantern light, passing them out with a grin. As the first warm notes filled the air, Billy’s clear, youthful voice rose, carrying across the quiet deck.

Billy
We anchored deep in a midnight bay,
Moon silver-bright on the water’s sway,
Deck empty, still, no soul in sight,
Only the creak of the Roger at night.
Lanterns swayed with their amber glow,
While the crew dreamed in the hold below.

Smee snored like thunder rolling low,
Jack muttered bets in his sleep, don’t ya know,
I hugged my lute, Tom layed still as stone,
All lost in peace, the ship’s their home.

We woke to stillness, the ship gone still,
Wondered where Cap’n took us at will.
Then saw the island, dark and strange,
Māyathrall’s shadow, wild and estrange.

Vines thick and wild, flowers in bloom,
The air sweet with jasmine’s soft perfume.
We wandered paths where shadows creep,
Found ancient stones where old gods sleep,
Runes carved deep in weathered stone,
Whisperin’ tales of kings long gone.

But love held fast, the storm was tamed,
Two souls entwined, forever named,
So raise your glass to the quiet night,
When passion burned and set things right.

The crew raised their tankards in a toast, cheering. Billy continued playing.

Billy
We dropped anchor in a cove so still,
Sun golden on the hill,
Sea like glass, not a ripple in sight,
The Roger rested in the afternoon light.
The cove was invitin', gleamin' gold,
A hidden paradise waitin' to be told.

We gave 'em space, we took the skiff,
Left 'em alone for their private gliff.
We rowed ashore, boots hittin' sand,
The island's secrets close at hand,
We laughed and drank from hidden springs,
The island gave us everything.

We climbed the ridge at golden hour,
Saw the whole bay in sunset's power,
The Roger gleamin' far below,
A black jewel on the water's glow.

Back on ship, the storm wakes slow,
Two hearts alone where the wild winds blow,
Capt'n and tempest, tangled and free,
They summon the maelstrom, with wicked glee.

The Roger rocked like a storm had come,
Timbers groanin', sails hummin' some,
Waves rose high, the hull did sway,
Love's wild tempest ruled the day.

The ship tossed hard, the masts did creak,
Lightning flashed from her stormy peak,
Cap'n plundered deep, no mercy shown,
Desylva's thunder shook the bones.

Hours passed, the sun sank low,
The Roger calmed, the wild winds slow,
Quiet fell like a blanket deep,
Lovers spent, and the cove asleep.

Night fell soft, a fire we made,
Songs and stories in the glade,
Fire on the shore and rum in our hand,
Listenin' to the sea and the lovers' land.

We rowed back under starlight gleam,
Wonderin' if they'd finished the dream,
Found 'em kissin' by the rail once more,
Still burnin' bright on that quiet shore.

So raise your glass to Storm and Steel,
To love that's fierce and wild and real,
For the Cap'n and his love, bound and true,
In the heart of calm, their love burns through.
To stolen hours when the world fades away,
May their passion never sway!

The last note faded into the soft lap of waves, the lute's strings humming softly, the fire crackling brighter, its flames leaping in approval. The crew let out a low, appreciative cheer, mugs raised in the firelight. Smee clapped wildly, his mug sloshing, grinning wide as he wiped his eyes. "That's a proper shanty, lad! Got the quiet, the storm, the whole mad night. Though ya could leave out the line 'bout me snorin', maybe add one 'bout me not trippin' over me own feet! Make it heroic-like!" Billy laughed, his freckles dancing. "Aye, Smee, next draft!"

One-Eyed Jack chuckled deep. "Leave the snorin', Smee. Song's better with it. Captures the calm before the thunder perfect." Black Tom gave a single, firm nod, the ghost of a smile on his scarred face, lifting his mug higher, in a toast, the firelight catching the rare warmth in his eyes.

Smee clapped Billy on the back, nearly spilling his rum. "Ya might soften the bit about the timbers groanin'. Don't want the ship gettin' embarrassed!" One-Eyed Jack chuckled, deep and rough. "Nah, leave it in. Captures the truth. Ship was damn near dancin'."

Desylva, leaning against Killian, smiled slow and satisfied. "You made it sound almost romantic, and us sound like legends, boy. I'll allow it." Killian's arm tightened around her, voice low and rough with affection. "He got one thing right, love. Our passion never sways."

Billy flushed, still strumming softly. "I'll polish it. Maybe add a bit 'bout the kiss that broke the spell. And maybe the Mirror."

Killian continued, "Quiet night, wild storm… and us still standin' when the thunder's gone. Days like that… and nights like this… are worth every storm." She smiled, her storm-gray eyes soft, "The night's not done, pirate."

The fire crackled higher, the rum flowed, and the crew settled into easy talk and laughter, the night deepening around them, the stars brighter overhead. The Jolly Roger rocked them gently beneath the stars, her runes glowing soft and steady, a quiet witness to the night's warmth, the day's adventure sealed in song, and the unbreakable bond that held them all together.

Shadowbrew (Day 55)

The Jolly Roger rested peacefully at the weathered pier in the quiet little port city of Whisperbay, her black hull gently rocking with the calm tide. The morning sun cast a soft golden light across the water, turning the gentle waves into shimmering ripples of liquid gold. Killian stood alone on the deck, leaning against the rail with his arms crossed, his black leather coat hanging open to reveal the silver chain with its pirate knot resting against his chest. His piercing blue eyes stared out into the serene sea, mind drifting like the distant gulls circling overhead.

The crew and Desylva had gone into port for supplies and a bit of shopping, leaving him with the quiet creak of timbers and the soft slap of water against the hull. A light breeze carried the distant sounds of the market — vendors calling, carts rumbling over cobblestones — but here on the ship, all was still. Killian's hook tapped idly against the rail, a faint metallic rhythm as his thoughts wandered to Desylva's laugh, the way her storm-gray eyes lit up when she found something that caught her fancy.

Market

The bustling market of Whisperbay was alive with color and noise. Vendors shouted their wares from colorful stalls lined with spices, fabrics, and gleaming trinkets. The crew moved through the crowd, haggling fiercely for fresh supplies. Smee argued over the price of salted pork, his face turning red as he waved his arms. One-Eyed Jack inspected rope with a critical eye, while Black Tom silently hefted barrels of fresh water, his presence alone enough to lower prices. Billy darted between stalls, eyes wide at the array of sweets and small instruments.

Desylva wandered a little apart, admiring a stall of delicate trinkets — silver charms, polished stones, and intricate glass beads that caught the sunlight. Nearby, a tall man in a long grey hooded cloak stood at his own stall, his complexion slightly pale, almost unnaturally so. Shelves behind him were lined with jars of various spices and mysterious powders that gave off faint, exotic aromas.

He noticed Desylva at the neighboring stall and called out smoothly, “Excuse me, miss. Can I interest you in a cup of my famous spiced tea?” Desylva turned, polite but distracted. “Maybe later, I…” The man smiled, his voice smooth and persuasive. “I guarantee you’ve never had a finer beverage.” Intrigued despite herself, Desylva stepped closer. “Is it really that good?”

“The best in all the realms,” he replied with a charming smile. “My own unique blend.” Desylva nodded. “Sure. Why not.” The man turned to his shelves, selecting two jars — one with a fine white powder, the other filled with dried spices and leaves. He measured careful spoonfuls into a clay cup, added steaming water from a small kettle, and stirred thoroughly until the powder dissolved completely and the spices blended into a rich, aromatic brew. The scent that rose was strong and unusual — spicy, earthy, with a faint metallic undertone.

He handed her the cup with a gracious bow. “Sip it slowly. It’s still hot.” Desylva raised the cup to her lips. The aroma was powerful, almost heady, but she took a careful sip. The tea was surprisingly good — warm, flavorful, with layers of spice — though a strange, slightly bitter aftertaste lingered on her tongue. The man watched her closely. “You like?” Desylva smiled. “Never tasted anything like it.”

He returned the smile, but there was something sharp in his eyes. Desylva finished the cup, about to thank him when her vision suddenly blurred at the edges. The world tilted. She dropped the cup — it shattered on the cobblestones — and looked at the man, her eyes widening in alarm. “What… what was in that tea?” The man slowly raised his hood, revealing a cold, calculating expression. “A special ingredient… to see if you can pass the test.”

Desylva’s mark began to blaze hot on her wrist. Winds whipped up around her without warning, scattering nearby stalls and sending loose items flying. “Test? What test?” she demanded, voice rising as lightning crackled at her fingertips.

One-Eyed Jack was the first to sense the shift. The sudden gust nearly knocked his hat off, and the crack of thunder made his eye widen. “Bloody hell … That’s Storm Girl!” he barked, voice cutting through the market noise like a bosun’s call.

Smee froze mid-haggle, his face draining of color as the wind whipped his hat sideways and lightning flickered dangerously close. “Oh no… oh no!” he yelped, voice pitching high with panic. One-Eyed Jack’s eye narrowed and he whispered to Smee, “Go get the Cap’n …Now!” Smee nodded frantically, dropping the sack of salted pork he’d been arguing over, and bolted toward the docks without hesitation, his legs pumping as fast as they could. Fear for her, and for anyone in her path, drove him. But so did trust. If anyone could reach her, it was Killian.

One-Eyed Jack started shoving curious onlookers toward the safety of The Gilded Kraken tavern, his grizzled hands rough but urgent. “Move, you idiots! Back up before she turns the whole square into kindling!” His scarred face was tense, jaw set, but there was no fear in his eye, only grim determination. He knew from experience how quickly her storms could escalate, and he positioned himself as a buffer, dagger drawn but pointed downward, ready to protect bystanders without provoking her.

Jolly Roger

A loud clap of thunder rolled across the sky, shaking the air. Killian turned sharply toward the market district just as a massive lightning bolt split the clouds, striking somewhere near the heart of Whisperbay. His instincts flared. “That’s not normal… That’s Desylva. Something’s wrong.” Before he could finish the thought, he spotted Smee sprinting toward the ship, red-faced and panting like he was fleeing a wildfire.

Killian moved to the gangplank as Smee reached it, gasping for breath. “Cap’n… come quick! Desylva is… something’s set her off proper!... she’s losin’ control!” Killian didn’t wait for more. “Take me to her.” They took off running down the pier, boots pounding on the wooden planks.

Market

The crew's reaction to the storm had been immediate, visceral, a mix of practiced caution, fierce loyalty, and bone-deep respect for the raw power Desylva wielded.

Black Tom, ever the silent sentinel, reacted with calm efficiency. He planted his harpoon firmly into the ground like an anchor, his broad frame acting as a living barrier between the growing vortex and a cluster of terrified vendors. His dark eyes flicked to Desylva, assessing, then to One-Eyed Jack with a single, meaningful nod. No words, but the message was clear. *Hold the line.* He stayed rooted, ready to throw himself between danger and innocents if needed, his scarred hands steady on the harpoon shaft.

Billy, perched on a nearby crate with an armful of trinkets, nearly tumbled off as the wind hit. His freckled face paled, but his eyes lit with a strange mix of awe and worry. “Whoa… that’s a big one!” he muttered, quickly scrambling down and helping One-Eyed Jack herd people. “Easy, folks! Give her space!” He kept glancing back at Desylva, lute still slung over his shoulder, already thinking of the shanty he’d write if they all survived this.

The rest of the crew moved with the well-honed instinct of men who had sailed through many of her storms. Some shouted warnings, others physically pulled strangers to safety, while a few simply stood back with grim respect, knowing better than to interfere unless Killian was there. There was fear — real, tangible fear of the uncontrolled power — but it was tempered by deep loyalty and the knowledge that Desylva was one of them. She was their storm, and they would weather her fury the same way they weathered the sea’s. Together. With Killian as their anchor.

The market square descended into controlled chaos. Stalls were overturned, merchandise scattered across the cobblestones, and several weapons from a nearby bladesmith’s display were embedded in wooden posts or lying broken on the ground. A fierce wind howled through the square, whipping cloaks and sending loose tarps flapping wildly.

The crew’s swift, coordinated response prevented it from becoming a full disaster. Their reactions spoke volumes. Respect for her power, protectiveness toward innocents, and absolute faith that their captain would calm the tempest before anyone got truly hurt.

Desylva stood at the center of the storm, arms at her sides, lightning flickering dangerously from her fingertips. Her dark hair whipped around her face like a living thing, and her storm-gray eyes glowed with uncontrolled power. A swirling vortex of wind surrounded her, keeping most people at a distance.

One-Eyed Jack had managed to clear most of the immediate area, shouting orders and shoving stragglers toward the safety of the tavern. The hooded man watched from the shadows, a satisfied smile hidden beneath his cloak.

Killian and Smee arrived at a run, skidding to a halt at the edge of the tempest. Killian’s eyes widened. “Bloody hell…” Smee looked between them, pale. “What do we—?”

“Stay back,” Killian ordered, voice steady. “Go help Jack get everyone inside. I’ll handle this.” Smee hesitated, then nodded and ran toward the tavern. Killian took a slow, deliberate step forward, eyes locked on Desylva.

The Gilded Kraken

Inside patrons pressed against the windows, watching the unfolding scene in the square with a mix of fear and fascination. A burly man standing beside One-Eyed Jack muttered, stunned, “Is he crazy? She’ll kill him!” One-Eyed Jack glared. “No, she won’t. He’ll be fine. He’s the only one who can reach her.”

Smee burst through the door, still catching his breath. The burly man turned. “And just who is he to think he can survive a storm like that?” Smee answered proudly, chest puffed, “He is Captain Hook. He doesn’t fear her. He’ll calm her. He always does.”

The man laughed nervously. “His funeral, then.” But all eyes quickly returned to the window, the tavern falling into tense silence as they watched Killian approach the heart of the storm.

Market

Killian walked calmly through the swirling winds, coat flapping violently around him. Sparks of lightning danced dangerously close, but he never faltered. He stopped directly in front of Desylva, meeting her glowing eyes with steady blue resolve.

Slowly, he reached out, taking her hand in his. Bright sparks ignited where their skin met, traveling up his arm. He brought his hook to her other hand, cupping it gently. More sparks raced along the steel, but he held firm. He stepped closer, lifting both her hands toward his chest, pressing them over his heart. “I love you,” he whispered softly, voice cutting through the wind like an anchor. He leaned in and kissed her.

The instant their lips met, a brilliant flash of light erupted, followed by a powerful warm shockwave of true love’s magic that radiated outward. The wave washed through the entire market, warm, golden, and soothing, calming the winds, grounding the lightning, and leaving a faint shimmer in the air.

Desylva’s hands slipped from his grip as her body went limp, collapsing against his chest. Killian caught her, wrapping his arms around her tightly. “It’s okay, love. I’ve got you,” he murmured, pressing a kiss to her hair.

Off to the side, the hooded man smiled faintly. “So… it’s true.” He quietly slipped away into the crowd.

The Gilded Kraken

Inside the burly man stared in disbelief. “I don’t believe it… How?” Billy piped up from near the window, grinning. “True love. Wins every time.”

Smee, One-Eyed Jack, Billy, and Black Tom quickly exited the tavern to join Killian.

Market

Killian scooped Desylva into his arms, her head resting against his shoulder. The crew met him at the edge of the square, faces filled with relief. Together they hurried back toward the dock, the people of Whisperbay gradually emerging from The Gilded Kraken to begin cleaning up the overturned stalls and scattered goods.

The market slowly returned to life, but the memory of the storm-lass and the man who calmed her would linger for many years to come.

The Jolly Roger

The gangplank creaked under their boots as the group made their way back aboard the Jolly Roger, the familiar sway of the deck beneath them a welcome comfort after the chaos in the market. Lanterns along the rails cast a warm, golden light that danced across the black oak planks, their silver runes pulsing faintly in greeting, as if the ship herself sensed the tension still lingering in the air.

The night sea lapped gently against the hull, a soothing rhythm that contrasted sharply with the earlier fury of Desylva’s uncontrolled storm. Salt mist hung in the cool breeze, carrying the clean scent of open water that helped clear the last traces of the market’s dust and spilled spices from their clothes.

Companionway

Killian carried Desylva directly to their cabin, her head nestled against his shoulder, her breathing still shallow but steady now. Her cursed mark had dimmed to a faint blue glow beneath her sleeve, the wild energy spent.

Killian & Desylva’s Cabin

He kicked the cabin door open with his boot, the hinges protesting softly, and laid her gently on their bed. The enchanted timbers hummed beneath her, the runes along the frame glowing warmer as they sensed her exhaustion, offering a subtle pulse of healing energy that eased the tension in her muscles. He brushed damp strands of hair

from her forehead, his thumb lingering on her cheek. “Rest easy, love,” he murmured, voice low and rough with lingering concern. “I’ve got you. Always.”

Desylva stirred, her storm-gray eyes fluttering open, still a little unfocused. “Killian… that tea… he said it was a test.” Her voice was hoarse, but the fire in her gaze was returning. She reached up, fingers tracing the silver chain at his neck, the pirate knot warm from his skin. “I thought I was going to lose control completely. If you hadn’t…”

He caught her hand, pressing a kiss to her palm. “You didn’t. You never do when I’m there. That hooded bastard won’t get another chance. I’ll make sure of it.” His blue eyes darkened with protective fury but softened as he looked at her. “You’re safe now. We’re home.”

Main Deck

The crew moved with purposeful energy. Smee bustled about, lighting extra lanterns and muttering to himself as he prepared a strong pot of herbal tea — this one from Lysara’s old recipe Desylva had taught him. “Can’t have her catchin’ a chill after all that,” he grumbled, adding extra honey with a generous hand. One-Eyed Jack checked the rigging, his eye scanning the horizon for any sign of pursuit, while Black Tom stood guard near the gangplank, harpoon planted firmly, a silent sentinel. Billy perched on the capstan, softly strumming his lute, not a full shanty, just gentle, soothing notes that seemed to calm the very air around the ship.

Killian & Desylva’s Cabin

Smee soon appeared at the cabin door with a steaming mug. “Brought her somethin’ to settle the stomach, Cap’n. No weird powders this time, I swear.” Killian took the mug with a nod of thanks, helping Desylva sit up against the pillows. The tea’s warm, earthy aroma filled the cabin as she sipped it slowly, color gradually returning to her cheeks.

The crew gathered just outside the open door, giving them space but staying close. Smee fidgeted with his hat. “That fella in the cloak… he won’t be botherin’ us again, will he?” One-Eyed Jack growled, “If he shows his face, I’ve got a dagger with his name on it.” Billy added softly, “You were amazin’, milady. Scary… but amazin’.” Black Tom simply nodded once, his silent approval speaking louder than words.

Desylva managed a tired smile, leaning into Killian’s side as his arm wrapped around her. “Thank you… all of you. I don’t know what that was, but I felt something fighting inside me. Like the mark was testing whether I’d choose power… or this.” She looked up at Killian, her fingers intertwining with his. “I choose this. Every time.”

Killian pressed a kiss to the top of her head, his voice a low rumble. “And I’ll always choose you, storm and all.” The Jolly Roger creaked softly around them, her timbers warm and steady, runes glowing with a gentle, protective light as the ship rocked them like a cradle.

Main Deck

The night sea whispered approval beyond the hull, the stars brighter overhead, Whisperbay and its shadows fading into memory as they sailed once more into open water — together, unbreakable, and ready for whatever came next.

The Proposal (Day 60)

The Jolly Roger swayed gently under a crescent moon and a tranquil azure sea, the twilight sky ablaze with purples and golds. The sails caught the last rays of the setting sun, glowing like lanterns against the horizon. No treasure lured them tonight—only a moment Killian had planned with a care he’d never given anything else. His heart pounded beneath his black coat as he adjusted the driftwood ring in his pocket, carved during quiet nights from a spar of their first storm together. The polished sapphire—from the dragon’s hoard—glinted faintly at its center, a symbol of every trial they’d survived.

He was ready. Tonight was the night.

The crew knew. Smee steered with a knowing grin, humming a sailor's tune under his breath. One-Eyed Jack polished a cannon with exaggerated flourish, nudging Black Tom, who gave a rare, warm nod. Billy strummed a soft, lilting melody from the rigging, his youthful fingers dancing across the strings, sending a tender hush across the deck.

Killian led Desylva to the bow, her gray eyes curious as he took her hand. Her dark hair caught the twilight glow, her storm-mark sparking faintly beneath her sleeve. She sensed his nerves, teasing him with a playful smile. "What's this, pirate? Another scheme?" He chuckled, voice low. "Aye, love. The best one yet." His blue eyes locked with hers as the ship rocked gently, the moment poised on the edge of perfection.

But tranquility shattered.

Regina's shadow wraiths erupted from the sea—skeletal figures draped in tattered robes, claws wreathed in chilling flames that burned with frostbite's agony. They soared from the waves, shrieking revenge for past defeats. Their wails piercing the dusk as they descended on the deck.

One slashed Killian, icy claws raking his chest. Blood welled through his torn shirt as he stumbled back. His cutlass swung, sparking against their ethereal forms.

Desylva's thunder roared. A jagged bolt split the sky, blasting two wraiths into mist. Her rain surged, dousing their flames. But Rumpelstiltskin's cackle echoed as a thick, blinding fog rolled in, shrouding the ship. Her vision clouded, her storm-mark dimming as she swung her dagger blindly.

Smee shouted, "Hold her steady, lads, they're everywhere!" One-Eyed Jack fired a cannon, the boom swallowed by fog. Black Tom's harpoons thudded into unseen targets. Billy's lute fell silent as he scrambled with a torch. "Cap'n, they're closin'!"

Killian slashed through the fog, his hook tearing a wraith's shroud. Its claw grazed his arm, frost spreading as he roared. Desylva staggered, a wraith's flame searing her shoulder. Her lightning flared, breaking Rumpelstiltskin's fog. Her rain poured, purging frost from Killian as she tackled him from a wraith's grasp, her dagger sinking into its core. Ichor sprayed as she pulled him close, kissing him desperately."Not ever losing you," she breathed, voice raw, gray eyes blazing. He steadied, kissing her back. "My storm… you're my everything." Blood mixed with rain. Her thunder roared again, scattering the wraiths.

One-Eyed Jack's cannon boomed. Black Tom's harpoons flew. Smee cheered, "Blast 'em, lads!" Billy waved his torch, the crew's resolve a shield.

The fog lifted, revealing a twilight sky once more. The wraiths dissolved into the sea, their wails fading into the wind. The deck was scarred, runes glowing to mend.

The Jolly Roger endured. Her timbers groaned under strain, runes flaring to steady the planks. The air cleared. The sea stilled. The crew caught their breath. Smee steadied the helm. One-Eyed Jack reloaded cannons. Black Tom retrieved harpoons. Billy restrung his lute with trembling fingers.

And Killian—bloodied, breath ragged—turned to Desylva. He kneeled before her amidst the chaos's aftermath, his coat torn, blood streaking his chest. Her breath hitched as he pulled the ring from his pocket. The sapphire caught the twilight's last light, glowing like a star in his palm. He took her hand in his hook, his blue eyes shining with fierce, unyielding love.

"Desylva… my tempest," he said, voice rough, thick with emotion. "Through every realm, every fight, every storm—you're my heart. You've stood beside me through hell itself. I've no riches but this ship, no title but pirate… yet I'd give you my soul. Marry me, love. Let's defy the fates together."

She knelt beside him, gray eyes shimmering with tears. Her dark hair fell loose as she pressed her hand to his, her voice steady despite the quake in her chest, tears glistening in her gray eyes. "Killian… my pirate, my light, my everything. You are my harbor. My anchor. In every storm." Her hands framed his face, tracing his jaw. "Aye… I'll marry you."

She kissed him fiercely.

Their kiss was a storm's embrace—deep, fierce, soul-shaking—tasting of sweat and blood and the salt of their shared trials. Her arms wrapped around his neck. His hand gripped her waist, his hook settling at her hip.

They eased apart, her breath warm against his cheek, lightning still humming faintly between them. His hook moved to the small of her back, holding her close as he brought his hand to hers, their foreheads meeting in a quiet, trembling pause.

He slipped the ring onto her finger, a beacon across all realms, signifying their vow.

The sea sighed around them. Her tears mingled with his.

The crew erupted. One-Eyed Jack fired a celebratory shot, the boom echoing across the sea. Smee bellowed, "To the Cap'n and his lass!" Black Tom nodded, a rare smile breaking his silence. Billy strummed a triumphant chord, youthful cheer spilling across the deck.

The Jolly Roger vibrated with their joy, a witness to their vow, her timbers creaking with pride. Lanterns flickered to life. The sails fluttered like a heartbeat in the breeze. Moonlight bathed them in silver as the crew burst into song, Smee bawling into his hat.

Killian rose, pulling Desylva up with him. Her ring glinted as they stood at the prow. Twilight deepened. Stars pierced the purple-gold veil. She pressed against him, arms around his neck. "Forever, Killian," she whispered. He held her tight, hook on her waist. "Aye, love. Forever."

Their bond forged anew amidst the scars of battle. Smee clapped Killian's shoulder, One-Eyed Jack roared a toast, Black Tom resumed his watch, Billy's music swelled. The crew rallied, voices a chorus of celebration.

The Jolly Roger sailed on, a floating haven under the starlit sky. The proposal a triumph over chaos. Their love a storm unbroken. The sea a mirror to their radiant future.

Interlude: A Night of Songs (Day 62)

The Jolly Roger drifted on a velvet sea, her black hull mirrored in water so still it looked like polished obsidian. A fat, silver moon hung low, washing the deck in pale light that made the enchanted runes in the planks shimmer like veins of quicksilver. Lanterns glowed amber at the rails, their flames dancing to the slow roll of the ship. The air was cool, salted with night mist and the faint sweetness of rum spilled hours earlier.

Main Deck

Killian leaned against the mainmast, coat open, hook idly tracing circles on a coil of rope, his blue eyes half-lidded with easy contentment. Desylva stood at the stern, one boot on the rail, cloak fluttering like a dark wing, her storm-gray gaze fixed on the moonlit horizon.

Smee sat cross-legged on a crate, puffing clove-scented smoke that curled around his ruddy face. One-Eyed Jack lounged against a cannon, dagger twirling between his fingers. Black Tom stood silent near the foremast, harpoon planted like a standard, his shadow long across the deck. Billy perched on the capstan, freckled cheeks flushed, lute across his lap, fingers plucking idle, playful notes that skipped over the water.

The crew's low laughter faded into comfortable silence. Desylva turned, catching Billy's eye with a sharp, mischievous look, one brow arched, a spark in her gaze. Billy grinned, sat straighter, and struck a bold, swaggering chord on his lute, the tune rolling across the deck like a cannonball.

Desylva's voice cut through the night, clear and fierce, as she strode from the stern, hair whipping like a battle standard, boots ringing on the enchanted planks.

Desylva
No one's bold as my Killian, none so grand as Killian,

No one's hook cuts through the dark like my Killian!

Desylva planted herself center-deck, dagger flashing as she pointed at Killian.

Desylva
With his black coat a-flappin' in the storm's wild roar,
He's the pirate who stole my heart on Veyra's shore!

I was storm-touched, a lass with thunder in my veins,
Branded cursed, yet my lightning broke those chains!
With Killian beside me, through the realms we've torn,
My gusts and his blade defy the tempest born!

The crew's boots stomped, and mugs clashed. Black Tom's cutlass slammed a barrel in perfect rhythm.

Billy/Smee/One-Eyed Jack
Oh, Captain Hook! Our Captain Hook!
With his hook like a star in the moon's silver gleam!
He's the rogue of the seas, with a swagger that frees,
Sails the Jolly Roger through the storm's wild dream!

Captain Hook! Our Captain Hook!
With Desylva's tempest, his heart's fiery spark!
No one's bolder, no braver, no pirate we'd savor,
Here's to Captain Hook, the king of the dark!

Desylva's voice rose, mark sparking electric blue as she gripped her dagger tighter. A gust snapped the lanterns. Lightning flickered in her hair.

Desylva
No one fights like my Killian, dares the night like Killian,
Slashed a wendigo's heart in the Shadow Realm's fright!
In the Crimson Abyss, where the blood-waves did churn,
He dove deep for the pearl, made my storm-heart burn!

Rumpel's curses, they struck, with their shadows and lies,
But my thunder roared fierce, lit the dark in his eyes!
With his cutlass and grin, he carved through the fray,
My love's the captain who leads us through the spray!

Smee stomped his feet. One-Eyed Jack grinned. Billy whooped. Black Tom pounded the deck.

Billy/Smee/One-Eyed Jack
Oh, Captain Hook! Our Captain Hook!
With his hook like a star in the moon's silver gleam!
He's the rogue of the seas, with a swagger that frees,
Sails the Jolly Roger through the storm's wild dream!

Captain Hook! Our Captain Hook!
With Desylva's tempest, his heart's fiery spark!
No one's bolder, no braver, no pirate we'd savor,
Here's to Captain Hook, the king of the dark!

Desylva's voice softened, eyes locking on Killian, warm and fierce.

Desylva
No one loves like my Killian, none so true as Killian,
Gave his heart 'neath the moon, oh, my Killian!

She stepped closer, mark glowing, her driftwood sapphire ring catching the lanterns light.

Desylva
My rain washed his wounds, my lightning struck true,
Through the Bone Cliffs' grim white, we fought and we flew!

With his hook at my side, we defied every spell,
He's my haven, my sea, through each realm's living hell!
Two Nights past on this deck, 'neath a crescent moon spark,
He proposed with his heart, bound my storm to his mark,

Smee raised a mug. One-Eyed Jack fired a pistol skyward, Billy cheered. Black Tom slammed his harpoon.

Billy/Smee/One-Eyed Jack
Oh, Captain Hook! Our Captain Hook!
With his hook like a star in the moon's silver gleam!
He's the rogue of the seas, with a swagger that frees,
Sails the Jolly Roger through the storm's wild dream!

Captain Hook! Our Captain Hook!
With Desylva's tempest, his heart's fiery spark!
No one's bolder, no braver, no pirate we'd savor,
Here's to Captain Hook, the king of the dark!

Desylva's voice soared, lightning crackling around her, mark blazing.

Desylva
No one sails like my Killian, never fails like Killian,
Faced the Labyrinth's echoes with my Killian!

She reached Killian at the mast.

Desylva
In the void's endless din, where the islands did sway,
His hook slashed through wraiths, kept the madness at bay!

Regina's schemes, Rumpel's traps, they tried to break us,
But my thunder and his blade, no curse could forsake us!
With the Echo Stone won, we stood tall in the strife,
He's my pirate, my love, I will soon be his wife!

When the shadows of Rumpel come creepin' with spite,
And Regina's dark curses ignite in the night,
My Killian stands firm, with his hook and his grin,
My storm joins his fire, and we'll always begin!

Through the Fireglass Sea, where the flames burned so bright,
To the Shattered Peaks' frost, we fought side by side
For my captain, my love, I'd defy every realm
With his heart and my tempest, we'll conquer the helm

Mugs clashed. Billy, Smee, and One-Eyed Jack stomped the deck. Black Tom drove his cutlass into the deck. The crew's voices thundered.

Billy/Smee/One-Eyed Jack
Oh, Captain Hook! Our Captain Hook!
With his hook like a star in the moon's silver gleam!

He's the rogue of the seas, with a swagger that frees,
Sails the Jolly Roger through the storm's wild dream!

Captain Hook! Our Captain Hook!
With Desylva's tempest, his heart's fiery spark!
No one's bolder, no braver, no pirate we'd savor,
Here's to Captain Hook, the king of the dark!

So raise up your grog, lads, and sing one last cheer,
For Killian and Desylva, their love crystal-clear!
Through the realms and the storms, they've carved out their fame,
Here's to Captain Hook, the sea's proudest name!

The final note rang like a bell. Desylva seized Killian's coat, pulling him into a fierce kiss. In one fluid move, he spun her, pinning her gently against the mainmast, hook at her waist, his grin wicked against her lips.

The crew's roars shook the stars, their stomps echoing like distant thunder, their mugs raised high in a frozen toast before clashing down with a resonant clang that sent rum splashing across the deck, runes flaring briefly to absorb the spill.

Desylva's gust settled into a playful breeze, ruffling Killian's open coat and drawing a roguish grin from him, his hook glinting. "Still praisin' me, love?" he teased, voice low and smoky, stepping closer to brush a strand of wind-tossed hair from her face, his fingers lingering on her cheek. She smirked, her mark pulsing warmer, a faint crackle dancing along her skin. "Always, pirate. … I think the lads have a tale to tell."

Billy's fingers hovered over the lute, then struck a jaunty, rolling melody, the notes bouncing like waves, inviting the crew to snap fingers and clap thighs in rhythm.

Billy (bright and eager)
From Veyra's shores where the tempests rage,
Came a lass with a curse on her stormy stage!
Lightning in veins, thunder in her cry,
But a pirate's grin caught her wandering eye!

Desylva laughed, spinning with a flourish, her cloak billowing as she summoned a swirl of mist that curled around the crew's boots like affectionate smoke, the air tingling with ozone. Killian's eyes darkened with memory, his hand finding her waist, pulling her briefly against him—heat flaring between them—before releasing with a wink. "Aye, that grin sealed your fate, lass." The crew snapping and clapping, Smee's pipe puffing in time.

Crew
Oh, storm-lass bold! Our storm-lass bold!
With gusts that howl and lightning gold!
She tames the skies with a flick of her hand,
Desylva's the tempest of our pirate band!

One-Eyed Jack (growling, dagger tapping his boot for beat)
She struck the beast in the venom's lair,
Her mark aglow, her winds in her hair!
The captain dove through the poisoned tide,
His hook her shield, his love her guide!

One-Eyed Jack stomped hard, the deck thudding, Desylva's eyes flashing as she thrust a hand skyward. A harmless lightning fork crackling overhead, illuminating Killian's proud smirk. He nodded approvingly, murmuring, "Still makes my blood race, that one." The crew whooped. Smee clapping his mug against the crate.

Crew
Oh, storm-lass bold! Our storm-lass bold!
With gusts that howl and lightning gold!

She tames the skies with a flick of her hand,
Desylva's the tempest of our pirate band!

Smee (hearty and slurred, standing wobbly to mime tying knots mid-verse)
In Shattered Peaks where the ice winds bite,
She brewed a gale through the endless night!
The Roger soared on her furious breeze,
Our storm-lass queen of the raging seas!

Smee's boots shuffled in a clumsy jig, the crew snapping louder, Desylva twirling her dagger and sending a cool rain-mist sprinkling over them, refreshing and sparkling under the moon. Killian caught a droplet on his tongue, his gaze locked on her with heated promise. "You'll pay for that later, love," he drawled, earning her wicked grin.

Crew
Oh, storm-lass bold! Our storm-lass bold!
With gusts that howl and lightning gold!
She tames the skies with a flick of her hand,
Desylva's the tempest of our pirate band!

The snaps and claps crescendoed, Billy strumming a bridging riff that slowed into a tender, swaying melody, the breeze gentling as Desylva stepped back, her chest rising with anticipation, the crew settling into hushed reverence for the ballad to come.

Billy's lute shifted seamlessly, fingers coaxing a haunting, melodic tune, the notes weaving like moonlight on water, drawing the crew into a gentle sway, their earlier snaps softening to fingertip taps on mugs. Desylva paced the deck with graceful intensity, her boots echoing softly, cloak trailing like a shadow, her voice rising pure and passionate, each word laced with raw emotion. She locked eyes with Killian, her storm-gray gaze softening as memories flooded.

Desylva
The day we met, the sea did churn,
His blue eyes blazed, my storm did burn,
A hook o' steel, a voice so stern,
I felt a spark I'd soon discern!

He pulled me from the waves' cold grip,
His rogue's grin flashed 'neath salt and drip,
My thunder rolled, his fate did slip,
A man o' steel 'cross my heart's trip!

She mimed the rescue, arms outstretched as if grasping the sea, a faint gust lifting spray from the rails to mist the air like tears of joy. Killian's expression melted, his hook stilling on the rope, blue eyes glistening as he murmured, "Never forget that day, lass." The crew tapped reverently, Smee wiping his eye with a sleeve.

Desylva
First days we clashed, his will so strong,
My gusts would howl, he'd prove me wrong,
Yet in his sight, I'd linger long,
A heart o' fire where I'd belong!

His tales o' dark did pierce the night,
A soul o' rage in candlelight,
My rain would fall, his pain take flight,
I saw him clear, my storm's delight!

Desylva spun slowly, her fingers trailing lightning sparks that danced harmlessly across the planks, runes glowing in sympathy. She approached Killian, brushing his chest lightly, drawing a sharp breath from him. Billy's lute swelled, the crew swaying deeper, One-Eyed Jack's dagger tapping a soft rhythm on his knee.

Desylva
Raise the wind and sing it free,
My pirate bold, he's claimed by me!
Through storm and steel, our hearts entwine,
A love o' tempest, wild divine!

Through months o' strife, his steel held true,
My lightning struck, his courage grew,
A rogue so fierce, my heart he drew,
A bond o' storm I'd ne'er undo!

His laughter rang o'er deck one morn,
A softer side 'neath scars was born,
My gusts turned warm, my heart was torn,
For him I'd weather any scorn!

We'd spar on deck, his blade would dance,
My dagger flashed, we'd take our chance,
His hook would gleam in wild advance,
A game o' steel, a lover's glance!

He'd parry swift, I'd strike with rain,
Our spars a storm o'er deck's domain,
His grin would spark, my heart's refrain,
Through every clash, my love'd gain!

She drew her dagger, mimicking a playful duel with invisible foes, then pointed it at Killian with a teasing thrust. He countered with his hook in mock parry, the steel clinking softly, eliciting chuckles from the crew. A warm breeze enveloped them, her mark pulsing brightly. Black Tom nodded approval, his harpoon tapping the deck gently.

Desylva
Raise the wind and sing it free,
My pirate bold, he's claimed by me!
Through storm and steel, our hearts entwine,
A love o' tempest, wild divine!

Years rolled by, his gaze grew deep,
My thunder hushed where he'd creep,
A man o' scars I'd long to keep,
His wild soul mine in storm's sweet sweep!

He'd stand with me 'gainst wind and tide,
His hook my shield, his heart my guide,
My rain would fall, his fears subside,
A love o' storm we'd not divide!

His voice would call through misty air,
A pirate's vow, so bold, so rare,
My lightning flared, his soul laid bare,
I knew my heart was his to share!

Each night we'd watch the stars align,
His hand in mine, our fates design,
My storm grew soft, his love a sign,
A rogue o' steel, my heart's own shrine!

Raise the wind and sing it free,
My pirate bold, he's claimed by me!

Through storm and steel, our hearts entwine,
A love o' tempest, wild divine!

Desylva knelt briefly, gazing up at Killian with vulnerable intensity, her hand over her heart, thunder rumbling faintly overhead, soft as a lullaby. He reached down, lifting her chin, his thumb tracing her lip, eyes locked in silent vow. The crew's taps slowed, their breaths held.

Desylva
He'd tease me fierce, I'd strike with glee,
Our days a dance o'er boundless sea,
His blue eyes held eternity,
My love for him grew wild and free!

Through battles shared, his strength I'd see,
A heart o' fire that set me free,
My thunder sang in harmony,
With him, my storm found destiny!

One eve he turned, his gaze so grand,
"Be mine," he swore o'er sea and sand,
My heart did leap, my storm expand,
A vow to take his pirate hand!

By ship's tall mast, he bent his knee,
"Marry me, lass," his wild decree,
My gray eyes shone, I'd ne'er foresee,
His love had claimed the storm in me!

Raise the wind and sing it free,
My pirate bold, he's claimed by me!
Through storm and steel, our hearts entwine,
A love o' tempest, wild divine!

She rose, arms wide, a final gust lifting her hair in a triumphant halo, lightning weaving through the clouds like celebratory fireworks. Killian pulled her close and kissed her deeply, the crew erupting in cheers, mugs clashing wildly as the ballad's echo faded into the night.

The final chorus of Desylva's ballad still shimmered in the air like lingering lightning, the crew's gentle taps fading into expectant silence, their faces flushed with wine and wonder.

Billy's fingers danced a light, teasing pattern over the lute strings, then settled into a slow, steady rhythm that matched the gentle rock of the Roger beneath their boots. The chatter softened to a murmur, then to silence, as heads turned his way. Lanternlight painted warm gold across scarred faces and weathered wood, the runes in the planks pulsing faintly like a heartbeat. Billy looked at everyone, eyes bright. "Time for a tribute to the Roger."

Everyone raised their mug in acknowledgement. The crew's faces lit up with nods and grins, the amber glow of the lanterns reflecting in their eyes as they leaned in closer, boots shifting on the deck with eager anticipation. Smee puffed his pipe once more, the clove smoke swirling like a signa.

One-Eyed Jack sheathed his dagger with a metallic click, crossing his arms expectantly. Black Tom planted his harpoon firmer, the wood thudding softly against the planks. Desylva exchanged a knowing glance with Killian, her storm-gray eyes sparkling as a faint breeze rustled the sails overhead, as if the ship herself was listening. The deck went quiet, lanterns flickering in the sudden hush.

Billy set the lute across his knee and let the first chord hang like a held breath. The notes rolled slow and steady, matching the ship's heartbeat as the ship rocked beneath them. The tune soft at first, then growing deeper, filling the night air with the low thrum of wood and sea. The sound resonating through the deck, making the enchanted runes in the planks flicker subtly, as if awakening to the melody. Lantern light pooled on faces, all leaning in as if the

song might stitch them closer than the runes ever could. Mugs raised in a quiet salute as the wood beneath their boots creaked in time.

Billy
When the cannon's smoke still hangs in the air,
And the hull's been torn by a kraken's glare,
The silver runes wake with a soft blue glow,
Knittin' splintered oak where the wild seas flow.

As he sang, fingers tracing the frets, the crew watched the planks as if the runes themselves might answer. Killian's jaw tightened at the memory of splintered timbers, shattered planks, and near-sinking battles before the runes were there. Desylva's hand tightened on the rail, a faint electric hum in the air. The melody wound through them, a reminder that the ship was more than timber and tar.

Billy
They trace the planks like veins of starlight cold,
Mend the cracks from battles fierce and bold,
No scar stays long on her enchanted frame,
The Roger heals herself in the night's dark claim.

A ripple of approval passed through the men. Black Tom's left hand rested briefly on the rail, fingers tapping in time, as though acknowledging the ship's quiet resilience, while his right hand held his harpoon, knuckles whitening. Smee's pipe went quiet. One-Eyed Jack's grin softened lips quirking, as he nodded along.

The runes' glow seemed to answer in the boards beneath their boots, a pale pulse that matched the song.

Billy
I've seen her shudder when the Cap'n bleeds,
Runes flarin' bright to staunch the need,
And when Desylva's storm cracks the sky apart,
They pulse in time with her thunderin' heart.

Desylva's mark glimmered faintly at that, as if in agreement. The crew's low hum rose like a tide, boots tapping gently as if to keep the enchantment steady. Killian's gaze slid to Desylva, a flicker of warmth in his eyes that had nothing to do with rum. She returned the gaze, with a small, private smile that sent a warmth through him despite the night's chill.

Billy
So sing for the runes that never sleep,
Guardin' our bones on the rollin' deep,
They're the ship's own soul, alive and true,
The Roger's magic runs through and through.

The crew's boots began to tap in slow, deliberate rhythm, mugs gently clinking against knees and barrels as their heads swayed, eyes half-closed in reverence, the low hum rising from their throats like a shared breath.

Smee exhaled a plume of smoke that danced with the melody, curling upward like a prayer. One-Eyed Jack nodded once, his scar twitching with a rare smile, his dagger stilling in his hand. Black Tom's massive frame shifted slightly, his harpoon tapping the deck in time.

Desylva's fingers tightened on the rail, a faint crackle of lightning in her hair as if the song stirred her storm. Killian leaned back against the mast, his hook idly tapping the rope in sync, a contented nod acknowledging the truth in the words.

Billy let the last note linger, drawing it out until it blended seamlessly with the crew's hum, then lifted his head with a grin, fingers already moving to the next chord, the rhythm quickening like a gathering wind.

Crew

Heave ho, runes aglow,
Mend the wounds that the wild seas throw,
Silver light in the dark o' night,
The Roger keeps us whole and right.

The hum settled into their bones, a shared reverence. Billy shifted the tempo, fingers dancing faster, the tempo quickening, the melody lifting like a breeze catching canvas. The crew swayed, mugs clinking, and Desylva's cloak snapped like a flag as she stepped closer to the capstan, eyes bright with mischief.

Billy
There's magic in the canvas, hull black as midnight coal,
When Desylva calls a breeze, the sails answer whole.
They billow full without a hand upon the line,
Catch her gusts like lovers drunk on rum and wine.

Billy punctuated the line with a playful flourish. One-Eyed Jack tapped his dagger on the deck for a beat, and Smee's laugh bubbled up, warm and rough. Desylva laughed softly, a gust ruffling the edges of her cloak in playful emphasis. Above, the sails rustled as if they, too, were listening, sighing as if in agreement.

Billy
I've seen 'em strain when she's angry, taut as bowstring wire,
Rippin' wind from the heavens, settin' all afire.
And when Killian laughs low, the sails ease and sigh,
Flutter soft as a whisper, like the ship's own sigh.

Killian's low chuckle rolled across the deck, and a few of the crew grinned, recognizing the truth in the line. The air between Killian and Desylva shimmered with memory of storms and quiet dawns alike.

Billy
No rope can hold 'em when her temper's on the rise,
They snap and crack like thunder rollin' through the skies.
But when they lie together, gentle as the morn,
The sails hang calm and quiet, lovin' to be worn.

Billy let the chord hang, then raised his voice in a toast to the canvas that carried them through every gale.

Billy
So here's to the wings that dance to their tune,
The Roger's sails enchanted 'neath the silver moon.

The crew's tapping quickened, boots now stomping in a lively counterpoint, mugs raised and clashed in time with the fluttering notes, their laughter bubbling up as the wind picked up slightly, ruffling cloaks and hats in playful response.

Desylva's smirk widened, her hand lifting as if conducting the breeze, her cloak snapped once in a playful gust, lanterns swinging brighter. Killian chuckled deeply, his eyes crinkling at the corners, his grin widened, his hook tapping the mast in approval.

Smee slapped his knee in delight, One-Eyed Jack uncrossed his arms to clap along, Black Tom's harpoon tapped harder, and the deck seemed to vibrate with shared energy, the enchanted runes flickering brighter. Billy leaned into the final chord, letting it ring out, before the crew's voices surged in, carrying the moment forward with seamless enthusiasm.

Crew (clapping fast, swaying side to side)
Blow ho, sails aglow,
Answer her storm and his heart's slow flow,
Wings wide on the wind we ride,
The Roger's magic keeps us alive.

The claps and sways turned the deck into a living rhythm, the ship rocking in time. Billy ended on a bright, lingering chord, then let his hand fall, eyes glinting with mischief as the mood shifted. He dropped his voice, letting it curl low and ominous, “Next one is on curses.” He looked to Smee and One-Eyed Jack, “Ye know the ones I mean.”

They exchanged a look, equal parts jest and memory, and the mood shifted. They leaned in, the laughter dimming to a tense anticipation, the melody dipping into darker waters as the lute’s tone grew low and creeping, like footsteps on a moonlit deck.

The air cooled as if a cloud had passed over the moon. Mugs were set down more carefully now; even the lanterns seemed to lean in. Shadows lengthened and the crew drew closer, as if the words themselves might keep the dark at bay.

Billy’s fingers moved with a storyteller’s patience, plucking a slow, unsettling rhythm, each chord a step deeper into the ship’s old wounds.

Billy
There’s a spot of black that no man wants to see,
A torn scrap o’ paper, marked with destiny.
It comes in the dark, slipped under the door,
And the man who takes it sails no more.

A hush fell over the deck. One-Eyed Jack’s grin fading, jaw tightening, spat over the rail as if to ward off the omen. Killian’s hand went to his hook, not in anger but in the reflex of a captain who had seen too many men vanish into the sea’s appetite.

Billy
The ink’s still wet when it touches your palm,
Cold as a grave, hot as a cannon’s qualm.
Your name’s on the list, the crew turns away,
No rum can wash that mark of decay.

Billy’s voice dropped to a rasp, and the runes underfoot flickered as if in warning. Smee’s face went pale as he swallowed hard, fingers tightening around his mug. like a talisman. The crew’s eyes flicked to the shadows near the doors, as though expecting a scrap of black to slide under at any moment.

Billy
I’ve seen strong men scream when the spot appeared,
Eyes wide with terror, their courage seared.
The Roger’s runes flare, tryin’ to fight,
But curses don’t care for enchanted light.

A murmur ran through the crew, remembrances of mates lost, of frantic prayers and desperate fires. Killian’s gaze swept the deck, steady and cold as the sea. The runes underfoot glimmered faintly, as if stung by the truth of it. Desylva’s mark pulsed once, a reflexive flare of defiance.

Billy
So burn every scrap that the shadows send,
Never let the black spot touch your hand.
For once it’s yours, the sea claims its due,
And the Roger’ll sail on without you.

Crew (low stomp, mugs tapped slow)
Heave ho, black spot, black spot,
Death’s little note that the shadows brought.
Burn it quick or the sea will claim,
Another soul lost to the curse’s name.

The last stomp echoed like a muffled drum. Billy shifted the melody, letting it ripple like water, his voice dropping to a half-sung, half-whispered tone that made the hairs on the back of necks rise, and the lantern flames shiver.

Billy
She sang from the rocks with a voice like silk and sin,
Hair green as kelp, eyes the color of drowning men.
One note in your blood and you're hers for good,
No port, no grog, no woman ever could.

One-Eyed Jack's fingers twitched toward his ears. The crew shifted closer to the center of the deck, away from the rail.

Billy
Ye leap to the rail with a madman's grin,
Dive for her arms where the deep begins.
The crew hauls ye back, but the song stays inside,
Every wave whispers her name till you die.

Billy's voice thinned to a haunted thread. Desylva's eyes flashed as she lifted a hand, a reflexive shield, and sent a harmless fork of lightning to the sky breaking the tension with a sharp, bright snap. The crew exhaled, some laughing nervously and clap a beat to dispel the chill.

Billy
I've seen 'em claw at their ears till they bleed,
Beggin' for silence, but the siren's deed.
The Roger trembles when they sing along,
Her timbers weep for the men gone wrong.

Smee, ever practical, thumped his mug and barked a laugh that was half bravado, half fear.

Billy
So plug yer ears with wax and rum-soaked thread,
Never look at the rocks where the pretty ones tread.
For the siren's binding is tighter than rope,
And she'll drag your soul to the lightless slope.

The crew swayed side to side, humming in eerie harmony.

Crew
Heave ho, siren's call, siren's call,
Sweet as death and cold as the squall.
Plug yer ears, lads, don't heed the song,
Or the deep will claim you before too long.

The humming faded into a chill silence. Billy let the melody darken further. His fingers slowed, drawing out a slow mournful, hollow sound from the strings, like wind through a graveyard of masts, as he told of fog and pale ships. Lanterns were lowered a fraction; the crew's voices softened to a hush.

Billy
There's a fog that rolls thicker than a hangman's hood,
And a ship inside it, pale as driftwood.
No crew on deck, but the wheel still turns,
Sails full of wind that no living man earns.

Black Tom's eyes narrowed; he'd seen that fog, felt the way the Roger shuddered at its approach. His jaw worked as he remembered the hollow-eyed men who'd chased a ghost and never returned.

The deck seemed to tilt toward that memory.

Billy
They say if you board her, your shadow stays,
Peels from your heels on the ghost-light rays.
You walk her planks till your flesh falls away,
A shade in her rigging for eternity's day.

Billy's voice was a warning and a lament. Killian's gaze hardened, a silent promise never to let his men chase such a gleam, his hand tightening on the rail, his eyes distant, seeing the pale ship and the men who'd followed it.

Billy
Ships shudder when that fog draws near,
Lanterns burnin' bright with a warning clear.
Good men lost who chased that pale gleam,
Now they sail silent in a cursed dream.

So when the mist comes thick and the lanterns dim,
Keep the wheel hard over, don't follow the hymn.
For the ghost ship hungers for living men's breath,
And she'll steal your shadow and leave you death.

Crew (quiet stomp, voices low and hushed)
Heave ho, ghost ship, ghost ship,
Steal no more souls on your silent trip.
Turn the wheel, lads, keep her away,
Lest we sail forever in her cold gray.

The stomp became more like a warding than a celebration. The tempo shifted, harder, like boots marching to the gallows. Billy's voice sharpened into a march as he sang of oaths and blood, of promises that bound men as surely as chains.

Billy
They swore on the blade when the moon was red,
Blood on steel, a vow they bled.
"Never betray, never leave the crew,"
But one man broke it, and the curse flew.

The crew's faces darkened. A silence fell, heavy enough to hear the sea breathe. Oaths, especially Blood Oaths, were no small thing amongst pirates.

Billy
His skin turned black where the blood had dried,
Veins like tar, eyes hollow inside.
He screamed for water, but salt burned his throat,
The sea rejected him, forsook yet afloat.

They chained him below till he withered to bone,
Still whisperin' betrayal in a voice like stone.

One-Eyed Jack spat and slammed his mug down. The thought of chains, and a man turned to a warning, made the deck feel colder. Smee stared into his mug as if it held answers.

Billy
So when you swear on a knife or maybe a hook,
Mean every word, don't give it a look.
For the blood oath waits like a shark in the deep,
And it'll eat your soul while you're still asleep.

Crew (hard stomp, mugs slammed down)
Heave ho, blood oath, blood oath,
Swear it true or pay the most.
Black veins creep and the sea won't take,
A traitor's curse for the oath ye break.

Billy ended with a long, mournful chord that seemed to hang in the air like smoke. The crew sat with the echo of the warnings in their bones. Billy's eyes swept them, and he let a small, rueful smile break the tension. "That's the dark side o' the life," he said quietly. "But we've got the Roger, and we've got each other. That's stronger than any curse." Mugs rose again, this time steadier, as if the shared memory of danger made them more resolute. The ship creaked softly, as if agreeing.

Billy's fingers found a new pattern, one that carried both ache and hope. Hiss grin returned, sly and bright. "Now, I've been working on a variation of the one we just sung. A version where we break the curses. A 'What If' if you wish." His lute started up again.

The tune began slow, like a hand reaching into a wound to pull out the rot, strings almost weeping at first, the mood shifting from dread to defiance. The crew leaned forward; even the sea seemed to hush, listening for the promise that curses could be undone.

Billy
They swore on a blade when the moon bled red,
Blood on the steel, a vow all bled.
But one man turned, sold 'em out for gold,
And the curse took root, black as coal.

Faces tightened, but Billy's next lines brought a spark, an image of Desylva stepping into the breach, lightning in her palms.

Billy
His veins went dark, skin split like dry earth,
Screamin' for water while his tongue burned with thirst.
The Roger shook, runes flarin' angry and red,
Till Desylva stood, storm cracklin' overhead.

The crew murmured the name like a benediction. Killian's jaw flexed, as his mind pictured Desylva's storm meeting the curse.

Billy
She pressed her mark to his blackened wrist,
Lightning poured in, a white-hot twist.
He howled like a beast as the curse burned away,
Flesh re-knit, bones setting true in its sway.

A collective exhale swept the deck. Smee dabbed at his eyes with a sleeve; One-Eyed Jack's grin was wet with relief. The tale of the curse broken was a salve.

Billy
With Killian's hook and her thunder's roar,
They broke the oath on that blood-soaked floor.
The black veins faded, the traitor breathed free,
But they never forgave, curses die, but not memory.

Crew (slow stomp, voices rising)
Heave ho, blood oath broken,
Lightning and steel, the curse unspoken.
Burn it out with storm and blade,
No vow shall bind what the dark has made.

Billy let the melody shift, lute rippling like water, darker notes snapping like chains as he returned to the siren's tale, this time with the rescue threaded through it.

Billy
She sang from the fog with a voice like sin,
Green hair floatin', eyes pullin' us in.
One note in the blood and the mind's not your own,
You leap to her arms where the cold deep is home.

Jack was the first, eyes glassy and wide,
Climbin' the rail with a lover's stride.
We chained him fast, but the song stayed inside,
Whisperin' sweet till his sanity died.

The image of One-Eyed Jack's near-loss made the crew's hands tighten on rail and rope. Desylva's face went hard with fury.

Billy
Desylva raged, storm boilin' black,
Thunder cracked loud, lightnin' on her back.
She dove in the water, dagger in her teeth,
Found the siren queen on her coral wreath.

The crew pictured Killian holding the chain, muscles straining, while Desylva fought beneath the waves. Billy's fingers struck a bright, decisive chord.

Billy
Hook held the chain while the lass fought below,
Steel met scale in the undertow.
When she surfaced, siren's throat in her fist,
The song snapped clean, Jack woke from the mist.

A cheer rose then, raw and relieved. One-Eyed Jack slapped the deck and laughed, the sound breaking the last of the chill.

Crew (swaying, then hard clap)
Heave ho, siren's chains shattered,
Storm lass dove deep where the cursed were scattered.
Cut the throat, break the spell,
No more voices draggin' us to hell.

Billy's tune turned spectral again, the strings trembling as he told of the ghost ship.

Billy (lute slow, eerie, strings trembling)
Fog rolled thick as a hangman's shroud,
A pale ship glided, silent and proud.
No crew on deck, but the wheel still spun,
Sails full of wind that no livin' man won.

Tom boarded first, shadow peeled away,
Left him hollow, walkin' night and day.
The Roger's runes burned, tryin' to fight,
But the ghost ship hungered for livin' light.

The crew's faces went pale as they pictured Black Tom's shadow peeling away.

Billy

Killian roared, “We end this tonight!”
Desylva called lightning, sharp and bright.
They boarded the phantom, steel and storm,
Hook slashed the wheel, thunder took form.

The crew pictured the rush of boarding, the clash of steel and the crack of thunder. Billy’s voice dropped to a single, fierce note.

Billy
She drove her dagger into the heart o’ the deck,
Black blood boiled up, the curse broke its neck.
The pale ship screamed, then faded to mist,
Tom’s shadow returned with a ghostly twist.

Black Tom’s shoulders relaxed as if a weight had been lifted; he laughed, a little unsteady, and the crew clapped him on the back.

Crew (slow stomp, voices rising)
Heave ho, ghost ship broken,
Storm and steel, the shadow unspoken.
Cut the heart, let the curse unwind,
No more shades stealin’ what’s mine.

Billy’s fingers found a hard, vengeful, fast, driving rhythm as he finished, the cycle of a curse born of greed and the healing that followed.

Billy
He took her heart, left Cap’n to bleed,
A golden imp with a crocodile’s greed.
The curse took root in the hook and the hate,
A vow to hunt him to the end o’ fate.

Scores of years passed cold, vengeance a chain,
Every shadow whispered his name again.
But Desylva came with her storm and her fire,
Broke the old rage, lifted him higher.

Smee, One-Eyed Jack, and Black Tom remembered those long nights, the hunts, the scars. Killian’s hand brushed the hook at his hip as if to feel the weight of what had been lifted.

Billy
She kissed the hook, lightning in her touch,
Burned the curse out, oh it hurt so much.
He screamed as the hate boiled away in her light,
The crocodile’s grasp snapped clean in the night.

A cheer rose, fierce and triumphant. The hook gleamed in the lantern glow, a small, hard, thing made new.

Billy
Now the hook shines bright, no longer black,
The vow’s still there, but the curse fell back.
With her by his side, the rage turned to flame,
They’ll face the beast, but they’ll never be the same.

Crew (hard stomp, mugs slammed)
Heave ho, curse be broken,
Storm lass kissed it, the hate unspoken.
Hook shines bright, no shadow remains,

Killian and Desylva broke the chains.

Billy let the final chord ring like a bell, then looked around at the crew. They applauded, some whooping, some nodding with fierce satisfaction. The air felt lighter, as if the telling itself had loosened old knots.

Billy smiled and shifted into a quicker, brighter, glittering riff. “Now we sing of spoils that make the danger worth it,” he said. The crew’s mood lifted as they straightened. Their grins, laughter, and the clink of mugs returning. The thoughts of triumph warmed them, ready for glory instead of ghosts.

Billy
Down in the Crimson Abyss where the blood-waves roll,
We dove for the pearl that could ransom a soul.
Kraken’s arms lashed, ink blacker than sin,
But Desylva’s lightning lit the way in.

The crew leaned forward, eyes bright with remembered terror and triumph. The tale of the dive played across their faces, wide eyes, clenched teeth, the thrill of the deep.

Killian’s grin was a flash of remembered danger and victory. Desylva’s lips curled in a feral smile. Killian’s hook flexed at his side as if itching for another swing.

Billy
Killian’s hook slashed through the beast’s rubber hide,
While her storm cracked the deep like a thunderous tide.
The pearl glowed red in the monster’s throat,
We pried it free with a pirate’s note.

They cheered and whooped at the memory, stomping in time, mugs raised high as if to hold the glow of that crimson prize in their hands once more. Smee mimed prying something from an invisible maw, earning a round of laughter.

Billy
Back on the Roger, it burned in our hands,
A heart o’ the sea from forgotten lands.
Worth more than gold, worth more than a crown,
The Crimson Pearl, our glory’s renown.

Crew (stomping hard, mugs raised high)
Heave ho, crimson pearl, crimson pearl,
Blood of the deep in a glowing swirl!
We fought the kraken, we claimed the prize,
The Roger’s hoard lights up the skies!

Billy (lute dark and heavy, strings almost growling)
The Obsidian Vault lies under a volcano’s breath,
Guarded by gorgons and rivers of death.
We stormed that black keep with cannon and blade,
Desylva’s tempest the gorgon’s bane made.

Her lightning shattered the stone serpent’s gaze,
Turned their stone hearts back to flesh in a blaze.
Killian’s hook pried the vault’s iron seam,
We pulled out the cloak that hides in a dream.

Shadow-cloth blacker than midnight’s core,
Wraps the ship tight, makes us ghosts evermore.
No navy can find us, no curse can pursue,
The Obsidian Vault gave its treasure to true.

Crew (slow, deep stomp, voices low and reverent)

Heave ho, obsidian cloak, obsidian cloak,
Shadows we wear like a pirate's joke.
From the vault of fire, we stole the night,
The Roger sails unseen in the fight

Billy (lute bright and crystalline, notes ringing like ice)
In Narnia's frost where the wargs howl and bite,
We sought the Dawn Crystal under eternal night.
Ice giants roared, their clubs cracked the snow,
But Desylva's thunder laid their army low.

Killian's blade danced through the blizzard's white scream,
While her storm lit the path like a frozen dream.
The crystal shone pure in a cave of blue ice,
We claimed its light at a terrible price.

Now it hangs in the crow's nest, glowing soft and clear,
Turns fog to gold when the dawn draws near.
No darkness can hold us when that crystal's ablaze,
A piece of the morning in our pirate days.

Crew (clapping fast, swaying like wind through snow)
Heave ho, dawn crystal, dawn crystal,
Light of the morn in a frozen thistle!
From Narnia's deep, we stole the day,
The Roger's star guides us all the way!

Billy (lute eerie and hollow, strings almost silent at first)
The Silence Shard sleeps in the Echo Realm's throat,
A crystal that drinks every sound, every note.
We braved the void where the islands drift free,
Voices stolen, no scream, no plea.

Desylva's storm tried to roar but went mute,
Killian's curses died on his lips absolute.
We fought shadow wraiths with steel and with will,
Till her lightning cracked the shard on the hill.

When it shattered, sound rushed back in a flood,
Our voices returned like a tide made of blood.
We took the largest piece, sharp as a blade,
Now it hangs at the helm, our silence repaid.

It quiets the cannon when stealth is our need,
Muffles the crew when we do the dark deed.
A treasure of nothing, yet worth more than gold,
The Silence Shard, our secret untold.

Crew (soft stomp, then sudden loud clap)
Heave ho, silence shard, silence shard,
Steals every sound in the Echoes hard!
We broke the quiet, we claimed the piece,
The Roger's voice will never cease!

The last echoes of drifted across the deck, mingling with salt air and the heartbeat of the ship, sealing the moment into memory. The crew's roar shook the sails, their boots hammering the deck in triumph. Billy finished with a long, triumphant chord, strings ringing out like scattered coins.

The Jolly Roger rocked gently beneath them, like a cradle, as if pleased with the praise. Her runes pulsing in a slow, steady rhythm, alive, listening, glowing silver-blue as if the ship herself approved of the telling. Rum splashed across the planks, absorbed instantly by the glowing sigils that drank it like an offering.

Billy grinned at the crew, eyes bright. Desylva smirked, her storm giving a proud gust that rattles the sails. Killian laughed low, hook tapping Billy's shoulder. "Keep singin' our treasures, lad. You make us sound richer than we are."

Smee sloshed rum over the rail in a ceremonial splash, muttering a blessing to the deep. Black Tom thumped the capstan with the flat of his harpoon, each strike a booming echo of victory. One-Eyed Jack spun his dagger overhead, catching it with a grin sharp enough to cut rope, then barked a laugh. "Aye, and worth losin' yer mind for, if she hadn't lit the beast up like a festival torch!"

Desylva laughed, breathless from the energy rolling across the deck, her storm-mark shimmering like a living ember, then gave a theatrical bow, cloak sweeping the deck. A playful gust curled around her ankles, lifting the hem as if applauding her. "I do try to keep our adventures dramatic." Killian slid an arm around her waist, pulling her flush against him with a wicked smirk. "Dramatic, she says," he murmured, lips brushing her ear. "Lass, you nearly boiled the sea." She smirked, tilting her head toward him. "And you nearly carved the kraken into calamari." He smirked, "That was the plan."

One-Eyed Jack nudged Smee with an elbow. "Storm-lass nearly fried us all down there," he said with a grin. "Aye," Smee replied, puffing his pipe, "but she did it with style."

Desylva shot them both a mock glare. "If I'd wanted to fry you, you'd be ash on the wind." One-Eyed Jack raised his mug. "And we'd die proud!"

Laughter erupted again, warm and rolling. Even Black Tom cracked a rare smile, the kind that looked like it had to fight its way through a decade of stoicism.

Their banter drew a round of cheers, the crew pounding fists on barrels and rails. Smee wiped his eyes, whether from laughter or rum, no one could say, and raised his mug again. "To the Captain and the Storm-Lass!" he shouted. "To treasure, curses, storms, and songs!" Billy chimed, plucking a triumphant flourish.

The crew echoed each toast, voices overlapping in a joyous cacophony. The night air vibrated with warmth, camaraderie, and the lingering electricity of Desylva's magic. Overhead, the sails rustled softly, catching a breeze that hadn't been there a moment before, her doing, no doubt, sending the ship rocking in a gentle, celebratory sway.

Killian pressed a kiss to Desylva's temple, his voice low and roughened by emotion and rum. "Storm or calm, curse or treasure… I'll take every realm with you." She turned into him, eyes glowing like storm-lit clouds. "And I with you, pirate."

Billy let his fingers drift lazily across the strings, coaxing a soft, wandering melody, something playful, something that let the adrenaline ebb without letting the energy die. The crew settled into a looser circle, some leaning on barrels, others dropping onto coils of rope or sprawling against the rail with contented sighs.

Desylva brushed a stray lock of hair from her face, the breeze responding to her touch like a loyal hound. Killian watched her with a half-smile, the kind that softened the sharp lines of his face and made the lanternlight cling to him like a lover.

Billy shifted the tune, letting it grow brighter, more mischievous. "Well now," he said, "we've sung of curses, treasures, storms, and savin' each other's hides. But there's one more tale the Roger's been whisperin' for us to tell."

Killian arched a brow. "Oh? And what tale would that be, lad?" Billy's grin widened, eyes sparkling with the thrill of a new song. "A tale o' the ship herself, Cap'n. … Not her runes… not her sails… already done that. … But her heart. … The part o' her that only wakes when the we's together, when the sea's calm, and when the night's ripe for truth."

They leaned in, curiosity piqued. Even the lantern flames seemed to steady, as though the ship herself were listening. Desylva crossed her arms, intrigued. "The Roger's heart, hm? And what does she say?" Billy plucked a

single, resonant note that hung in the air like a held breath. “She says,” he murmured, “that the night ain’t done with us yet.”

A ripple of anticipation moved through the crew, quiet, electric, expectant. Killian’s grin turned wicked. “Then by all means, lad… let her speak.”

Billy nodded, fingers settling into position on the strings. The crew straightened, mugs lifted, boots braced. The sea hushed. The wind stilled. And Billy began to play. His fingers settle on the strings, the deck falling into a hush so complete even the sea seemed to pause.

A faint breeze curled around the crew’s boots, as if the ship herself were leaning closer to listen. The lanterns flickered, their flames stretching toward the center of the circle like eager spectators.

Billy (voice low, warm, reverent)
There’s a beat in the boards when the night runs still,
A hum in the hull when we crest a hill,
A whisper soft in the riggin’s sway,
The Roger’s heart keeps the dark at bay.

The crew shifted, glancing down at the planks beneath them. The runes pulsed faintly, silver, steady, alive. Killian’s brows lifted, intrigued. Desylva’s eyes softened, sensing the magic stirring.

Billy
She’s more than oak and iron and tar,
More than the sails that take us far,
She’s breath and bone, she’s storm and spark,
A guardian born from the endless dark.

Smee’s mug lowered slowly, his expression turning thoughtful. One-Eyed Jack’s grin faded into something quieter, almost reverent. Black Tom rested a hand on the mast, as if greeting an old friend.

Crew (soft hum, swaying gently)
Ho, ho, the Roger’s beat,
Steady as thunder, strong and sweet,
Hear her whisper, feel her guide,
The Roger’s heart sails by our side.

Billy’s fingers danced lightly, the melody turning tender, almost lullaby-soft. The ship rocked in time, her timbers creaking like a contented sigh.

Billy
When Cap’n’s wounded, her runes burn bright,
Silver flames drivin’ back the night,
She steadies her keel when Desylva storms,
Holdin’ fast through the fiercest forms.

Killian’s gaze dropped to the deck, remembering nights when the ship had glowed beneath him, keeping him alive through wounds that should’ve ended him. Desylva brushed her fingers along a glowing rune, her touch sparking a faint shimmer.

Billy
She’s felt our laughter, she’s felt our pain,
She’s carried our curses through wind and rain,
She’s held our secrets in every plank,
A loyal soul no storm has sank.

One-Eyed Jack swallowed hard. Smee sniffed loudly. Black Tom’s eyes glistened in the lanternlight.

Crew (soft, almost prayerful)
Ho, ho, the Roger's soul,
Keeper of tales that the deep winds stole,
Standin' strong through storm and strife,
The Roger guards our pirate life.

Billy's voice rose, warm and fierce, the melody swelling like a tide.

Billy
She's seen us break the darkest curse,
She's watched us bleed, she's watched us nurse,
She's held our vows in her sacred grain,
A ship o' magic, forged from pain.

Billy stepped forward, tapping the deck with his boot. The runes flared in answer, bright and sure.

Billy
So raise yer mugs to the heart below,
The pulse that guides where the wild winds blow,
For without her strength, without her grace,
We'd be lost to the deep's cold, hungry face.

Crew (voices rising, boots stomping in rhythm)
Ho, ho, the Roger's heart,
Beatin' strong from the very start,
Storm or curse, we'll never part,
For we sail with the Roger's heart!

The final stomp shook the deck. The runes blazed once, bright as lightning, before settling into a gentle glow. A warm breeze swept across the ship, ruffling hair and cloaks, as if the Roger herself were exhaling in gratitude. The ship, ancient, enchanted, loyal, seemed to hum in agreement.

Killian clapped Billy on the shoulder. "Fine work, lad." Desylva smiled, eyes glowing. "The Roger approves." Billy lowered his lute, smiling softly. "She hears us," he murmured. "She always does." Killian nodded, voice low with respect. "Aye. And she always will." Desylva placed her palm on the deck, her mark glowing faintly. "She's family."

The crew murmured agreement, some touching the planks, others raising their mugs in silent salute. Billy rolled his shoulders, cracked his knuckles, and let a sly grin creep across his face. His lute started up again, deep and rolling, like waves before the strike.

Billy
We sailed the Maelstrom's Eye where the waters boil black,
Kraken woke hungry, arms thicker than mizzen tack.
Tentacles smashed the rail, splintered oak flew high,
Suckers latched the hull, pullin' us to die.

Killian roared from the bow, hook flashin' like flame,
"Cut the bastards loose, or we'll all join the same!"
Desylva called lightning, cracked the sky in two,
Thunder rolled deep as the beast screamed its due.

Jack fired the cannons, grape shot tore the flesh,
Tom's harpoon sank true, pinned an arm to the mesh.
Smee hacked with his cutlass, I lit the fuse,
We burned the monster's eyes till the sea turned red ooze.

The kraken thrashed once more, then sank to the deep,
Left us battered but breathin', victors to keep.

We carved its beak for the prow, a trophy of might,
The Jolly Roger sails on through the endless night.

Crew (hard stomp, mugs slammed)
Heave ho, kraken down, kraken down!
Steel and storm sent the beast to drown!
Hook and lightning, cannon and blade,
We carved our name in the deep-sea shade!

Billy (lute fast and sharp, like swords clashing)
Three ships o' the line came hard on our tail,
Royal colors flyin', cannons primed to prevail.
Grapeshot tore the sails, splinters ripped the deck,
But Killian laughed loud, "They'll pay for that wreck!"

Desylva summoned a squall, black clouds swallowed the sun,
Winds howled like banshees, their rigging came undone.
Jack aimed the long nine, chain shot sang through the air,
Snapped their masts clean, left 'em flounderin' there.

Tom boarded first, harpoon through the captain's chest,
Smee followed swingin', cutlass slicin' the rest.
Billy climbed the shrouds, torch in hand aflame,
Set their powder stores, lit the night with their shame.

The navy burned bright, a funeral pyre on the tide,
We took their gold and their flag, left 'em nowhere to hide.
The Roger's black sails caught the wind once again,
No king's navy will ever chain her men.

Crew (clapping fast, boots pounding)
Heave ho, navy broke, navy broke!
Three ships sank in the storm we woke!
Cannon and cutlass, storm and flame,
The Jolly Roger wins every game!

Billy (lute eerie and low, then building to a fierce charge)
In the Shadow Realm's frost where the trees bleed black,
A wendigo woke with a hunger to crack.
Antlers like scythes, eyes burnin' red coal,
It hunted our scent through the endless cold.

Killian met it first, hook flashin' in the gloom,
Steel met bone, sparks lit the tomb.
Desylva called thunder, cracked the sky in rage,
Lightning struck true, burned its ribcage.

Jack fired the swivel, grape tore through its hide,
Tom's harpoon sank deep, pinned it side to side.
Smee hacked its legs, I torched its hair,
We carved that monster till it wasn't there.

Its heart was ice, but we melted it down,
Took the frozen core back to the crown.
Now it hangs in the cabin, a lantern of frost,
A reminder we beat what the shadows lost.

Crew (slow stomp, then sudden roar)

Heave ho, wendigo slain, wendigo slain!
Storm and steel through the endless pain!
Ice heart broken, shadow undone,
The Jolly Roger's crew has won!

Billy (lute pounding like cannon fire, fast and relentless)
Siren's Port glowed with a hundred black guns,
A rogue fleet waited 'neath the blood-red suns.
Their admiral sneered from his gilded deck,
"Strike the Roger down, break her neck!"

Killian grinned wide, hook raised to the sky,
"Give 'em hell, lads—let the powder fly!"
Desylva summoned a squall, waves crashed like walls,
Their broadsides missed as the tempest calls.

Jack loaded chain shot, tore their rigging apart,
Tom's harpoon flew, pinned the captain's heart.
Smee rammed the swivel, grape ripped through the rail,
I lit the fuse, sent their powder to sail.

The enemy burned, masts cracked and fell,
Their screams drowned out by the Roger's bell.
We took their gold, their rum, and their pride,
Left Siren's Port smoldering on the tide.

Crew (full roar, stomping and clapping)
Heave ho, cannon duel, cannon duel!
We broke their fleet, made the rogues drool!
Storm and shot, hook and blade,
The Jolly Roger will never fade!

Billy ended with a long, ringing chord, lute strings vibrating over the water. Then he grinned at the crew, eyes bright. "That's just some of the battles we've won. Not just steel and storm, but heart. The Roger carries every victory in her bones."

The men roared, mugs crashing together. Desylva's storm gave a proud gust that rattled the sails. Killian laughed low, hook tapping Billy's shoulder. "Keep singin' our fights, lad. You make us sound invincible."

Billy looked at Killian and Deslyva, "This next one is for you two." Desylva raises an eyebrow, "For us?" Billy smiled, his lute slow and warm, strings almost sighing.

Billy
She came from the rock where the tempest was born,
Gray eyes like thunder, hair wild as the storm.
He dove through the gale just to pull her aboard,
And found in her gaze what his heart had ignored.

Her mark glows blue when he kissed her at night,
Lightning in her veins, fire in his sight.
They tangled in shadows, no words, only need,
Her storm met his sea in a desperate deed.

She rides him like thunder, fierce and untamed,
He holds her like anchors when the gales have been named.
No port, no gold, no kingdom could buy
The love in her eyes when the world passes by.

So here's to the storm-lass who claimed his soul,
Through every cursed realm, she makes him whole.

Crew (soft hum, swaying gently)
Heave ho, storm-lass heart, storm-lass heart,
Lightning and sea, never torn apart.
Love like a tempest, wild and true,
Burns brighter than stars for him and you.

Billy (lute jaunty at first, then dipping into longing)
In Tortuga's haze where the lanterns burn low,
Rum on his tongue and the fiddles in flow,
She leaned 'cross the table, eyes dark as the deep,
Lips painted red with a promise to keep.

One kiss in the corner, away from the crowd,
Her fingers in his hair, fierce and proud.
They slipped to the alley where the shadows were thick,
Pressed against brick, her nails made him sick.

Her breath was hot rum, her skin tasted of salt,
They moved like a storm, no mercy, no halt.
The fiddles kept playing, the night swallowed sound,
But he swears the whole town felt their hearts pound.

Crew (clapping lightly, a few low whistles)
Heave ho, tavern kiss, tavern kiss,
Night of fire, moment of bliss.
Storm ebbed, but hearts still burns,
Pirate love's lesson: the wheel always turns.

The crew settled into a warm, rum-soaked glow, breathless and flushed, the deck warm beneath their boots. Lanterns swayed gently overhead, casting soft gold across the planks. Their faces flushed with pride and drink.

Billy let his fingers drift into a gentler melody, the notes falling like quiet moonlight over the ship. The shift in tone was immediate, voices softened, shoulders eased, and even the sea seemed to hush.

Killian's arm remained around Desylva's waist, his thumb brushing slow circles against her hip. She leaned into him, her storm-mark glowing faintly, the warmth of it brushing his skin like a whispered promise.

The crew exchanged knowing grins, the next song was one they all recognized.

Billy (lute gentle, almost a lullaby)
When the watch is long and the sea's gone still,
They slip below deck to the cabin's thrill.
No cannon, no storm, just candlelight's glow,
Skin on skin where the wild winds don't blow.

As Billy sang, the crew chuckled softly, nudging each other with elbows. Smee turned pink and pretended to adjust his pipe. One-Eyed Jack smirked openly, tapping his dagger on his boot in a slow, teasing rhythm.

Billy
He traces every scar with a reverent hand,
She whispers his name like it's holy land.
Slow and tender, like waves on the shore,
They move together, needing nothing more.

Killian's cheeks warmed, not with embarrassment, but with pride. Desylva's eyes sparkled, her lips curving into a wicked, affectionate smile. She nudged him with her shoulder, and he dipped his head to brush a kiss against her temple.

Billy
Her breath catches soft when he kiss her throat,
His fingers find places that make her float.
No rush, no fight, just the quiet they claim,
Two hearts beating one in the lantern's flame.

The crew quieted, the teasing fading into something softer. The Jolly Roger creaked beneath them, her runes glowing faintly as if warmed by the memory of the lovers she sheltered.

Billy
The Roger sighs low, timbers warm and content,
As if she approves how the lovers are spent.
In the hush of the night, when the world fades away,
They find our forever in the words we don't say.

Crew (quiet hum, almost reverent)
Heave ho, quiet night, quiet night,
Love soft as moonlight, burning bright.
Below the deck where the world can't see,
Two hearts sail together, wild and free.

Billy's fingers shifted, the melody deepening, gaining heat and strength. The crew straightened, sensing the shift from tenderness to fire, the other side of the lovers' tale.

Billy (lute building from tender to fierce, full passion)
She's lightning and thunder, he's steel and sea,
Together they burn brighter than destiny.
Her storm crashes down when his rage runs hot,
His hook holds her close when the battles are fought.

Desylva's mark flared bright blue, a spark of lightning snapping harmlessly above her head. Killian's grin sharpened, his hook glinting in the lanternlight as he pulled her closer.

Billy
They fight like tempests, then love like the calm,
Her nails in his back, his hand on her palm.
Rough as a squall, then soft as the tide,
Every scar they share, every tear they've cried.

The crew whooped at that, stomping boots and slamming mugs. Smee covered his ears with exaggerated modesty; One-Eyed Jack cackled and slapped him on the back.

Billy
The crew hears them sometimes, the cabin's thin wall,
They grin in the dark, but they never call.
For they know what they've won in the fire and rain,
A love that defies every curse and every chain.

Killian pressed a kiss to Desylva's cheek, murmuring something low that made her laugh, a warm, rolling sound that sent a playful gust swirling around the deck.

Billy
So here's to the storm and the hook entwined,
Two souls bound forever, two fates combined.

Through every realm, every battle, every night,
They sail as one, their hearts burning bright.

Crew (full roar, mugs crashing, boots stomping)
Heave ho, storm and hook, storm and hook,
Love like a tempest no curse could unlook!
Rough and tender, fierce and true,
Killian and Desylva, forever two!

Billy finished the last chord with a flourish, the lute strings ringing out over the water like a vow cast into the sea. The crew erupted in cheers, stomping and laughing, some raising mugs, others pounding the rail. Desylva smiled from Killian's side, her storm giving a warm, playful gust that ruffled Billy's hair. Killian laughed low, hook resting on her hip. "Keep singin' like that, lad. You'll have the whole sea knowin' how lucky I am." Billy winked. "Already do, Cap'n." The crew roared again, and the Jolly Roger rocked beneath them, proud and alive.

Killian murmured, voice low enough for only her to hear. "The lads'll be singin' this night for years." She nudged him with her shoulder, eyes bright. "Only because you make such fine material, pirate."

Billy's fingers danced across the lute strings, shifting from tender melody to a rollicking, bawdy reel, the kind that made boots itch to stomp and mugs itch to spill. The notes leapt like sparks from a blacksmith's hammer, wild, infectious and irreverent. The crew reacted instantly, shoulders shaking, grins spreading, elbows nudging ribs in anticipation of mischief.

Billy leaned in toward One-Eyed Jack, Smee, and even Black Tom — who rarely entertained such conspiracies — whispering something that made all three men snort like guilty schoolboys. One-Eyed Jack's dagger twirled faster. Smee puffed his pipe so hard the ember glowed bright as a ruby. Black Tom's stoic face cracked into the faintest, most dangerous smirk. Their heads nodding with mischievous grins. Their boots already shifting, ready to stomp.

Killian and Desylva exchanged a puzzled look, identical raised brows, identical suspicion, identical amusement. Her storm-gray eyes narrowing playfully, a faint breeze curling around her ankles. Killian tapped his hook against the mast in mock warning, the metal ringing like a bell, his blue eyes sparkled with curiosity. "What devilry are you lot brewing now?" he called, his voice laced with amusement. Desylva smirked, her wind teasing the lantern flames until they guttered like giggling children. "Aye, spill it, lads. Before I summon a squall to loosen tongues."

Billy straightened atop the capstan, freckled face splitting into a sheepish yet gleeful grin, lute poised like a weapon of chaos. "We have another one, Cap'n. Somethin' we've been craftin' in the quarters. All in jest, mind ye. No offense meant! Just a bit o' fun at yer expense."

The crew chuckled, some nervously, some gleefully. Smee puffed his pipe nervously, in frantic little bursts, clove smoke curling thick. One-Eyed Jack twirled his dagger faster, scar twitching with anticipation. Black Tom folded his arms, harpoon resting like a judge's gavel.

Killian leaned back against the mast, casually draping an arm around Desylva's shoulders, pulling her close. Her warmth pressed into him, her mark pulsing faintly against his coat. "Jest, eh? Let's hear it then, bilge rats. But if it's rubbish, you're swabbin' the decks at dawn." Desylva laughed as she slid her hand to his chest, fingers sparking teasingly. "Make it good, Billy. Or I'll zap the lot of you."

Billy's voice rang bright and wicked, lute pounding a raucous rhythm so filthy the deck itself seemed to blush. The crew erupted into thigh-slaps and stomps, the planks vibrating like a drum skin under their rowdy fervor.

Billy
Oh, Cap'n Hook with his lass so fine,
Desylva's storm makes the heavens whine.
They're screwin' wild where the starlight gleams,
Rockin' the Roger 'til the oak beams scream.

Killian's eyes widened as he barked a laugh so loud it startled a gull off the rigging as realization dawned. His hook clenched the rope tighter as he doubled over. Desylva's cheeks flushed crimson beneath her smirk, her gust

whipping up suddenly and snatching Billy's wool hat clean off his head; it sailed across the deck, landing in Smee's lap.

"Oi! You cheeky whelp!" she exclaimed, but laughter bubbled up, thunder rumbling low and playful overhead. Ozone sharp in the air. Killian pulled her tighter, his lips brushing her ear, voice a husky whisper, "They've been listenin' at the keyhole, love. Shall we give 'em more material?" She elbowed him lightly, mark flaring blue-hot, but her gray eyes danced with wicked delight.

Billy
Her thunder cracks as his hook digs deep,
Their rutting shakes the ship from sleep.
The waves do roar with her lusty cries,
Poundin' so fierce they're burnin' the skies.

In cabin's glow, they're a tangled mess,
Her nails carve trails 'cross his scarred chest.
They shag so hard the runes ignite,
Sparkin' the dark with their lover's might.

The sea's a churn with their primal beat,
Her storm's a blaze where their bodies meet.
He rides her hard 'til fades her mark,
Leavin' the crew to curse in the dark.

The crew howled with laughter, stomps shaking the planks so hard the lanterns swung wildly. Desylva's breeze intensified into a swirling vortex of mist and salt spray, misting their faces like a lover's sweat. Killian threw his head back, guffawing, his hand slapping his thigh, while wiping a tear from his eye. "Burnin' the skies, eh? You've painted us proper, lad!"

Desylva cackled, thunder rumbling low and playful overhead, as she threw her head back, summoning a harmless bolt that crackled across the sky like fireworks, illuminating Killian's flushed, grinning face. She fanned herself theatrically, her voice breathy with mock scandal, "Gods, pirate, they've got us pegged. Feel that heat?" She pressed closer, her hip grinding subtly against his, drawing a low growl from him, the wind howling in approval.

One-Eyed Jack slammed his dagger against the cannon for percussion, his eye gleaming with filthy glee, his grin feral.

One-Eyed Jack (rasping deep)
Old Killian's hook's got a wicked gleam,
Desylva's storm's a ruttin' dream.
They bang the bed 'til the timbers groan,
Shaggin' so loud it rattles the bone.

Her lightning flares when he drives it home,
Their lust a squall where the wild winds roam.
The Roger heaves with their sweaty grind,
Screwin' so fierce it'll blow your mind.

His steel's a tease on her fevered skin,
She bucks and moans as he plunges in.
They're humpin' rough, makin' planks complain,
Storm and Hook, they're the sea's own bane.

The hull's a-throb with their raucous play,
Her cursed mark burns 'til the break of day.
They shag 'til stars fall in lusty streams,
Leavin' us mates with some damn fine dreams.

The crew collapsed into hysterics. Smee nearly choked on his pipe smoke, Black Tom's shoulders shook with silent mirth, his harpoon thudding the deck in rhythm.

Desylva threw her head back and cackled, summoning a harmless bolt that crackled across the sky like fireworks, illuminating Killian's flushed, grinning face. "Plunges in, does he?" she teased, her fingers tracing Killian's hook suggestively, with a slow, deliberate finger, the steel cool under her touch. Killian caught her hand, kissing her knuckles with exaggerated gallantry. "Only for you, lass. Though the lads'll be dreamin' tonight. Poor sods."

A warm rain-mist pattered down briefly, cooling the deck and slicking their skin, the runes glowing brighter as if aroused. Smee, hearty and sloshed, standing to mime exaggerated thrusts, pipe clamped in teeth.

Smee
Cap'n and Des, they're a horny pair,
Screwin' up storms with nary a care.
Her gusts do howl as his hook takes hold,
Bangin' the bed 'til the oak grows bold.

They're ruttin' hot, makin' waves collide,
Her spark's a fire where his passion rides.
The ship's a-rock with their bawdy din,
Humpin' so wild it's a pirate's sin.

Her eyes like squalls when she begs for more,
His growl's a tide on her wanton shore.
They shag 'til the Roger's runes all blaze,
Leavin' the crew in a lust-fogged haze.

The sea's a-thrum with their carnal spree,
Her magic crackles for all to see.
They're screwin' fierce 'til the night's undone,
Makin' us wish we'd their kind o' fun.

The crew doubled over, boots stomping in a chaotic jig, the ship rocking gently as Desylva's gusts synced with the rhythm, sails snapping like applause. Killian wiped sweat from his brow, then playfully dipped Desylva low, his hook at her back. "Begs for more, do you?" he murmured, nipping her earlobe, her moan soft as thunder rolled distant. "Only from you, pirate," she purred, her mark searing against him, the air electric with their shared heat.

Black Tom, ever silent, thrust a crumpled paper at One-Eyed Jack, who snatched it with a grin, clearing his throat dramatically. "Tom's words, my voice, for the silent sod!"

Black Tom raised his harpoon like a conductor's baton, waving it as One-Eyed Jack sang his words.

One-Eyed Jack (gravelly and intense)
Hook's got his lass in a stormy grip,
Her thighs like a vice 'round his thrustin' hip.
They bang the night 'til the seas ignite,
Screwin' so raw it's a hellish sight.

Her spark's a whip when his hook's a-stir,
Their rutting quakes every plank and spur.
The Roger moans with their feral need,
Shaggin' so deep the stars take heed.

His scars meet hers in a lusty clash,
Her cries a gale as their bodies thrash.
They hump 'til the hull's 'bout to split in twain,
Storm and Hook, they're the ocean's chain.

Their love's a tempest that none can tame,
Each thrust a spark in their wild flame.
They're screwin' 'til dawn with a pirate's might,
Leavin' the Roger to sing their fight.

The reel crashed to a triumphant close, lute screeching a final flourish. The crew erupted in whoops, stomps, and applause, mugs clashing like cymbals. Desylva's storm settled into a sultry breeze, mist cooling their heated faces.

Killian straightened, applauding heartily, then raised his hook raised in salute. "Brilliant, you filthy dogs! You've immortalized us proper." Desylva laughed breathlessly and pulled Killian into a fierce kiss, her gust lifting spray in glittering arcs. "They're not wrong, love," she whispered against his lips, voice husky with promise.

Billy smirked, wiping sweat from his brow. "Ah, not quite done, Cap'n."

Killian raised an eyebrow. "There's more?" The crew nodded eagerly, some already leaning forward like children at story-time. Desylva crossed her arms, amused. "Well, continue then. Don't keep us in suspense."

Billy's lute softened into a slow, intimate melody, the kind that made lanterns dim and the sea hush, the strings almost sighing, the notes drifting out like moonlight on calm water. The crew settled, boots stilling, mugs lowered, the deck falling into a reverent hush broken only by the soft lap of waves against the hull and the occasional creak of enchanted oak.

Billy (soft, almost whispering)
There are nights when the sea goes still as glass,
Moonlight silver on the waves so calm,
Cap'n draws her close, no rush, no blast,
Just whispers and touches, a lover's balm.

His lips brush her throat like a summer breeze,
Slow and reverent, tasting salt and skin,
Her storm quiets to a sigh in the ease,
The ship purrs low, timbers warm within.

He lays her down on the cabin's bed,
Hands tracing scars like maps of old fights,
No hurry, no storm, just love gently spread,
Her mark glows soft, a faint blue light.

They move like the tide, slow rise and fall,
Bodies entwined in a tender embrace,
Her breath catches sweet, his name her call,
The Roger rocks gentle, cradling their grace.

The crew's breathing slowed, some men closing their eyes, swaying gently, mugs held to their chests. Smee's pipe smoke curled upward like a prayer. One-Eyed Jack softened, his eye warm, his dagger resting still in his lap. Black Tom closed his eyes, his shoulders relaxed for the first time all night. Billy let the last note hang, then lifted his voice again, the lute shifting to a deeper, more passionate cadence.

Crew (soft hum)
Gentle tides, gentle tides,
Love soft as moonlight on the waves,
Cap'n and Desylva, side by side,
In the quiet night, their hearts are saved.

Billy's fingers shifted, the melody sharpened, heat rising like a storm building on the horizon.

Billy (voice rising, lute strumming hard and fast)
Then come the nights when the storm breaks free,

Her mark flares like lightning's vein,
Cap'n pins her hard against the cabin's beam,
No mercy, no pause, just raw need and pain.

He takes her rough, hands bruising her hips,
Thrusts deep and fierce, claiming every inch,
She claws his back, drawing blood from his skin,
Her storm howls, winds rattling every winch.

The ship groans loud, timbers shudder and creak,
As he drives into her, relentless and wild,
Rain lashes the window, thunder at its peak,
Her cries echo sharp, a tempest beguiled.

She rides him then, fierce and unyielding,
Nails raking his chest, hips slamming down hard,
The Roger pitches, sails straining and yielding,
Lightning cracks the sky, their passion scarred.

The crew's taps quickened, boots stomping hard in time again, mugs clanging. Some laughed, some flushed. Desylva's mark glowed bright as a star, her cheeks flushed anew, her grin wicked now, her fingers tightening on Killian's coat. He pulled her closer, murmuring against her ear, voice rough with memory and promise. The air crackled faintly, her mark pulsing in rhythm with the lute.

Crew
Storm's fury, storm's fury,
Rough love crashes like thunder's roar,
Cap'n and Desylva, wild and free,
The ship feels it all, forevermore.

Billy's voice softened again, warm and reverent, lute steady and heartfelt.

Billy
No two souls fit like Cap'n and her,
A pirate's hook and a storm-witch's fire,
He's the sea that cradles her thunder's stir,
She's the gale that lifts him ever higher.

His blue eyes calm her raging skies,
Her gray gaze steadies his vengeful heart,
Through every realm, every curse, every lie,
They're the lock and key, never torn apart.

He whispers soft when her storm runs bold,
She tempers his rage with a lightning kiss,
No force in the world can break their hold,
A perfect match forged in battle's bliss.

When the night grows long and the seas turn black,
They find their haven in each other's arms,
Hook and tempest, no turning back,
Two halves of one eternal storm.

The crew's taps slowed again, voices softening into a reverent hum. Some men leaned against cannons or rails, faces softened by the firelight and the song. Desylva rested her head against Killian's shoulder, her storm quiet now, a gentle breeze that carried the scent of salt and rum. Killian pressed a kiss to her temple, his hook resting lightly at her waist.

Crew
Perfect storm, perfect storm,
Cap'n and Desylva, bound as one,
Through every tide, every battle worn,
Their love shines brighter than the sun.

Billy's lute alternated slow and fast, like waves shifting from calm to fury.

Billy
Some nights they're soft, like moonlight on waves,
He kisses her slow, hands gentle and sure,
The ship sighs low, the sea barely raves,
Their love a whisper, tender and pure.

Other nights passion ignites, rough as a squall,
He pins her hard, thrusts fierce and deep,
The Roger rocks wild, timbers shudder and call,
Her storm howls back, no secrets to keep.

He'll takes her slow, then fast as a gale,
Her nails rake his back, drawing crimson lines,
The cabin shakes, the wind begins to wail,
Their cries mingle with thunder's design.

No matter the pace, soft or savage and raw,
They fit like a puzzle, storm and sea entwined,
Cap'n and Desylva, breaking every law,
Their love a fire no darkness can bind.

The crew's hum grew richer, layered, almost reverent. Desylva lifted her head, eyes locked on Killian's, her mark glowing softly against his coat. He smiled, slow, wicked, tender, and pulled her into a deep kiss, the crew's applause rising around them like a wave.

Crew (full roar, stomping and clapping)
Nights of fire, nights of fire,
Soft or rough, they burn so bright,
Cap'n and Desylva, hearts desire,
Together they claim the endless night!

Billy ended with a flourish, lute strings ringing out. Smee raised his mug, One-Eyed Jack fired his pistol skyward, Black Tom nodded his approval. The deck shook with stomps. Desylva laughed and pulled Killian close for a quick kiss, her storm humming contentedly. The night settled around them. Billy's lute started up again, slow and low at first, building to a cheeky bounce

Billy
When the cabin door shuts tight at night,
And the lantern's glow goes dim and slight,
The first low growl escapes from the Cap'n's throat,
And the storm lass answers with a thunder note.

Smee blushes red as a lobster's shell,
Covers his ears and weary the swell,
Jack grins wide with his one good eye,
Muttering, "Gods, they're at it high and dry."

Tom just nods, harpoon across his knees,
A faint smirk cracking his silent face with ease,
I play my lute to escape the sound,
But the timbers hum it all around.

Crew (clapping and laughing, mugs raised)
Heave ho, hear the storm below!
Cap’n and his lass put on a show!
Thunder in the cabin, lightning in the bed,
The Jolly Roger rocks while the lovers tread!

Billy (lute jaunty and teasing, quick strums)
Dawn breaks soft and the cabin door creaks wide,
Cap’n stumbles out, coat half open, eyes half-tied,
Desylva follows, hair wild, lips still red,
Mark glowing faint like embers in the bed.

Smee whistles low, “Cap’n, ye look half-drowned!”
Jack cackles loud, “She rode ye to the ground!”
I grin from the crow’s nest high,
“Storm lass left her thunder in his sigh!”

Tom points at the love-bites on Cap’n’s throat,
A silent salute with a nod and a low note,
We roar with laughter, mugs clashing in cheer,
“Another night of love, another day of beer!”

Crew (stomping and chanting)
Morning after, morning after,
Bites and scratches, love and laughter!
Cap’n’s marked, the lass is proud,
The Roger sails beneath their cloud!

Billy (lute deep and rolling, almost reverent)
When they love soft, the ship sighs low and sweet,
Timbers warm like a heart’s gentle beat,
Runes glow gold, lanterns dim to a hush,
The Roger cradles their quiet rush.

But when they turn rough, the hull shudders hard,
Planks groan loud like thunder in the yard,
Sails strain tight though they’re furled away,
The Roger rocks wild in their passionate play.

We feel it all through the oak and the rope,
Every thrust, every sigh, every wild hope,
The ship drinks their fire, stores it in her bones,
For the next storm that comes, she’ll never sail alone.

Crew (slow stomp, deep hum)
Heave ho, the Roger knows,
Every soft kiss, every savage throe,
She carries their love in her heart of oak,
Through every tide, through every stroke.

Billy (lute soft and steady, voice almost hushed)
We don’t speak of it much when the sun is high,
But at night we feel their storm pass by,
We tip our hats (or what’s left of ‘em) low,
To the Cap’n and his lass in the lantern’s glow.

Smee mutters prayers for their endless flame,
Jack raises a silent glass in their name,

Tom carves another notch in his harpoon's haft,
For every night they prove love can last.

I sing softer when the cabin's alight,
Knowing their fire keeps the dark at bay tonight,
We're rough men, scarred and worn to the bone,
But we guard their love like it's our own.

Crew (quiet hum, mugs gently tapped)
Heave ho, soft and low,
For the storm and hook in the moonlight's glow,
We sail for them, through every squall and fight,
Their love's the spark that keeps us bright.

Billy ended with a flourish on the lute, then grinned at the crew. "That's what I heard last night, lads. And the night before, and the night before that. The Roger remembers every moan! But she had more to say."

His lute deepened, warm and rolling.

Billy
The old oak beams, they've seen centuries of fight,
But they purr like a great cat when love burns bright.
When Hook pins Storm gentle, hands soft on her skin,
The timbers hum low, lettin' pleasure in.

When she rides him fierce, nails rakin' down his chest,
The whole ship groans deep, rockin' with their quest.
Every thrust, every sigh, the planks feel the beat,
They flex and they sigh, sharin' in the heat.

I've heard 'em creak soft when he kisses her slow,
A lullaby of wood for the lovers below.
And when they break together, cryin' out as one,
The Roger shivers all over, like she's comin' undone.

So raise a glass to the timbers that know,
The fire of their love makes the whole ship glow.

Crew (quiet stomp, mugs tapped gently)
Creak ho, timbers low,
Feel the love through the deck's old flow,
When they're soft or when they're wild and free,
The Jolly Roger sings their ecstasy.

Billy's voice dropped to a deep, steady rumble.

Billy (lute deep and steady, like waves on a calm night)
She's more than wood and canvas stretched on spars,
The Roger's got a heartbeat, feels the stars.
When Cap'n takes Desylva in the lantern's glow,
The whole ship breathes with 'em, steady and slow.

Runes pulse brighter when their bodies meet,
A rhythm in the oak, a magic sweet.
The anchor chain rattles soft like a sigh,
When she whispers his name beneath the sky.

And when the storm breaks loose and they go wild,

The hull quakes hard, like a mother gone riled.
Every shudder, every groan, every trembling board,
Is the ship lovin' them back, her own reward.

So here's to the Roger, alive in her way,
She carries their passion night into day.
Through every realm, every fight, every storm-tossed mile,
She sails for their love with a living smile.

Crew (slow, deep hum, swaying as one)
Beat ho, heart aglow,
The ship feels the love that the two bestow,
Runes and timbers, sails and chain,
The Jolly Roger beats for their flame.

Billy ended with a flourish on the lute. They all roared with laughter, mugs clashing, some wiping eyes, others pretending to cover their ears again.

Desylva smirked, her storm giving a playful gust that ruffled Billy's hair, while Killian chuckled low, hook tapping Billy's shoulder in mock threat. "Sing those too loud, lad, and you'll be swimmin' with the fishes." Billy strummed a soft, contented chord, an exhale after the storm of songs, and the crew settled into a warm, rum-soaked glow. Lanterns swayed overhead, casting golden halos across faces flushed with pride and drink.

The stars shone bright, the sea stretched out calm and endless, reflecting the moon in a perfect silver path that seemed to lead nowhere and everywhere at once. The Jolly Roger rocked beneath them like a living thing, enchanted, loyal, and full of stories yet to be sung, carrying the crew's hymn into eternity. A defiant ballad of storm and hook, bound forever to the Roger's legend.

Desylva leaned in and whispered, "Cabin. Now." Killian's grin turned wolfish, his hook grazing her lower back as he steered her toward the companionway with a low growl, "Aye, lass. Let's give the Roger somethin' to sing about." They slipped below, boots echoing on the ladder, the crew's knowing catcalls and laughter chasing them into the shadows as the hatch door thudded shut.

The Jolly Roger sailed on, moonlit waves cradling her like a lover, the shanty's echo woven into her enchanted timbers, joined now by the faint, rhythmic creak of the captain's cabin below. Smee puffed his pipe, grinning ear to ear. One-Eyed Jack sheathed his pistol with a satisfied click. Black Tom hefted his harpoon, a rare smirk ghosting his lips; Billy strummed a gentle, teasing coda, notes floating like fireflies over the deck.

Happy Ever After (Day 64)

Montage

Over the next few weeks, the Jolly Roger sailed through calm azure waters, sun-dappled seas, and velvet-black starlit nights. The salt wind was sharp against skin, the creak of timbers and snap of canvas a constant heartbeat beneath every plan. Killian and Desylva planned a wedding at sea—simple, wild, achingly theirs—like stealing time from fate itself, daring it to try and take it away. Every glance, every brush of fingers, every whispered promise carried the weight of something fragile and fiercely defended, something they both knew could be ripped away in an instant.

Desylva spent most afternoons cross-legged on the cabin floor, salvaged silk scavenged from a merchant wreck spread across her lap like spilled moonlight. The fabric was cool and slippery under her fingertips, shifting like water with every breath she took. Her needle flashed in the slanted sunbeams pouring through the stern windows, silver thread catching light as she stitched lightning bolts into the hem. Each tiny, deliberate stab of the needle was a vow. Her cursed mark pulsed softly beneath her sleeve, a warm blue throb that quickened whenever Killian stepped close enough for her to smell the leather of his coat mixed with sea and smoke.

Sometimes her hands shook—not from the ship's gentle roll, but from the quiet terror that this fragile happiness might shatter like sea glass underfoot. She never said it aloud. She didn't have to. The tremor in her fingers said it for her. The silk itself seemed to sense her fear, rippling faintly as if stirred by a phantom breeze.

Killian watched her from the doorway, shoulder against the frame, hook resting idle against his thigh. He polished his black leather coat with slow, methodical strokes, the rag rasping softly against brass buttons, but his eyes never left her. The sight of her bent over the silk—dark hair falling across her face, lips pressed together in focus—made something deep in his chest clench so hard he had to look away for a moment, swallowing against the sudden thickness in his throat.

She's real. She's here. She chose me.

The thought felt fragile, almost painful, like holding sea glass worn thin by waves—beautiful, sharp-edged, and so easily broken. Centuries of believing happiness was a lie he didn't deserve had left scars deeper than any blade. Now joy sat three feet away sewing their future into silk, and the fear of losing it again was worse than any curse he'd ever borne.

Sometimes he'd cross the room just to sit beside her, his knee brushing hers, offering quiet presence rather than words. She'd lean into him without looking up, her shoulder touching his, the warmth of him grounding her trembling hands. Her storm-mark would flare faintly, blue light brushing his skin like a soft pulse of magic. He'd rest his hook lightly against her thigh, a silent anchor, a promise that he wasn't going anywhere.

They stole every chance they could find to be alone together, lost in each other's gaze. Late afternoons when the crew was busy with ropes and sails, they'd climb to the crow's nest, pressed close against the swaying mast, her head on his shoulder as they watched the horizon bleed gold and crimson. The wind tugged at her hair, carrying the clean salt scent of open water; his arm curled around her waist, hook resting gently against her hip, anchoring them both.

"Imagine it, love. A life of storms and seas, no chains but the ones we choose," Killian murmured, his hand tracing the curve of her arm, his touch sparking faintly against her skin. Desylva leaned into him, storm-gray eyes glinting with mischief, dark hair whipping in the breeze. "Can't wait, pirate," she teased, fingers brushing his stubble, her voice a sultry lilt that sent a shiver down his spine. "No more running. Just us, and the sea, and whatever storms come."

He pressed his lips to her temple, tasting salt and wildflowers, voice rough with everything he couldn't say. "I've spent too long running from everything. I'm done running." His hand slid to the small of her back, hook resting gently against her hip, anchoring them both. "You're my forever, Des. Whatever it costs." He pulled her closer until their heartbeats synced with the ship's rhythm, his lips grazing her ear. Their laughter mingled with the waves' lap, her head resting on his chest as they planned their future—ports to plunder, realms to explore, a life unbound.

Evenings were filled with laughter and whispered vows of forever. Under stars that glittered like scattered diamonds, he carved tiny driftwood trinkets—a miniature ship with sails like her cloak, a lightning bolt no bigger than his thumb. His hand steadied the wood while his hook traced each careful cut, the metal tip shaving curls of driftwood that fell like tiny waves at his feet. "For you," he murmured, placing them in her palm, fingers lingering. "So you'll always carry a piece of me."

She'd laugh, soft and breathless, then kiss him slow and deep, her cursed mark flaring faintly, blue light dancing across his skin like static before a storm. "And you carry me, pirate," she whispered against his lips, voice trembling just enough to betray her. "Every storm I call is yours to weather."

Their flirting turned tender, edged with desperation. "Think you can handle forever with me?" she teased, straddling his hips, fingers in his hair, breath warm against his ear. He'd grip her waist—hand and hook both—voice low and raw. "I'd burn every realm to keep you, love. Forever's not long enough."

Nights were softer, more dangerous. Lantern light cast warm amber across rum-strewn maps and half-carved trinkets. They lay tangled in sheets, the ship rocking them like a cradle. "You're my heart and soul, Des. The storm that finally anchored me." She'd reply, laughing softly, "And you're my sea. My pirate. Wild, endless, mine."

One night she teased him about his hook during a mock duel on deck, and he pinned her gently against the mast, voice a low growl. “Careful, love, or I’ll show you what this hook can do.” She smirked, storm-mark flaring. “Oh, I know what it can do.”

The crew buzzed with excitement, transforming the ship into a floating haven of celebration. Lanterns strung from the rigging glowed like captured fireflies, their glass etched with protective runes that cast a golden haze over the deck. Smee fussed over rum barrels, muttering about “the finest for the Cap’n’s lass.” One-Eyed Jack carved bawdy decorations from whalebone, chuckling. Black Tom wove nets of silver thread for the ceremony, scarred hands steady. Billy composed shanties, lute strumming melodies of love and sea.

The ship hummed with joy, but shadows lurked. Fate doesn’t favor pirates for long. Beneath every laugh, every touch, ran a current of dread neither could name aloud. They’d drawn too much attention with their exploits.

Rumpelstiltskin had watched their every move, his spies in every port, his magic threading through the shadows like spider silk. Desylva’s cursed mark fascinated him. An ancient power, a volatile energy, a well of raw power he could siphon to feed his own endless hunger, twisting it into a weapon for his endless schemes. He’d studied her for years, noting every flare of blue light, every storm she summoned, every time Killian looked at her like she was the only star in his sky. Killian’s happiness, his laughter, his peace, was a taunt, a living reminder of everything the Dark One had lost. Milah. Bae. Joy he could never reclaim.

The wedding plans reached his ears like salt ground into an open wound. His rage was patient, cold, meticulous. This happiness would not stand. This wedding would never happen. He would see to it. His giggle echoed in the void as he plotted.

Jolly Roger

The day before the wedding, the Jolly Roger lay anchored in a quiet, secluded cove, her black hull rocking gently on water so clear it mirrored the first stars emerging overhead like scattered diamonds. Waves lapped at the shore like whispered secrets, the water reflecting the heavens in a glittering mosaic that danced with the soft glow of the lanterns strung from the rigging. Their enchanted glass cast warm, golden pools across the deck, turning every rope and plank into something almost sacred.

The air was thick with salt and the sweet, fleeting scent of wildflowers carried on the shore breeze. It drifted from the lush, vine-draped coastline where palm fronds rustled softly, mingling with the distant call of seabirds and the faint smoke curling from the fire pit the crew had built amidships. The crackle and pop of burning driftwood formed a gentle counterpoint to the lap of waves against the hull. The ship’s timbers creaked as she settled into the calm, her enchanted runes pulsing with a gentle, approving light that made the deck feel alive beneath their feet—almost as if the Jolly Roger herself understood what tomorrow meant.

Killian and Desylva danced barefoot on the quarterdeck, her ring catching every flicker of lantern light as he spun her with a flourish. Her dark hair cascaded over her shoulders in wild waves, her laughter bright and unguarded, her storm-gray eyes shining with a joy so fierce it almost hurt to look at. She pressed close to him, her fingers brushing his jaw, her breath warm against his cheek. He guided her through a sailor’s jig, hand warm on her waist, hook resting lightly against her hip, their bodies moving together with the ease of people who had learned each other’s rhythms in battle and in quiet nights.

The deck planks were sun-warmed under their bare feet, smooth and slightly tacky from earlier spills of rum. The faint creak of the ship beneath them was a heartbeat they shared. Lantern light shimmered across the water, casting rippling gold across their skin as they danced.

“This time tomorrow,” he murmured against her ear, voice low and rough with emotion, “you’ll be mine in every way. The sea and stars can witness.” His blue eyes locked on hers, filled with a depth that made her breath catch. She tilted her head back, lips brushing his jaw, voice a teasing whisper that sent heat curling through him. “I already am, pirate. Tomorrow’s just for show.” He pulled her closer, forehead resting against hers, breathing her in—wildflowers, lightning, home. “Can’t wait to make it official. To let the whole bloody ocean know you’re mine forever.”

“Forever’s a long time, pirate,” she murmured, fingers trailing down his neck. “Think you can handle my storms that long?” His hook rested gently on her hip, his hand tracing the curve of her back, sending a shiver through her. “I’d

chase your storms across every realm, love," he whispered, lips grazing her neck. "You're the only gale worth sailing into. The only port I want to anchor in." She laughed, bright and melodic, fingers tangling in his hair as she pulled him into a slow, deep kiss. Her cursed mark flared faintly, blue light dancing across his skin like static before a storm, raising gooseflesh along his arms.

For a heartbeat, the world narrowed to just them—the press of her body, the warmth of his hand, the promise they'd carved out of a world that had tried so hard to break them. The crew's cheers rose around them, fading into background warmth.

Smee, swaying slightly, raised a toast with rum, his face beaming, eyes suspiciously bright. "To the Cap'n and his storm-lass! May your love be wilder than any gale and sweeter than stolen rum!" The crew roared approval, mugs clashing with a metallic ring that echoed across the cove. One-Eyed Jack launched into a bawdy tale of a pirate wedding in Tortuga, his eye twinkling with mischief as he clapped Killian on the back hard enough to make him stagger. "Remember that wedding in Tortuga?" he boomed. "Groom lost his bride to a parrot! But no chance of yours flyin' away, Cap'n! You two meant to be together forever." His hand lingered on Killian's shoulder a moment longer, something like pride softening his rough features. The crew erupted in laughter, the sound rich and hearty, Billy's youthful chuckles mingling with One-Eyed Jack's booming guffaws.

A short while later

They all gathered around the fire pit, flames crackling and popping, sending sparks spiraling upward like tiny stars. Faces glowed in the firelight—faces that had fought beside them, bled for them, laughed with them.

Black Tom sat on a crate, broad shoulders relaxed for once, carving a small ship from driftwood with slow, careful strokes. His hands were steady, the wood shavings curling like waves under his knife. The soft rasp of his knife blending with the fire's crackle. His dark eyes meeting Killian's with a rare, warm smile, a silent nod of approval that spoke volumes in his mute way. When he finished, he rose and placed the carving in Desylva's hands. His dark eyes met hers with rare, unguarded warmth—a silent nod that said more than words ever could — *you belong here, with us*.

Billy played a lively jig on his lute, fingers dancing across the strings with effortless grace. His freckled face was alight with pure joy as he led the crew in a raucous chorus that rolled across the cove like thunder. Their voices were rough but heartfelt, wrapping around Killian and Desylva like an embrace. The melody weaved through the night air like a siren's call.

Desylva leaned into Killian, head resting on his chest as they swayed to the music. His heartbeat was steady under her ear, his hand warm on her back, hook resting gently against her hip. The warmth of his body seeping through his shirt. Her fingers traced lazy patterns on his arm. She murmured softly, "I never thought I'd have this. A future. A home. You." Her voice trembled slightly, barely audible over the fire's crackle and the crew's laughter.

He pressed a kiss to her hair, lips lingering, tasting salt and wildflowers, voice rough with emotion. "You're my home, love. Always have been. Tomorrow, we make it real for the whole world to see." She lifted her head, eyes shining, "A life of adventures. Just you and me. No end."

He kissed her forehead, his lips lingering, his hook resting gently on her hip, their bond sealed in this moment. The ship's gentle rock a lullaby to their words. "With you, love, every horizon's a promise," he whispered, his blue eyes soft, his hand cupping her cheek, thumb brushing her skin in a tender caress that made her heart flutter. She kissed him, slow, deep, full of everything they'd survived to reach this night, her fingers curling into his coat, anchoring herself to him.

Smee poured more rum. The amber liquid glinting in the firelight as it splashed into mugs. The rich, sweet scent rising with the smoke. He raised his mug in another cheer, his voice slurring slightly as he bellowed, "Another round for the soon-to-be-weds!" One-Eyed Jack roared with laughter, slapping his knee. The crew's voices rose in a joyful, chaotic symphony that blended with the gentle lap of waves against the hull.

The Jolly Roger held them all, their sanctuary as the night unfolded. Her timbers a steady heartbeat under the starlit sky, alive with celebration. seeming to breathe easier under the weight of so much love.

As the fire crackled lower, Billy set aside his lute, grin widening as he called, “Lads, let’s sing one for the Cap’n and his lass!” The crew cheered, mugs raised, and Billy struck a new tune, a rollicking shanty dedicated to Killian and Desylva. Smee and One-Eyed Jack joined in with gusto, voices rough but heartfelt, while Black Tom tapped his foot in silent rhythm, his harpoon resting beside him.

Billy (voice clear and bright)
Oh, Cap’n Hook’s found his match so true,
A storm-lass fierce with a mark of blue!
She calls the winds and cracks the sky,
He’s got the hook that makes villains cry!

Yo ho, for the pirate and his storm,
Through gales and gold, their love stays warm!
Yo ho, for the Cap’n and his queen,
The wildest pair the seas’ve ever seen!

Her lightning flashes, his cutlass swings,
Together they claim what the ocean brings.
From cursed isles to treasures deep,
Their bond’s a vow no curse can keep!

Billy/Smee/One-Eyed Jack
Yo ho, for the pirate and his storm,
Through gales and gold, their love stays warm!
Yo ho, for the Cap’n and his queen,
The wildest pair the seas’ve ever seen!

Billy
Smee’s got the rum, Jack’s got tales to spin,
Tom’s got the strength, I’ve got the grin.
But Cap’n and Des, they lead the way,
Through every night and every day!

Billy/Smee/One-Eyed Jack
Yo ho, for the pirate and his storm,
Through gales and gold, their love stays warm!
Yo ho, for the Cap’n and his queen,
The wildest pair the seas’ve ever seen!

Billy
May their sails be full, their enemies flee,
A pirate’s life for eternity!
For hook and storm, they’ll rule the tide,
Forever sailing side by side!

Billy/Smee/One-Eyed Jack
Yo ho, for the pirate and his storm,
Through gales and gold, their love stays warm!
Yo ho, for the Cap’n and his queen,
The wildest pair the seas’ve ever seen!

The crew’s voices faded into cheers, mugs clashing again, the fire popping with embers that floated up like stars.

Killian pulled Desylva closer, his voice low, “They’ve got us pegged, love.” She laughed, her eyes sparkling, “Then let’s give them a duet to remember.” They stood, arms linked, and sang to each other, their voices intertwining, the crew falling silent to listen.

Killian (voice rich and roguish)

My storm-lass with eyes like the sea,
You crashed into my heart, wild and free.
Your lightning strikes, your thunder roars,
You're the gale I'd been waitin' for!

My love's a storm that won't subside,
With you beside me, we'll ride the tide!
My love's a storm that won't subside,
With you, my lass, forever by my side!

Desylva (voice fierce and melodic)
Oh, my pirate with hook so bright,
You stole my soul on a moonlit night.
Your grin's a blade, your heart's the key,
You're the sea that calls to me!

Our love's a tempest, wild and true,
Through every wave, I'll sail with you!
Our love's a tempest, wild and true,
Through every wave, I'll sail with you!

Both (eyes locked, hands clasped)
Storm and Sea, we're bound as one,
Under the moon till the risin' sun.
No curse or foe can tear us apart,
You're my anchor, my beating heart!

Our love's eternal, fierce and deep,
Through every storm, our vow we'll keep!
Our love's eternal, fierce and deep,
Through every storm, our vow we'll keep!

The crew erupted in applause, Smee wiping a tear, One-Eyed Jack roaring approval, Billy strumming along, Black Tom nodding with a rare smile.

The night deepened, the cove alive with their joy.

Wild and warm, a celebration carved into the night. Beneath it all—the laughter, the music, the warmth—something darker stirred. A faint prickle at Desylva's mark. A whisper of unease in Killian's chest. A shift in the air that neither could name. But for now, they held each other close, unaware of the storm already gathering beyond the cove's gentle embrace.

A few hours later

Main Deck

Fog rolled in like a shroud, thick and suffocating, swallowing the cove in a clammy gray veil that pressed against the hull with eerie insistence. It didn't drift in like normal mist—it poured, heavy and deliberate, coiling around the ship like living tendrils. The air thickened with a sinister chill that seeped into bones and marrow, the mist carrying the faint, acrid scent of ozone and something darker—old magic, bitter as burnt herbs, threaded with malice.

Lanterns along the rails flickered and died one by one, their flames guttering low before snuffing out in tiny, defeated hisses. The deck plunged into near-total darkness, broken only by the faint, sickly glow of the moon struggling through the haze. The sea grew unnaturally still, waves flattening to oily glass that reflected nothing. The usual rhythmic lap-lap against the hull vanished, replaced by an oppressive silence that made every creak of timber sound like a warning.

The Jolly Roger herself seemed to sense the wrongness. Her timbers shuddered, a low, mournful groan echoing through her ribs. A faint, sickly yellow-green shimmer pulsed once along the enchanted runes carved into her masts and rails — a dying heartbeat — before fading into nothing. Her protective magic didn't just falter, it was strangled, choked out like a candle under a wet cloth. beneath the Dark One's spell.

The Galley

Below in the galley, the celebration's dying echoes were snuffed out mid-breath.

Smee's slurred shanty, "…and the storm-lass bright as lightning's gleam…" cut off abruptly as his head slumped forward onto the table with a dull thud. His tankard tipped, rum spilling in a slow amber river that pooled around his limp fingers, the scent rising sharp and wasted. One by one the crew followed. One-Eyed Jack's booming laugh choked into a gurgle as he slid sideways off his crate, mug clattering to the floor. Billy's lute slipped from his lap with a mournful twang as his freckled face hit the planks. Black Tom's massive frame sagged against the bulkhead, harpoon slipping from slack fingers with a soft clunk.

Tankards toppled in slow motion, rum splashing in dark, glistening arcs across the floorboards, catching the last dying lantern light like spilled blood. Snores and soft, drugged breaths filled the space—a grotesque parody of peaceful slumber. The enchanted sleep was so deep it silenced even dreams.

Deck

Above, the fog pressed thicker still, muffling sound until the ship seemed wrapped in cotton wool. The brazier's embers hissed and died under the damp weight, sparks winking out one by one like dying stars. The air tasted metallic, sharp, wrong—like the moment before lightning strikes. The cove itself seemed to recoil. Palm fronds stilled. Seabirds fell silent. Even the wind held its breath.

Then, from somewhere deep in the mist, came a high, chilling giggle. Rumpelstiltskin's cackle—faint but unmistakable—drifted across the water like poison on the wind. It lingered, mocking, curling through the fog like a serpent. The sound didn't echo, it slithered, sliding under the deck planks, threading through the rigging, brushing cold fingers along the back of the neck. Then it dissolved into the haze, leaving only silence and the soft, relentless creak of the anchored ship rocking in the unnatural calm. The night held its breath. The Jolly Roger shuddered, as though she felt the unnatural stillness pressing in. Stripped of her defenses, she braced like a living creature under a blow she could not stop.

Killian & Desylva's Cabin

The cabin breathed around them like a living thing. Warm lantern-light flickered across the rune-etched walls, casting soft gold over the tangled linens and the scattered remnants of their night — boots kicked off beside the enchanted oak desk, his black coat draped over the chair, her cloak pooled like spilled ink where she'd dropped it hours earlier. The air was thick with the scent of rum, salt, leather, and wildflowers, a blend that had become uniquely theirs, clinging to the cabin like a memory.

The fog's spell hadn't seeped into the cabin — not yet — but the air was already thinning, trembling with the same wrongness that had smothered the deck.

Killian and Desylva lay tangled together atop the bed, bodies pressed close in the quiet aftermath of laughter and whispered promises. Clad in pants and shirts, they lay entwined in the lingering warmth of shared breath and quiet closeness. Bare feet brushed against linen still warm from their skin. Her head rested on his chest, rising and falling with each steady breath he drew. His arm curled around her waist, hook resting lightly against her hip, the metal cool but familiar, a constant anchor even in moments of peace.

Her cursed mark pulsed soft blue against his shirt — a second heartbeat, warm and rhythmic, syncing with his own. Every pulse sent a faint shimmer of light across his skin, a gentle echo of the storm she carried inside her. The ship rocked them in a slow, cradle-like rhythm, timbers creaking softly as though humming their happiness back to them. The Jolly Roger's runes glowed faintly, responding to the quiet magic in the room, the ship's enchanted heart beating in time with theirs.

Killian brushed his thumb along her shoulder, savoring the warmth of her, the softness of her breath against his chest, the way her fingers curled loosely against his ribs. He felt her smile before he saw it — a small, contented curve of her lips against his shirt.

For a moment, the world was impossibly still. A moment stolen from fate. A moment carved out of storms. A moment that felt like it could last forever.

Then her mark flared. A sudden, searing burst of blue light shot beneath her skin, bright enough to cast sharp shadows across the cabin. The pulse wasn't warm this time — it was cold, electric, jagged. Pain lanced up her arm like lightning trapped beneath flesh, sharp and merciless.

Her breath hitched, her body tensing. Her storm-gray eyes snapped open. "Something's wrong," she whispered, voice tight, urgent, threaded with fear that cut through the quiet like a blade. She sat up so fast the bed creaked beneath them, the linens twisting around her legs. Her hand shot back toward the ledge behind the bed, fingers closing around the familiar hilt of her dagger. The blade caught the lantern's flicker, glinting coldly in the dim light, a shard of silver ready to meet whatever threat her magic had sensed.

Killian bolted upright, instincts snapping into place with violent clarity. The warmth of the moment vanished, replaced by a surge of adrenaline that burned through his veins. He rolled off the bed in one fluid motion, boots forgotten, bare feet hitting the planks with a soft thud. His hand reached for his cutlass propped against the wall, the steel singing as he began to draw it.

But the air changed. A shimmer of gold rippled through the cabin — unnatural, wrong — bending the lantern-light, warping the shadows. The runes along the walls flickered violently, reacting to the intrusion. The temperature dropped, a cold that seeped into bone, into breath, into the spaces between heartbeats. Dark smoke coiled upward from nothing, twisting into a shape that made Killian's blood run cold.

Rumpelstiltskin materialized in a swirl of shadow and gold, his twisted form coalescing with sickening ease. Crocodile skin gleamed unnaturally in the lantern light, scales catching the glow like wet stone. His eyes glittered with cold, triumphant malice — a predator savoring the moment before the kill. His giggle slithered through the air like venom, high-pitched and chilling, raising the hairs on Killian's neck.

The cabin — once warm, once safe — seemed to recoil. The ship's timbers groaned. The runes dimmed. The lantern flickered violently. The air thickened with dread.

Rumpel smiled, all teeth and cruelty. "Ah, the happy couple," he purred, voice dripping venom and mockery.

The lantern's flame guttered low, shrinking as though trying to hide from him. The runes carved into the cabin walls flickered violently, reacting to the Dark One's presence with a tremor of warning.

Desylva's breath caught in her throat. Killian's heartbeat slammed against his ribs.

The air thickened — heavy, suffocating — as if the cabin itself were bracing for impact.

Rumpel's voice slithered through the room. "So touching." His grin stretched too wide, too sharp — a predator savoring the moment before the kill. "So fragile." He tilted his head, eyes glittering with cruel amusement. "And really, dearies, you should know better. It's terribly bad luck for the groom to get too close to his bride before the wedding." His gnarled fingers twitched, eager to weave mischief. "But who am I to deny tradition?" His voice dripped with mock sweetness. "A wedding gift, dearies. From me to you." With theatrical flair, he flicked his hand — a gesture as casual as it was deadly

Killian snarled as he lunged. He didn't think. Didn't hesitate. Didn't breathe. His body moved on instinct — centuries of battle, reflex, rage — propelling him forward with a snarl ripped straight from his chest. His cutlass flashed in the lantern light, steel singing as it cleared the scabbard, the blade catching a streak of gold as it arced toward Rumpel's throat.

But Rumpel was already moving. “Not this time, pirate,” he crooned. His wrist flicked. A wave of inky darkness erupted from his palm — not smoke, not shadow, but something thicker, heavier, alive. It slammed into Killian with the force of a tidal wave, a wall of magic that hit him square in the chest.

The impact was catastrophic.

Killian flew backward, the world blurring into streaks of gold and black. His back struck the cabin wall with bone-splintering force. The oak beam cracked under the blow, splinters exploding outward. His skull hit the wood with a sickening thud that detonated white behind his eyes. Pain tore through him — sharp, blinding, immediate. Blood bloomed hot at his temple, trickling down his cheek in a warm, sticky stream. The copper taste flooded his mouth, thick and metallic. His vision flickered, edges darkening, the room tilting violently as consciousness wavered. But he fought it. He clawed at the floorboards, nails scraping harshly against the wood. “Desylva!” he rasped, voice raw, desperate, fighting the black edges creeping in, his fingers scrabbling for purchase on the floor, nails scraping the planks with a harsh rasp.

Desylva surged forward. Her dagger gleamed with cold, lethal promise. The lantern’s flicker caught the blade, sending shards of light dancing across the cabin. Her storm magic surged, a jagged bolt of lightning arcing from her outstretched hand. The crackle split the air with a sound like shattering glass, ozone burning sharp in the confined space. “Leave him alone!” she screamed, voice breaking with fury and fear. Her mark flared — bright, wild, uncontrolled — blue light spilling across her arm, illuminating the cabin in a storm-lit glow.

Rumpel laughed. High. Gleeful. Chilling. The sound slithered along the walls, coiling around their throats like a noose. He tossed a small orb. It shattered at her feet with a crystalline crack.

The floorboards trembled. The runes flickered. The air split. Shadow vines erupted — thick, writhing tendrils bursting forth with grotesque vitality. They surged upward like living serpents, thorns glistening black and venomous, each one pulsing with dark magic.

Killian roared her name — “DESYLVA!” — the sound tearing from his throat, raw and desperate, echoing off the walls. He reached for her — fingers outstretched, shaking — but another blast of darkness slammed him back, harder, crushing the breath from his lungs. His body crumpled, legs giving out, the deck rushing up to meet him.

The cabin rocked violently, timbers groaning under the force of magic. The lantern swung wildly, casting frantic shadows that made the room seem alive with malice. The ship shuddered. The runes flickered. The lantern guttered. The cabin seemed to recoil in pain.

The vines struck fast — a whip-crack of green that lashed across the cabin and coiled around Desylva’s waist and arms before she could fully turn. Her dagger flew from her grasp, skittering across the floor. Thorns bit into her skin, sharp and shocking. Her storm-mark flared bright in reflex, a burst of blue light reacting to pain.

“Killian!” Her scream was raw, terrified, the kind that ripped straight through him.

The cabin shuddered, lantern swinging wildly as the runes flickered in warning.

Killian forced himself up from the floor, hook scraping wood as he levered himself upright. His vision swam, but he pushed through it, staggering to his knees. His hand closed around the cutlass hilt — fingers slipping once before tightening.

Rumpel’s laugh slithered through the cabin. “Pathetic.” The word was soft, almost amused, a casual cruelty that made Killian’s stomach twist.

The cabin shuddered. Lantern light swung wildly. Runes along the walls flickered in warning.

Killian staggered forward — one step, two. Suddenly a blast of darkness slammed into him like a physical blow, knocking him flat. His skull struck the planks with a brutal crack, breath knocked out of his lungs in a brutal rush. The cutlass skittered from his grasp and came to rest near the foot of the bed.

Desylva reached for him — fingers outstretched, eyes wide with terror — as the vines yanked her backward. “Killian!” Her voice cracked as the cabin lurched again, the first tremor of something far worse gathering.

The vines violently tightened. A crushing constriction that wrenched Desylva’s arms backward with a force that made her joints scream. Thorns driving deeper, drawing thin rivulets of blood. The tendrils coiled around her wrists, ankles, waist, throat, each one pulsing with dark magic, each thorn glistening like obsidian teeth.

Her breath hitched as the first thorn pierced skin. A sharp, hot sting. Then another. Then another. Thin rivulets of blood welled instantly, soaking into her shirt in dark, spreading blooms. The copper scent filled the cabin, sharp and metallic, mingling with the ozone from her lightning and the salt of the sea. She fought — wild, desperate. Her fingers clawed at the floorboards, nails splintering wood with sharp cracks. She dragged her body forward inch by inch, muscles straining, burning, trembling under the crushing weight of the vines. Her nails left bloody streaks across the oak, each mark a testament to her refusal to yield. Her storm-mark flared wildly, blue light pulsing in frantic bursts — a storm trying to break free, trying to answer her terror — but the dark magic smothered it, choking the glow until it flickered weakly beneath her skin. Her voice broke on a faint scream. “Killian!!!”

The sound tore through the cabin, through the ship, through Killian’s bones. It was raw, desperate, shattering — a plea, a warning, a declaration of love and terror all at once.

Killian’s breath hitched, chest burning, limbs trembling under the crushing weight of helplessness. His breath came in ragged, broken gasps. “Desylva…” Her name cracked in his throat, thick with blood and terror. The room tilted violently. He planted his hook against the floor, using it as leverage, splinters biting into his palm as he pushed himself upward. His muscles trembled. His knees shook, threatening to buckle. His head throbbed with a vicious, bone-deep pain that made his vision blur. He rose again — slower, shaking — dragging himself forward on hands and knees. His hook gouged splinters from the floor as he crawled, blood dripping into his eye, breath coming in broken pulls.

Her thunder, usually a roar to match her lightning, faltered into a stifled rumble, choked by the tightening grip as she twisted and thrashed against the restless hold, her muscles straining, burning with the effort. The vines creaked like straining ropes as they tightened further, cutting off her air. Her cursed mark flared wildly but dimmed under the dark magic’s suppression.

Rumpel’s giggle rose again — high, cruel — filling the cabin like poison. He stepped closer to Desylva, crouching to meet her eyes. His breath brushed her cheek, foul and cold. His fingers traced her jaw with mock tenderness, claws grazing her skin, voice a venomous purr. “Such power, dearie,” he whispered. “All that lovely storm magic… wasted on a pirate…. But don’t worry… I’ll put it to much better use.” He straightened, turning toward Killian — who was dragging himself forward inch by inch, blood dripping steadily, vision swimming. “Look at him,” he taunted, his voice a venomous hiss. “Your brave captain. Bleeding on the floor like a gutted fish.”

Desylva snarled, twisting violently against the vines, her storm-gray eyes blazing with fury and terror. Her lightning flickered weakly along her fingertips, sparks snapping in the air before dying under the vines’ crushing grip.

Rumpel’s eyes gleaming with sadistic delight as he watched Killian struggle, blood dripping from his temple, vision blurring, darkness pressing in like a suffocating weight, limbs heavy as lead, each breath a labored rasp. His giggle rose again, high and cruel. He leaned closer to Killian, voice dropping to a hiss. “Milah died before she could scream. Your little storm won’t be so lucky.”

Killian roared — a sound torn from the deepest hollow of his soul. His body shook violently, vision tunneling. “You… bastard…” His voice cracked, slurred, thick with blood and rage and terror. “I’ll kill you. I swear it.”

Rumpel flicked his wrist.

Another wave of darkness hit Killian, harder, crushing him to the floor. His limbs went numb, refusing to obey. He collapsed fully, cheek pressed to the blood-streaked planks, vision tunneling.

The cabin rocked violently, timbers groaning under the force of magic. The lantern swung wildly, casting frantic shadows that made the room seem alive with malice.

Desylva screamed again — a sound that cracked into a sob halfway through, her voice breaking under the vines' crushing grip. Her thunder tried to rise — a rumble deep in her chest — but the vines tightened around her throat, choking it into silence. Her storm-mark flickered weakly, dimming under the suffocating weight of dark magic.

Killian clawed at the floor, fingers trembling, nails scraping wood. "Des…" Her name broke in his throat, barely a whisper.

Rumpel straightened, turning toward Killian with a look of delighted contempt. "You thought you could have happiness?" he hissed. "A wedding? A future? After everything you've taken from me?" His voice rose, sharp and venomous. "Pathetic." He stepped closer, looming over Killian's crumpled form. "People like you don't get a happy ending."

Desylva's eyes locked on his — wide, terrified, pleading — her breath coming in broken gasps as the vines tightened further. Her voice cracked on a whisper. "Killian…"

The cabin shuddered. The ship groaned. The runes flickered. The lantern guttered. The moment hung suspended — fragile, agonizing — the breaking point before the fall.

Desylva's spine arched in agony, breath tore from her lungs in a strangled gasp as the tendrils dragged her backward across the floor, thorns biting deeper, drawing fresh rivulets of blood that streaked down her arms and soaked into her shirt. Her lightning sputtered along her fingertips — frantic, desperate — but each spark died under the crushing weight of dark magic. Her storm-mark flickered weakly, dimming like a candle smothered under a wet cloth.

Killian saw it. He saw her magic failing. He saw her strength buckling. He saw her terror. And something inside him broke. He forced himself upward, muscles trembling violently, blood dripping steadily from his temple. His breath came in ragged, broken pulls, each one scraping his throat raw. His cutlass lay just out of reach near the foot of the bed, glinting faintly in the lantern's dying light. He reached for it — fingers shaking, stretching — but his hand slipped, smearing blood across the planks. "Desylva…" Her name cracked in his throat, barely a whisper.

Rumpel watched him with delighted cruelty. "Look at you," he hissed. "Crawling. Bleeding." The taunt was colder now, precise, aimed to wound deeper than any thorn. He stepped toward Desylva, his shadow falling over her like a shroud. His gnarled hand shot out, seizing her arm with cruel force. His fingers dug into her flesh like claws, leaving bruises that bloomed instantly beneath his grip.

Desylva cried out — a sharp, broken sound — her body twisting violently as she tried to wrench free. Rumpel's grip clamped down, claws digging into her arm, forcing her still.

Killian roared — a sound torn from the deepest hollow of his soul, "Let her go!" His voice cracked, raw and desperate.

Rumpel didn't even look at him. He flicked his wrist. A swirling portal yawned open behind him — a vortex of oily violet-black light, pulsing with dark magic. The edges rippled like torn fabric, whispering with eerie, distant screams that echoed from realms beyond.
The cabin convulsed. The lantern guttered, flame shrinking into a trembling ember. Timbers groaned under the weight of dark magic, runes dimming as though suffocating. The air thickened, heavy and electric, pressing against Killian's ribs until his breath came in ragged, panicked pulls.

The portal's pull tugged at Desylva's hair, her clothes, her blood. The air around her warped, bending toward the void. She kicked, twisted, fought — her muscles straining, burning.

The vines shuddered in response to Desylva's struggle, cinching just enough to hold her bound, but no longer dragging her; the movement belonged entirely to Rumpel now. He hauled her backward, her heels scraping against the floor, leaving streaks of blood and splintered wood. Her fingers clawed at the planks, nails cracking, breaking, leaving desperate marks across the oak.

Killian reached for the cutlass again — fingertips brushing the hilt near the bed — but his hand slipped, smearing blood across the planks. Another wave of darkness slammed into him. Harder. Final. His skull struck the floor with a sickening crack, and the world tilted sideways. "Des—" Her name broke in his throat.

Rumpel leaned close to her ear, sneering at her, his breath foul against her face as she kicked and twisted. “And you, dearie… your magic will be mine. A fine addition to my collection.” The vines tightening with a creak that made her gasp in pain.

Desylva snarled, twisting violently, her storm-gray eyes blazing with fury and terror. “Killian!” Her voice cracked, breaking into a sob.

Rumpel rolled his eyes, tightening his grip on her arm

Killian tried one last time — a desperate, broken rise — reaching for her with trembling fingers. But he was too far. Too slow. Too broken. He fell, body slackening as his strength failed.

Rumpel paused at the portal’s edge. He turned to Killian with mocking pity. “Tell me, Captain,” he sneered, voice dripping with contempt, “how does it feel? To finally have something worth living for… and watch it slip through your fingers? Again.” He giggled, high and cruel. “Don’t worry. I’ll take very good care of her power. You’ll have plenty of time to think about what you’ve lost while you rot.”

Desylva’s eyes locked on his — wide, terrified, pleading, love and fear and fury all at once — her breath coming in broken gasps as the vines tightened further. Her voice cracked on a whisper. A tearful “I love you,” escaping her lips. Her last glimpse was of Killian sprawled on the floor, his blue eyes flickering with fading defiance.

The words shattered him.

Rumpel rolled his eyes. “Oh, how sentimental.” With a final, mocking flourish, he tossed her through the portal like discarded refuse. Her body twisted in the void, swallowed by swirling darkness.

Killian’s vision tunneled. Her “I love you,” echoed back once — sharp, shattering — then cut off abruptly as she vanished. Her last glimpse was of Killian sprawled on the floor, his blue eyes flickering with fading defiance, blood streaking his face, hand outstretched toward her.

Rumpel glanced at him, smirking mockingly. “She loves you. Such sediment. Too bad she’ll never see you again. … Sweet dreams, Captain. When you wake… if you wake… remember this. Happiness was never yours to keep.” He stepped through after her, his giggle lingering like poison in the air, his form dissolving into gold smoke.

The portal snapped shut with a sharp, final crack — a sound like breaking bone — reverberating through the cabin. Silence followed. Heavy. Oppressive. Absolute.

Killian screamed. Raw. Primal. Guttural. His voice tore from his throat until it cracked into silence, breaking on her name. “DESYLVA!!!” The sound shattered the quiet, echoing off the walls, ringing in his ears, reverberating through the ship.

His body shook with helpless fury as he crawled forward, the darkness closing in around his mind like cold fingers. His gaze fixed on the spot where she had vanished — the empty air, the blood on the floor, her dagger lying abandoned, its blade catching the lantern’s dying glow like a mournful beacon.

The air hung heavy with the scent of salt and iron, the night pressing down as the ship rocked gently, its creaks a mournful echo of the battle lost.

His hand twitched toward it — fingers trembling — as the weight of her absence sank into his bones. Tears mixed with blood on his face, his breaths coming in gasping sobs. His vision tunneled to black, limbs heavy, strength bleeding out with every heartbeat. Her scream, her declaration, her last broken cry looped in his mind, over and over, each repetition a fresh wound. The pain, the grief, the helplessness overwhelmed him. He collapsed forward, face striking the bloodied planks, consciousness slipping away like a ship sinking beneath black waves.

The silence after the portal snapped shut was not silence at all. It was a pressure, a suffocating weight that pressed against the cabin walls, against Killian’s ribs, against the very air. The lantern flickered weakly, its flame guttering as though struggling to stay alive in the aftermath of the magic that had torn through the room.

Killian's scream still echoed faintly, a ghost of sound lingering in the timbers. His body shook violently, muscles spasming with the effort of breath. His throat burned from the force of his cry, raw and torn. His vision blurred, edges darkening, the cabin tilting as consciousness wavered. He crawled forward — a broken, desperate motion — fingers trembling, nails scraping the blood-streaked planks. His hand reached for the spot where she had vanished, where the portal had swallowed her whole.

But there was nothing. Only empty air. Only silence. Only the faint, sickening scent of dark magic lingering like rot. His breath hitched, chest caving inward. "Des…" Her name cracked in his throat, barely a whisper.

Her dagger lay abandoned on the floor, its blade catching the lantern's dying glow like a mourning star. The hilt still carried the faint warmth of her grip — a cruel echo of the hands that had held him only moments before. Killian's fingers twitched toward it, trembling violently.

The cabin creaked around him — a soft, mournful sound — as though the Jolly Roger herself felt the loss. The runes along the walls flickered weakly, their glow dimmed, smothered under the residue of dark magic. The ship's enchanted heart thrummed faintly, a broken rhythm echoing Killian's own.

His breath came in gasping sobs, each one scraping his throat raw. Tears mixed with blood on his face, streaking down his cheek in dark, jagged lines. Her scream looped in his mind — sharp, shattering — echoing over and over, each repetition a fresh wound. Her "I love you" reverberated through his ribs, carving into bone, into marrow, into the deepest part of him.

He reached again — fingers brushing the floor — but his strength bled out with every heartbeat. The pain, the grief, the helplessness overwhelmed him. His body collapsed forward, face striking the bloodied planks with a dull, final thud. His limbs went slack, heavy, refusing to obey. His breath hitched once, twice, then slowed into shallow, broken pulls. Darkness closed in around him — cold, suffocating — like fingers wrapping around his mind.

The lantern flickered. The runes dimmed. The cabin exhaled a long, mournful creak. The cabin fell silent. A silence that felt like death. A silence that felt like loss. A silence that felt like the moment before a storm breaks the world open.

Outside, the waves lapped against the hull — soft, indifferent — a dirge for the love stolen away. The Jolly Roger rocked gently, her timbers groaning in quiet grief, the ship holding her captain's unconscious form as though trying to cradle him through the storm.

Early Morning (A few hours later)

The world returned to Killian in fragments. Jagged, splintered shards of sensation that stabbed through the darkness like broken glass.

First came the pain. A vicious, bone-deep throb at the back of his skull — a hot, pulsating vise that clamped tighter with every heartbeat. Each pulse sent fresh shards of fire lancing through his temples, down his neck, into his spine. The raw, scraped skin burned like salt rubbed into an open wound. Every throb felt like a splintered plank grinding against exposed nerves.

Then came the cold. A clammy, nauseating chill soaked into his shirt collar, seeping down his back. The sticky warmth of blood had pooled beneath him, cooling into a viscous puddle that clung to his skin like a second, suffocating layer. The metallic tang coated his tongue — thick, coppery — sliding down his throat in slow, sickening pulses that made his stomach twist.

Then came the smell. Salt. Iron. Ozone. Dark magic. The cabin reeked of violence — a sharp, wet-iron scent that soured the ever-present salt of the Jolly Roger. The air felt heavy, tainted, as though the magic Rumpel had unleashed still clung to the walls like rot. The lantern above swayed on its chain, its flame guttering low. Long, jagged shadows writhed across the planks like living accusations.

Killian dragged in a ragged, shuddering breath — wet, broken — tasting blood and despair. His chest hitched painfully, ribs aching from the force of his earlier screams. His fingers twitched against the floor, scraping weakly at the wood. He forced his eyes open.

The world tilted violently, blurred at the edges, then snapped into cruel, merciless clarity.

Her dagger lay just beyond the reach of his trembling, blood-slick hand. Its blade caught the dying lantern light and threw it back in a cold, merciless silver line that sliced across his vision like a fresh wound. The leather-wrapped hilt was pristine, untouched by the chaos that had torn her away. It still carried the faint warmth of her palm — a ghost of her grip — a tactile echo of her touch that seared his fingertips as he reached for it, a cruel reminder of the hands that had held him only hours before.

The sight punched through him like a harpoon to the chest.

A sound tore from him — raw, animal — part sob, part snarl, part scream. It ripped up from the deepest hollow of his soul, echoing off the cabin walls in a hollow, mocking reverberation.

Gone. She's gone.

The realization wasn't a thought. It was a physical blow — a cannon shot to the sternum — a wave crashing over his soul, draining the air from his lungs, cracking ribs around his heart, the impact vibrating through his chest like a bell tolling doom. Desylva — his storm, his fire, the wild fierce, untamed heart that had dragged him out of centuries of darkness and given him something to live for beyond vengeance — was gone. Stolen. In a heartbeat.

He lay there feeling like a useless, broken thing, blood pooling warm and sticky beneath his head. The tacky sensation clung to his hair like fingers refusing to let go. His breath came in shallow, trembling pulls, each one scraping his throat raw. Rage erupted — molten, black, apocalyptic — twisting with a grief so sharp it cut like his hook through flesh. It surged through every vein until he thought his skin would split and boil, the heat prickling his flesh like a thousand needles.

Rumpelstiltskin echoed in his mind like a taunting whisper. The name a curse. A death sentence. A vow carved into his marrow with a dull blade, igniting a firestorm in his veins. His fingers curled into fists, nails biting into his palms until blood welled. He would find the crocodile. He would peel the monster apart layer by layer, slowly, while he begged and screamed. He would rip the Dark One's heart out and crush it in his fist while the bastard watched, choking on his own arrogance.

But beneath the fury, grief clawed deeper — a black, bottomless abyss threatening to swallow him whole. Its edges were sharp as broken glass scraping his insides raw. A void where her laugh should be. Her touch. Her storm-gray eyes that had seen through his facade to the man beneath.

How dare he take her from me?

The thought fueled him, turning anguish into blade-sharp resolve.

Her scream. That single, desperate cry — "Killian!" — looped in his skull, over and over, each repetition a fresh gash. The sound echoed louder with every pulse of his headache, bouncing off the walls of his mind like a trapped bird beating its wings to bloody pulp. He could still feel the exact moment her voice had broken on his name — the terror, the plea, the love — and the sound of it now lived inside his ribs, clawing to get out, a constant, torturous reverberation. He had failed her. Failed to protect her.

She fought. My fierce lass fought alone, and I was too weak to save her.

His vision blurred — not from the head wound, but from the hot, furious tears he could no longer contain. They carved burning tracks down his blood-streaked face, mixing with the drying crimson, salty and stinging like seawater in a fresh cut.

I should have been faster. Stronger. I should have seen it coming.

Every failure replayed in brutal detail. The moment the darkness hit, a crushing weight slamming into his chest like a tidal wave. … The instant his knees buckled, the deck rushing up to meet him with a bone-jarring impact. … The split second he could have reached her if he'd only been quicker.

I failed you. Gods help me, I failed you.

The guilt was acid, eating through the rage, leaving only hollow, aching devastation that made his chest cave inward, each breath a labored rasp scraping his throat raw. He rolled onto his side, ignoring the sickening lurch of nausea that sent bile burning up his throat, hot and bitter. His limbs trembled violently, strength bleeding out with every heartbeat. But he reached. His hand closed around the dagger's hilt. The leather. rough and familiar, was still warm from her grip. Still carried the faint imprint of her fingers. Still felt like her/

He lifted it slowly, reverently, turning the blade so the lantern light ran along its edge like liquid moonlight. Its weight was a cold anchor to the night's horror. His blue eyes traced its edge. The memory of her wielding it, fierce, unyielding, searing his heart. He could still see her holding it earlier that night—fingers sure, wrist loose, the storm-gray of her eyes flashing with laughter as she'd teased him during their dance on deck. The memory hit like a physical blow, doubling him over, like a gut punch, twisting the knife of loss deeper. The hilt pressing into his palm so hard it bit into his skin.

I'll burn the realms to find you.

Rage surged again, his vision blurring. A sob broke free — harsh, ugly, unstoppable — tearing from his chest in wrenching waves, that echoed faintly off the cabin's walls, amplifying his isolation.

I can't lose her. Not her. Not after everything.

His throat closed, breath hitching, a ragged sob stifled as he pressed the flat of the blade to his forehead, the steel cool against his fevered skin, a stark contrast that sent a shiver racing down his spine and let the memory cut deeper than any wound.

Come back to me, Des. Please. I'm nothing without you.

The tears came harder now, silent and relentless, soaking the dagger's hilt, dripping onto the bloodied planks with soft, accusing plops.

The cabin creaked around him — soft, mournful — as though the Jolly Roger herself felt the loss. The runes along the walls flickered weakly, their glow dimmed, smothered under the residue of dark magic. The lantern guttered low, its flame shrinking into a trembling ember.

Killian's breath trembled, his body shaking violently as grief tore through him. And the storm inside him — grief, rage, love — began to gather. His breath hitched as he lay sprawled on the blood-streaked planks, her dagger clutched in his shaking hand. The steel pressed against his forehead, cool and merciless, a stark contrast to the fevered heat burning beneath his skin. His shoulders shook with silent sobs, each one scraping his throat raw, each one tearing deeper into the hollow carved inside him.

He forced his gaze upward — toward the desk, toward the scattered remnants of their night — and his eyes caught on something that made his heart fracture all over again.

Her cloak. It lay crumpled where it had fallen during the struggle, dark leather pooled like spilled ink across the floor. The faint seaweed embroidery along the hem glimmered softly in the lantern's dying light. The fabric still carried the ghost of her scent — wildflowers crushed by rain, ozone after lightning, the clean bite of open sea.

Killian's breath broke into a sob. His fingers slipped, and the dagger dropped beside him, its silver edge flashing once as he reached for the cloak — trembling violently — dragging himself across the floor inch by inch. His limbs felt heavy, numb, refusing to obey, but he forced them to move. He clawed at the planks, nails scraping wood, leaving faint streaks of blood in his wake.

A shiver raced through him as reached for it. The leather was soft, and still carried the warmth of her body, a tactile phantom that made his skin prickle with longing. Its folds catching the light as if whispering her presence. He gathered it carefully into his lap with shaking hands, smoothing the creases as though he could iron away the

violence that had marked the night. The cloak felt impossibly heavy — weighted with everything she was, everything she meant, everything he had just lost.

He buried his face in the folds. Her scent hit him like a physical blow — sharp, aching, devastating. His lungs burned as he dragged in a breath, shoulders shaking violently. The fabric muffled his cries, but not the echo of her voice in his mind.

I love you. I love you. I love you.

The words were a litany, a prayer, a curse against the emptiness she'd left behind.

His fingers curled into the cloak, gripping it so tightly the leather creaked. "I'll tear the realms apart to find you," he whispered into the fabric, voice cracked and trembling. "I swear it on every drop of blood I've ever spilled." The vow formed in him like a blade — sharp, cold, absolute.

He lifted his head slowly, jaw clenched so hard his teeth ached. The fire in his chest was no longer a flicker — it was a roaring, apocalyptic inferno of grief-fueled rage a pirate's defiance kindled by loss, burning through the haze of pain. His blue eyes burned with lethal certainty, the kind that could freeze the sea itself.

The ship's timbers groaned beneath him — a low, mournful sound — as though the Jolly Roger herself echoed his vow. Her enchanted heart thrummed faintly, a broken rhythm aligning with his own.

Killian wiped his face with the back of his hand, smearing blood and tears across his cheek. His breath trembled, but his resolve did not. He straightened — slowly, deliberately — like a man rising from the grave, his hook scraping the desk for support, legs trembling beneath him but refusing to buckle. Blood had trickled down the side of his face, drying in a dark, jagged streak from temple to jaw, tight and flaky against his stubble. He ignored it.

He gathered the cloak against his chest as he rose, then carried it to the desk, the leather heavy with her absence. He spread the cloak across the wood with slow, reverent care, smoothing each fold as though gentleness could undo the violence that had torn her away. The fabric settled like a shadow of her presence, soft and familiar, a quiet echo of the woman he loved.

He knelt and picked her dagger back up, fingers trembling as he lifted it from the floor, and turned back to the desk. With careful, ritualistic deliberation, he laid it across the folded cloak, aligning the blade perfectly with the center seam, hilt toward the bed — as though she might reach for it the moment she walked through the door. The arrangement looked almost ceremonial, a shrine to the woman torn from him. A promise. A warning. A tether to Desylva's indomitable spirit, fueling the mission that now consumed him. His breath hitched once, a soft, broken sound.
He stood in the center of the cabin, swaying slightly, the world tilting around him in slow, nauseating waves. His breath trembled, chest tight with grief and rage, but his legs held. Barely. His fingers curled around the edge of the desk, knuckles white, hook digging into the wood hard enough to splinter it.

The lantern flickered overhead, casting jagged shadows across the walls — shadows that seemed to twist and recoil from him, as though the cabin itself sensed the storm gathering inside him.

His blue eyes burned. Not with tears now — though they still streaked his face, drying in dark, salty lines — but with something colder. Sharper. A lethal certainty forged in the furnace of loss.

He reached for his own black leather coat where it had been flung across the chair. He rolled his shoulders back as he shrugged it on with a single, brutal motion, the leather creaking softly. The familiar weight settled over him like armor forged in hell — heavy, grounding, a reminder of who he was before her, and who he would become again to get her back. The leather cool and creaking against his sweat-damp skin. He tugged on his boots next, their leather scuffed from countless voyages, lacing them with quick, vicious efficiency, each knot pulled tight like a promise of retribution, the cords biting into his fingers.

His hook steadied the lantern chain as he turned toward the door. Each step a drumbeat of grief, rage, and unbreakable determination echoing like a call to war. He paused at the threshold. The cabin was a ruin — splintered

wood, blood streaks, scorch marks, overturned linens. The air still hummed faintly with dark magic, a sickly residue clinging to the walls. The silence was suffocating, heavy with her absence.

Killian's jaw clenched. He looked back at the cloak and dagger one last time. "I'm coming for you, love," The words were both vow and death sentence, spoken to the empty cabin, to the blood on the floor, to the universe itself. They didn't echo this time. They settled. They rooted. They became truth. He reached for the latch. His hook clicked against the metal — sharp, final — a sound that cut through the silence like a blade.

I will find you. I'll tear through every realm, every shadow, every inch of existence if I must. I'll burn the world to bring you home… and make him suffer for every second you're gone. And when I find him—there'll be nothing left to bury

The Jolly Roger groaned beneath him, timbers shifting as though the ship herself braced for what was coming. Her runes flickered faintly, responding to the storm gathering inside her captain.

He opened the door. The pirate was awake. The captain was hunting. And the Dark One would learn what it meant to take everything from Captain Hook.

Quarterdeck

Killian emerged from the companionway like a man carved out of grief and resurrected by rage. The fog swallowed him whole the moment he stepped onto the deck — thick, unnatural, clinging to the wood like wet silk. It curled around his boots, coiled up the masts, smothered the rigging until the Jolly Roger looked half-drowned in gray. The air was cold enough to bite, sharp enough to sting, heavy enough to suffocate.

The lanterns still burned, but their light barely penetrated more than a few feet. The ship looked ghostly — a black silhouette adrift in a world that had forgotten color. Even the sea was quiet. The gentle lap of waves against the hull was muted, swallowed by the fog until the ocean itself seemed to hold its breath. The silence pressed against Killian's ribs, amplifying the pounding of his heart, the ringing in his skull, the raw ache in his throat.

Killian didn't hesitate. He strode to the ship's bell — the heavy brass hanging from its beam like a relic of war — and seized it with his hook. The first strike rang out sharp and violent. A single, commanding clang that cut through the fog like a blade, echoing across the deck with a haunting reverberation. The sound hung in the air long after the bell stilled, suspended like a warning.

Killian struck it again. And again. And again. Each peal was raw, desperate, furious — a war cry forged from grief. The bell's cry vibrated through the timbers, through the fog, through the ship's enchanted heart. The Jolly Roger shuddered beneath him, her runes flickering faintly in response. He didn't stop ringing the bell until he heard boots thudding below.

Main Deck

The crew stumbled up from below — bleary-eyed, hair mussed, shirts untucked, still half-drunk on rum and celebration. Their laughter died the instant they saw him. Alone at the quarterdeck rail alone. His coat hung open to the wind, the leather snapping sharply with each gust, the familiar weight settling over him like armor forged in grief. Blood crusted along his temple in a dark, jagged streak — the same wound that had soaked the cabin floor hours earlier. Tear tracks had dried into the blood, leaving pale, salt-stained lines across his skin. His blue eyes — gods, his eyes — burned with a fury so cold and absolute it seemed to freeze the fog itself. His face was a ruin — pale, streaked with drying blood and fresh tear tracks, jaw clenched so hard the muscles stood out in sharp relief.

The crew froze. Silence fell like an executioner's axe. Killian didn't raise his voice. He didn't need to. "Rumpelstiltskin took her." Three words. Flat. Final. Devastating. The words hit the deck like cannon fire.

The fog seemed to recoil. The air tightened. The ship groaned — a low, mournful sound that vibrated through the planks. A collective breath sucked in — sharp, wounded — like a blade to the gut.

Smee's mug slipped from numb fingers. It shattered on the deck, the crash obscenely loud in the suffocating silence. Shards skittered across the planks, with a tinkling echo that seemed to mock the moment, catching the lantern light like broken stars. His face drained of all color, eyes widening in horror, mouth working soundlessly before a choked,

broken “No…” tore from his throat, the word echoing off the masts. His knees buckled. He caught himself on the rail, wood creaking under his grip. Tears streamed down his cheeks, hot and relentless, carving wet paths through the grime. His whole body shook violently, shoulders trembling with sobs he couldn’t contain, hands clutching at his hat as though it could shield him from the truth, his shoulders heaving with each wrenching breath, the sobs echoing softly in the mist. “Not… not our lass… not Des…” His voice cracked into a raw sob. “She… she was just laughin’… she was happy…” The words dissolved into wrenching, childlike cries.

One-Eyed Jack’s hand flew to his cutlass. His knuckles whitened, the leather hilt creaking under his grip. His eye blazed with incandescent rage that mirrored Killian’s. But beneath it, grief flashed raw and naked across his scarred face before hardening into vengeance. “That… that monster…” he rasped, voice thick, breaking. A tear tracked down his cheek, unheeded, hot and stinging. His shoulders trembled. “I’ll rip his bloody heart out with my bare hands.” The snarl ended on a cracked, anguished note. his free hand balling into a fist that shook. “She was one of us… our storm-lass…” His voice fractured, and he turned away, shoulders heaving once, twice, before forcing himself upright, tears still falling, the sound of his ragged breaths echoing in the silence.

Black Tom’s fists clenched around his harpoon so hard the wood groaned and splintered under his grip, the crack echoing sharply. His massive shoulders slumped as though the news had physically struck him, the impact vibrating through his frame. His dark eyes filled, glistening, and silent tears carved hot paths down his weathered cheeks, the drops pattering softly onto the deck. A low, guttural sound rumbled from his chest — pure, wordless agony — a wounded animal’s cry that shook his entire frame and echoed faintly off the sails, raw and primal. His knees hit the deck, harpoon trembling in his hands.

Billy’s lute slid from his shoulder. It hit the planks with a hollow, mournful clatter that reverberated across the deck. His freckled face crumpled, eyes flooding instantly, tears spilling hot and fast. “She… she can’t be…” he stammered, voice breaking into a childlike sob that cracked and echoed. “She was just… singin’… dancin’… she hugged me…” His knees gave out completely, hitting the deck with a thud that sent vibrations through the planks. He curled in on himself, shoulders shaking violently, tears dripping onto the wood in dark splatters. Each sob a sharp, echoing gasp. “We have to get her back, Cap’n.” His voice dissolved into wrenching sobs, his hands balling into fists and pounding the planks once, twice, helpless, rage and grief twisting his features.

The crew’s grief was a storm — raw, violent, uncontained — tearing through the deck with the force of a tempest. Their cries mingled with the fog, rising like a broken chorus.

Quarterdeck

Killian stood at rail, unmoving. He watched them — every tear, every trembling shoulder, every shattered expression — and saw his own torment reflected a hundredfold in the faces of the family he’d built. The family Desylva had helped him keep. The raw agony of losing one of their own, a sister-in-arms.

“She fought,” Killian said, voice low. “She fought him. He took her through a portal.” His voice cracked once — just once — then steadied. “She screamed my name.”

The shared pain was visceral — hot tears on cold skin, shaking limbs, echoing sobs — a forge that would temper them into something unbreakable.

Then, quieter, deadlier, voice thick with the same tears he refused to shed again: “We’re going after her.” The words landed like a thunderclap.

Main Deck

No one moved. No one breathed.

Until Smee, round, soft, perpetually nervous Smee, took one shaking step forward. His chin lifted, eyes streaming, but fierce with loyalty. His voice was steady despite the quake in his hands, a sob choking the words as he wiped his face. “Aye, Cap’n. For Des.” One-Eyed Jack’s voice followed, rough and shattered, thick with tears. “Aye… we’ll bring our lass home… or we’ll die tryin’.” His grip tightened on his cutlass, his eye red-rimmed, grief fueling the vow. Black Tom’s nod was single, sharp, absolute. He rose, his massive frame trembling violently, as he stepped forward, harpoon gripped like a lifeline, tears still falling silently. Billy dragged himself to his feet, clutching his lute like it was

all that tethered him to the world. His voice cracked, but he forced the words out through the sobs. “Aye… for Desylva.” His fingers already moving across the strings in a slow, grim march.

Quarterdeck

Killian turned toward the shrouded horizon, hook resting on the rail, blood dried in a dark streak along his temple where the lantern-light caught it. “Then raise anchor,” he said — low, lethal, a voice that cracked only once. “We’ve a Dark One to hunt.”

The wind rose — sudden, sharp — carrying the scent of ozone and distant lightning. Killian’s smile flickered small and dangerous, a broken edge beneath it. “I’m coming, Des,” he whispered, turning from the rail and striding for the helm.

Main Deck (Departure) A few moments later

The Jolly Roger tore free of the cove with a groan of protesting timbers, the sound deep and wounded, as though the ship herself understood what had been taken from her.

The anchor chain rattled up through the hawsepipe with a violent clatter, links grinding and clanging in a cacophony that reverberated through the fog-shrouded dawn. It sounded like chains breaking. Like shackles snapping. Like a promise being forged.

Quarterdeck

Killian stood at the wheel, his hook gripping the spokes so hard the wood groaned under the pressure, grain creaking in protest. His hand trembled once — the lingering tremor from the cabin — before he forced it still. His blue eyes burned with cold, lethal certainty, the kind that didn’t flicker, didn’t waver, didn’t leave room for doubt or mercy. The grief and rage in his chest had become a roaring furnace, fueling every breath, every command, every heartbeat.

“Full sail!” he bellowed, voice raw and cracking. It carried over the wind and waves like a war cry. “Every knot of canvas we’ve got. Don’t spare the rigging.”

Main Deck

The deck vibrated underfoot as the crew obeyed without question, driven by a storm of grief and incandescent rage. They moved not with the sluggishness of men waking from sleep, but with the violent urgency of those who had just lost a sister — surging into motion grief-stricken, furious, determined, fueled by desperation and devotion.

Smee hauled lines with trembling hands, tears still streaming down his cheeks., breath hitching with every pull — the same broken sobs he’d choked out when Killian first rang the bell. One-Eyed Jack barked orders through a voice thick with grief, his eye red-rimmed and blazing, each command a vow sharpened from the night’s devastation. “Get those sails up! Move, lads — MOVE!” His voice cracked halfway through the command, but the crew didn’t falter.

Black Tom pulled ropes with silent, brutal strength, his massive shoulders heaving, tears carving silent paths down his scarred face. Billy scrambled up the ratlines, fingers fumbling but determined, his freckled face streaked with salt and sorrow, the same grief that had dropped him to his knees on the deck hours earlier. His breath hitched with every movement, but he climbed anyway, climbing like the mast itself depended on him.

The sails unfurled with shouts that were half battle cry, half sob. Canvas cracked like thunder as it billowed taut, the wind filling it with a sudden, hungry whoosh that made the masts creak and the rigging sing.

The Jolly Roger stirred. Her timbers groaned, a deep, resonant sound that vibrated through the deck, through the crew, through Killian’s bones, as she came alive beneath their hands. The runes along her rails flickering with a faint, furious glow — the same glow that had pulsed weakly in the cabin after Desylva vanished — reacting to the storm gathering inside her captain.

The fog parted reluctantly before her prow, tendrils tearing away like shredded silk. The sea beyond had turned restless — waves rising higher, cresting white and angry, slapping against the hull with wet smacks that echoed the crew's pounding hearts.

She surged forward, cutting through the mist like a blade. Her black hull sliced the water like a dark knife, bow wave foaming white and violent. The deck tilted as she heeled over under full press of sail. The wind rose to meet her, sharp and cold, whipping hair and coats, carrying the salt sting of spray that lashed faces like needles.

Waves crashed against the sides with increasing fury, spray exploding over the rails in icy sheets that soaked the crew to the bone. The ship rocked violently as she drove into the swell, timbers groaning under the strain, the deck shuddering with each impact.

Lightning flickered on the horizon — faint, distant, blue-white. Not random. Not weather. A storm-echo. Desylva's magic reaching across realms, or the ship answering Killian's vow. Thunder rumbled low, like a growl of approval.

Quarterdeck

Killian's gaze stayed fixed forward, unblinking. The blood on his face had dried to a dark mask. His jaw was clenched so hard the muscles stood out in sharp relief, tension vibrating through him like a taut rope ready to snap. "We're coming for you, Des," he whispered to the wind — the same vow he'd spoken in the cabin, the same vow he'd repeated at the wheel.

The words were lost in the roar, but the ship heard them. Her enchanted timbers thrummed with shared purpose, the runes along her hull pulsing faintly in answer. The Jolly Roger responded. Her sails snapped taut. Her hull cut deeper into the waves. Her bow lifted, then plunged forward with renewed fury.

The hunt had begun in earnest — a black arrow loosed into the dawn, carrying vengeance, grief, and unbreakable love toward whatever realm the Dark One had fled.

The sea opened before them, vast and merciless, but the Jolly Roger sailed on. Her crew was bound by loss and fury, the deck alive with their determination. Every creak, every groan, every snap of canvas was a vow. They would bring their storm-lass home. Or they would burn the world trying.

Beneath the roar of wind and waves, beneath the crack of canvas and the groan of timbers, something else stirred — a gathering, a sharpening, a direction. Killian's search had begun.

Killian's Search

The first six months of the search were a blur of storms, steel, and desperation. Time slipping by like sand through his fingers, his hope fraying like old rope left too long in the sun. The Jolly Roger carved through realms like a blade, her black hull slicing mist and moonlight as Killian hunted every whisper, every rumor, every shadow that might lead him to Desylva. His hook gleamed cold and merciless as he stormed taverns, docks, and dens of thieves. Every port from Tortuga to Neverland felt the weight of his wrath. Witnesses whispered of a pirate captain who hunted like a man possessed — a man who had lost something precious and would tear the realms apart to reclaim it.

1st Month

The first month burned hotter than any storm Killian had ever sailed through.

He barely slept. Barely ate. Barely breathed unless it was to shout her name into the wind. His blue eyes blazed with purpose — sharp, wild, fever-bright. His voice cut like steel — every command a blade. His heart was a furnace of vengeance — roaring, relentless, consuming.

The Jolly Roger surged through realms like a warship reborn, her runes flaring with each violent turn of the helm. Killian drove her hard, harder, until her timbers groaned and her sails snapped like thunder.

He stormed through taverns with ruthless purpose, kicking in doors as his cutlass flashed in his hand. His boots thundered across the floorboards, and his coat snapped behind him like a banner carried into battle. He pressed his cutlass to smugglers' throats, demanding answers in a voice roughened by grief and sharpened by rage. In rain-slick alleyways, he hunted down cutthroats and dragged them close, the cold gleam of his hook resting beneath their chins as he forced them to talk. Informants fared no better; he seized them with his hook and hauled them across tables, leaving little doubt that he would stop at nothing to uncover the truth.

His voice was a weapon. His grief was a blade. His rage was a storm.

The crew followed him with fierce loyalty because they loved her too. Smee chattered nervously, trying to keep spirits high, hands shaking as he polished cannons and fetched maps. One-Eyed Jack sharpened his cutlass with a grin, eager for a fight, eye blazing with the same fury that drove his captain. Black Tom hauled ropes with brutal strength, silent but steadfast, his massive frame a pillar of support in the chaos. Billy played hopeful shanties, his lute echoing across the waves like a promise — soft, trembling notes meant to keep Killian from breaking.

Every storm felt like her magic calling. Every flash of lightning felt like her mark flaring somewhere out there. Every gust of wind felt like her whisper. Killian believed he would find her — and he would burn the world down to do it.

They chased a rumor in Tortuga — a sailor swearing he'd seen blue lightning strike the sea. Killian slammed him against a wall, hook pressed to his throat, demanding details until the man sobbed out a location.

They found nothing.

They hunted a whisper in Neverland — a fairy claiming she'd seen a gray-eyed woman near the lagoon. Killian tore through the jungle, cutlass slicing vines, shouting Desylva's name into the humid air.

She wasn't there.

They followed a lead in the Enchanted Forest — a thief insisting he'd seen a storm-lass fighting off bandits. Killian cornered him behind a tavern, hook tapping the wall beside his ear.

The thief lied.

Killian's fury didn't falter. His hope didn't dim.

One night, after a fruitless chase through three ports, Killian stood at the stern, coat whipping in the wind, jaw clenched so tight it trembled. His breath shook — not from exhaustion, but from the sheer force of the rage burning inside him.

Billy whispered to Smee, voice trembling, “He really is gonna tear the realms apart.” Smee swallowed hard. “Aye… but maybe that’s what it’ll take.” Black Tom watched Killian with dark, steady eyes — a silent vow to follow him into whatever hell came next. One-Eyed Jack muttered, “If the imp’s hidin’ her, we’ll gut him.”

The crew was united. Fierce. Hopeful. But they were beginning to understand the truth. Killian wasn’t just searching. He was hunting.

By the end of the first month, Killian had become a storm — a force of nature, a man carved from grief and fury, a captain who would not stop until he found her.

The Jolly Roger carved through realms like a blade. Her runes flared. Her timbers groaned. Her sails snapped like thunder.

Killian stood at the helm, eyes blazing, hook gripping the wheel, voice rough with command. “Find her,” he rasped into the wind. “Find her.”

And the sea answered with a mournful sigh.

2nd Month

The trail grew cold. Not suddenly — but with a slow, creeping chill that settled over the Jolly Roger like frost. Rumors contradicted each other. Witnesses lied. Rumpel’s spies fed false leads with smug grins and trembling hands. Every whisper Killian chased dissolved into smoke the moment he reached for it. His voice grew harsher. His temper sharpened. His questions became demands. His demands became threats.

The crew began to whisper among themselves — not out of disloyalty, but out of fear. They had seen Killian angry before, but this was different. This was a man whose grief was beginning to hollow him out.

Smee watched him with wide, worried eyes, his nervous chatter dying into quiet mutters. One-Eyed Jack sharpened his cutlass more often, the rasp of steel a nervous habit rather than preparation for battle. Billy’s shanties grew softer, shorter, fading mid-melody when Killian didn’t react. Black Tom’s silence deepened, his dark eyes following Killian with a sorrow that made Billy’s breath hitch.

The Jolly Roger herself groaned under the strain — her timbers shuddering as if she felt her captain’s unraveling. Her runes flickered weakly, dimming whenever Killian’s rage spiked, then pulsing faintly when his despair crept in.

Killian paced the deck at night, boots thudding against the planks, hook tapping the rail in a restless rhythm. He muttered to himself — fragments of questions, half-formed curses, Desylva’s name spoken like a prayer and a threat all at once.

He chased a rumor in the Camelot. Nothing. He hunted a whisper in Wonderland. A lie. He cornered a thief in Smuggler’s Cove. Another lie.

Each failure carved deeper into Killian’s voice, into his posture, into the way he gripped the helm until the wood splintered beneath his hand and the runes flared to repair the damage.

The crew felt the shift — the first true crack in their captain’s fire.

Billy whispered to Smee one night, voice trembling, “He’s slippin’, Smee… he’s slippin’.” Smee swallowed hard, eyes wet. “Aye… and if we don’t find her soon… I fear what he’ll become.”

The Jolly Roger drifted through mist-heavy waters, her bow cutting through fog like a ghost. Her timbers groaned. Her runes dimmed. Her sails sagged as though mourning the captain she carried.

Killian stood at the helm, jaw clenched, blue eyes hollowing at the edges — the first signs of a man beginning to fray. He wasn't burning anymore. He was smoldering. And the crew feared what would happen when the fire finally went out.

Third Month

Killian sailed into storms he once would have avoided. Thunder cracking overhead. Lightning splitting the sky. Waves slammed the hull with bone-breaking force. But none of it felt like her. Her storm-magic had always carried warmth beneath the fury — a pulse of life, a heartbeat in the chaos. These storms were empty. Cold. Dead.

He stood at the helm through every tempest, soaked to the bone, hook gripping the wheel. His coat snapped violently in the wind, rain streaming down his face like tears he refused to shed.

The crew exchanged worried glances. Billy whispered, voice trembling, "He's chasin' ghosts." Smee wiped his brow with a shaking hand. "Aye… and ghosts don't like bein' chased." One-Eyed Jack muttered, "He's gonna kill us all if he keeps this up." Black Tom didn't speak — but his dark eyes followed Killian with a heavy, sorrowful warning.

Killian began steering the Jolly Roger toward storms deliberately — storms that seasoned sailors avoided, storms that cracked masts and swallowed ships whole. He ignored the crew's shouts. He ignored the ship's groans. He ignored the runes flickering in distress.

One night, he forced the Jolly Roger into a tempest so violent the sails strained against the wind, snapping like thunder. The mast shuddered, runes flaring in frantic pulses as they fought to hold the enchanted wood steady. The deck pitched hard, spray exploding over the rails as the storm hammered the hull.

Billy clung to the rigging, eyes wide, voice cracking over the roar of the wind. "Cap'n — the runes are strainin'! She can't hold this forever!"

Killian didn't flinch. Didn't blink. Didn't look away from the lightning.

Another night, he ordered the Jolly Roger straight toward a whirlpool — a massive, churning maw of black water. The runes along the hull flared in frantic pulses, fighting the pull as the ship lurched toward the spiraling abyss.

Smee grabbed Killian's arm, voice cracking, "Cap'n, please! She ain't in there!" Killian shook him off with a snarl. "Hold course."

The whirlpool roared louder, dragging the ship sideways. The deck pitched violently, spray exploding over the rails.

Black Tom lunged toward the wheel — trying to wrench it away from Killian's grip, muscles straining as the whirlpool fought them like a living beast.

Killian growled — a low, feral sound — and snapped his head toward Black Tom. His blue eyes blazed with a wild, dangerous light. A grin — sharp, unhinged, terrifying — cut across his face.

For the first time, Black Tom froze.

Killian lifted his hook — not to strike, but out of blind, grief-mad instinct.

Smee stared, stunned, wondering what Killian was going to do. One-Eyed Jack's hand hovered near his cutlass, breath catching, ready to jump in if needed.

Killian drove his shoulder forward and slammed into Black Tom with the full force of his hook-arm. Something wild and unnatural seemed to pour through him. It was not a shove. It was a violent surge that crashed into Black Tom like a breaking wave, as though grief itself had lent Killian impossible power.

The force hurled Black Tom backward. He slammed into the port rail, the impact rattling the wood, runes flickering in alarm. He steadied himself, chest heaving, rain dripping from his beard, his dark eyes wide with a fear he rarely allowed himself to feel. No man should have been able to move him like that, and certainly not Killian. For an instant, he could scarcely believe what had happened. It wasn't strength. It was madness.

Killian turned back to the wheel, jaw clenched, hook gripping the spokes as he forced the Jolly Roger toward the raging maw — a captain chasing despair with reckless abandon.

Black Tom didn't move again. He just stood there, chest heaving, his dark eyes fixed on Killian.

The moment broke something in the crew. They knew that look. They had seen it a hundred times before, in darker years when Captain Hook ruled the seas through fury and spite. Then Desylva had come crashing into their lives, and they'd watched Killian Jones emerge from the shadow of Captain Hook, watched love succeed where over a century and a half of bloodshed had failed. Watched Captain Hook fade and Killian Jones return. Now they feared they were watching the opposite happen. The tide was turning once more, and Captain Hook was reclaiming the ground he had lost.

Crew Quarters (A few days later)

The crew gathered in the dim lantern-light, voices hushed. Billy's hands shook around his lute. "He ain't right, lads… he ain't right." One-Eyed Jack slammed his fist on the table. "He's lost his bloody mind! Storm-chasin', whirlpool-chasin', death-chasin'—" Smee cut him off, voice trembling. "He's hurtin'. He's scared. He's… he's breakin', Jack."

Black Tom carved a slow line into a block of wood — a storm cloud, another tribute — his silence louder than any words. Billy whispered, "If he keeps sailin' like this… the sea's gonna take him." Smee swallowed hard. "Aye… and she'll take us with him."

Main Deck

Above them, the Jolly Roger groaned — her timbers aching, her runes flickering weakly, as though she felt her captain's unraveling.

Deck (Next Day – Dawn)

Killian stood at the helm again staring at a storm brewing on the horizon. A storm no sane sailor would approach. The crew watched him, breath held tight. Killian whispered, "Des… if you're out there… show me." He turned the wheel toward the storm.

The Jolly Roger shuddered. The crew froze. Billy whispered, "Gods help us…" And the ship sailed on — into a tempest that felt nothing like her.

4th Month

Killian stopped speaking unless necessary. Days passed without a word. Nights passed without sleep. He stood at the helm for hours, staring at the horizon with hollow eyes — eyes that once blazed with fury now dimmed into something colder, quieter, more frightening. His hook rested against the wheel, unmoving. His breath was shallow. His posture rigid, carved from exhaustion and grief.

Smee tried to talk to him. He didn't answer. Billy tried to play for him — soft, hopeful chords meant to reach whatever part of Killian still listened. He didn't look up. Black Tom placed a hand on his shoulder once. He didn't react. Didn't flinch. Didn't blink.

The crew began to fear him — not because he was cruel, but because he was fading.

Killian spent long stretches alone at the stern, coat fluttering in the wind, staring into the endless dark as though waiting for it to speak. The sea whispered beneath him — soft, mournful, echoing the hollow ache inside his chest.

Sometimes he whispered her name. Sometimes he didn't speak at all.

Billy watched from the rigging, heart twisting. "He's driftin' away," he murmured, voice trembling. Smee wiped his eyes. "Aye… and I don't know how to pull him back."

At night, Killian climbed to the quarterdeck and stared at the stars — searching for patterns, omens, anything that might point him toward her. His blue eyes reflected the constellations, but there was no spark in them, no fire, only a quiet desperation. He traced the constellations with his hook, murmuring under his breath, "Storm-lass… where are you?"

The stars didn't answer.

Billy whispered to Smee, "He's lookin' for her in the sky now…" Smee swallowed hard. "He's lookin' anywhere he can."

Killian began confining himself to his cabin for hours at a time. The crew heard the scrape of his hook against the desk, the rustle of maps, the soft thud of boots pacing back and forth. Sometimes he emerged with new charts. Sometimes with nothing at all. Sometimes he didn't emerge until dawn.

One-Eyed Jack muttered, voice low and grim, "He's losin' himself in there." Smee swallowed hard, eyes wet. "No… he's talkin' to her." Black Tom simply bowed his head, a slow, heavy motion that said he agreed.

The Jolly Roger groaned — her timbers aching, her runes flickering weakly — as though she felt her captain's breaking.

The crew moved quietly around him, their steps soft, their voices hushed, as though any sudden sound might shatter what remained of their captain. Billy plucked a single, trembling chord. Smee whispered a prayer. Black Tom rested a hand on the mast, eyes closed.

Killian didn't notice any of it.

He stood at the helm, hollow-eyed, staring into the horizon as though waiting for it to give him back the woman he'd lost. He wasn't burning anymore. He wasn't raging. He wasn't storm-chasing. He was fading. And the crew feared the silence more than they had ever feared the storm.

5th Month

The crew started to realize the truth. Killian wasn't searching anymore. He was chasing despair. The fire that had once driven him — sharp, bright, relentless — had collapsed into something hollow. Something dangerous.

He stormed taverns with wild eyes, boots pounding across floorboards, coat snapping behind him like a shadow torn loose from its owner. He interrogated strangers with shaking hands, his hook tapping a frantic rhythm against tables, walls, throats — anything that stood between him and an answer. He threatened smugglers who had no answers. He cornered informants who had never seen her. He chased rumors that dissolved the moment he reached them. He sailed into storms that would have torn lesser ships apart — not out of hope, but out of desperation, as though the chaos might swallow the ache inside him.

Week 2

In a sketchy tavern, Killian slammed a man against the bar, hook pressed to his throat. "Storm-lass. Lightning. Gray eyes. Where?"

The man sobbed. "I don't know her — I swear it!"

Killian's hand trembled. Not with rage — with despair.

He released the man and walked out without a word, shoulders bowed, boots dragging through the mud.

Billy watched from the doorway, heart twisting. “He ain’t huntin’ anymore… he’s drownin’.” Smee wiped his eyes. “Aye… and the sea’s takin’ him piece by piece.”

Week 3

In a shadowy alley filled with purple smoke from enchanted braziers, Killian stopped a thief who claimed he’d seen a storm-marked woman. The thief lied — Killian could see it in the twitch of his jaw, the shift of his eyes. Killian didn’t raise his cutlass. He didn’t snarl. He didn’t threaten. He simply stared at the man, hollow-eyed, rain dripping from his hair, his hook hanging uselessly at his side. “Then you’re no use to me,” he whispered — not angry, not sharp, just… tired.

The thief bolted. Killian didn’t move. Didn’t watch him go. Didn’t care.

Smee saw him from the mouth of the alley, breath catching. “He’s not even fightin’ anymore,” he whispered. One-Eyed Jack’s jaw tightened. “Aye. That’s the part that scares me.”

Killian walked past them muttering “Why can’t I find her? I should be able to find her?”

One-Eyed Jack looked to Smee, “He’s unravelin’, lads.” Black Tom’s silence was heavy, his dark eyes following Killian with a sorrow that made Smee’s breath hitch.

Week 4

The crew watched their captain unravel. Gone was the carefree Killian who’d laughed with Desylva under starlit skies, his blue eyes dancing as they spun tales of their next adventure. Gone was the man softened by her storm-born magic. In his place stood a shadow — a man whose every step echoed with purpose and pain, his hook clenched around the helm, his soul fraying like old rope left too long in the sun.

The crew moved through the ship like ghosts, their voices hushed, their steps careful, as though any sudden sound might shatter what remained of their captain. Billy’s lute stayed silent. One-Eyed Jack sharpened his cutlass without speaking. Black Tom coiled ropes with slow, deliberate motions, his massive hands trembling. Smee watched Killian with wide, wet eyes, whispering prayers into the wind. They braced themselves for whatever came next.

The Jolly Roger drifted through quiet waters, her runes dimming, her timbers groaning under the weight of a captain losing hope. Her sails sagged. Her bow dipped. Her enchanted heart pulsed weakly, as though mourning the man she carried.

Killian stood at the helm, staring into the horizon with a look that frightened the crew more than any storm. He wasn’t burning anymore. He wasn’t raging. He was chasing despair. And the sea whispered beneath him like a lullaby meant to drown.

6th Month

One bleak dawn, as the Jolly Roger rocked gently in Tortuga’s harbor, a cloaked figure slipped aboard. His boots scuffed the planks, his breath ragged as he emerged from the fog — a messenger sent by Rumpelstiltskin. His voice trembled, thin and reedy, as he delivered the lie he’d been coerced to speak. “She’s lost to you, pirate. Gone beyond your reach.” The words hung in the damp air like poison, a cruel seed planted to break Killian’s spirit.

Killian’s head snapped up. His blue eyes blazed — not with grief, but with fury. A spark reignited. Captain Hook stirring again. His jaw clenched. His hook twitched. His voice dropped into a dangerous growl. “Get off my ship.”

The messenger fled, stumbling down the gangplank.

Killian stood rigid, chest heaving, the fire he’d buried beneath three years with Desylva roaring back to life. The crew exchanged uneasy glances — they had seen this version of him before and feared what it meant.

For awhile, Killian was all storm and steel. He barked orders. He tore through taverns. He interrogated smugglers with a cutlass at their throats. He demanded answers with a voice sharp enough to cut bone.

The crew followed him with wary obedience, their hope rekindled, but their fear rising.

Captain Hook was back.

By the end of the month, the Jolly Roger drifted through the mists of the Enchanted Forest's outer waters, her sails half-furled, her runes dim, her timbers groaning under the weight of a hunt that had begun to feel endless. The ship herself seemed to sense the shift — Killian's grief had stopped burning hot and begun sinking into cold again.

The fire in Killian's chest guttered out again. He walked into taverns like a ghost. His shoulders sagged. His hook tapping the bar in a hollow rhythm. A rhythm of despair rather than threat. His questions lacked fury.

"Any word of a storm-lass?"
"Any sign of blue lightning?"
"Any trace of her?"

Most shook their heads. Some lied. A few pitied him. He didn't threaten them anymore. He simply turned and left, shoulders bowed, jaw clenched, grief gnawing at him like a tide wearing down stone.

The crew watched him fade. Smee's nervous chatter dwindled to whispers. One-Eyed Jack's jokes died on his tongue. Black Tom's silence grew heavier, his dark eyes following Killian with a sorrow that made Billy's freckled face pale. Billy's lute stayed quiet more often than not. He plucked only soft, mournful chords — the kind that drifted across the deck like sighs.

Killian forgot to eat, to sleep. He began zoning out at the helm. Not dozing — not distracted — but gone, staring into the horizon as if caught in a siren's trance. His blue eyes were unfocused, fixed on some distant point only he could see, his breath shallow, his hook resting motionless against the wheel. Minutes would pass, then hours.

One-day things almost became fatal.

The Jolly Roger drifted, her bow turning slowly toward a jagged reef rising from the mist.

Up in the crow's nest, Billy froze mid-strum. His freckled face paled. "Reef ahead!" he shouted, voice cracking as he pointed frantically. "Cap'n! We're driftin' straight into it!"

Smee jerked upright, rag falling from his hands. One-Eyed Jack spun toward the bow, his eye widening.

Black Tom reacted instantly, his massive frame lunged across the deck, boots pounding the planks. He pointed sharply at the reef, then at Killian, then at the wheel — a mute warning delivered with the urgency of a man who had seen too many close calls.

Killian gaze stayed locked on the horizon.

The Jolly Roger groaned as the current pulled her closer to the jagged rocks.

"Cap'n!" Smee cried, voice breaking. "Hook! Snap out of it!" One-Eyed Jack barked, panic rising.

Black Tom reached the helm in three strides. He lunged for the wheel, his massive hands seizing the spokes, muscles straining as he hauled it hard to port. The helm jerked violently under his grip, the enchanted wood creaking as the ship swung wide.

The Jolly Roger shuddered, her runes flickering in alarm as she scraped past the reef by mere feet — close enough for Billy to gasp and clutch the mast. Smee stumbled across the deck, breath hitching. "Gods, Cap'n—!"

Killian remained frozen, trapped in a grief-born trance, the sea whispering beneath him like a lullaby meant to drown.

Black Tom stood beside him, chest heaving, one hand still braced on the wheel. He cast a look toward Smee and One-Eyed Jack that said everything: Their captain was slipping. And the sea would claim him if they didn't hold him together.

The crew exchanged terrified glances. Billy whispered from above, voice trembling, "He didn't even see it…" Smee wiped his eyes with a shaking hand. One-Eyed Jack muttered a curse under his breath.

Black Tom stayed at the helm only long enough to wrench the wheel clear of danger. Then, with a sharp, purposeful motion, he reached for the Starward Compass. The enchanted device pulsed to life beneath his palm, its soft blue glow spreading across the helm as the Jolly Roger steadied herself, sails tightening, runes humming in alignment. The ship corrected her course instantly — a silent, magical response — while Killian remained frozen, staring into the fog.

Smee approached him later, hands trembling, eyes still wide from the near-collision. "Cap'n…" he started, voice thin and shaking.

Killian didn't move.

Smee swallowed hard, the word catching in his throat. He tried again — softer, more desperate. "Killian…" he whispered, the name slipping out like a plea, as if calling to the man beneath the captain might reach him where titles could not, "you're scarin' us."

Killian stood rigid at the helm, gaze fixed on the fog, as unreachable as if he were carved from the same enchanted oak beneath his boots.

Smee's breath hitched. Tears gathered. "Please… come back to us."

Killian blinked out of the trance at last — a slow, disoriented flutter, as though waking from a dream he couldn't remember. His gaze drifted from the fog to the deck, unfocused, hollow. He stepped back from the helm without a word, boots dragging across the planks as he retreated toward the companionway.

The crew watched him go, their breaths held tight. Billy climbed down from the crow's nest, landing lightly beside Smee. One-Eyed Jack sheathed his cutlass with a sharp, uneasy click. Black Tom's dark eyes followed Killian's fading silhouette. No one spoke.

The Jolly Roger rocked gently, her runes dimming as though exhausted from saving her captain.

8th Month

The crew began to fracture.

Killian's Cabin

One-Eyed Jack confronted Killian first. He slammed his cutlass onto the table in the captain's quarters, the blade clattering against maps and charts. "We're chasin' ghosts, Cap'n. You're killin' us with this madness."

Killian didn't look up. One-Eyed Jack's voice cracked. "She's gone, Cap'n. We all loved her, but she's gone."

Killian's jaw tightened. His blue eyes flickered — a spark of fury, a spark of grief — then dimmed again. "Leave," he rasped. One-Eyed Jack left the cabin shaking, his eye wet.

Crew Quarters

Billy cried quietly that night, his lute silent in his lap. Smee sat beside him, rubbing his shoulder, whispering, "He'll come back to us. He has to." Black Tom carved a small wooden storm cloud — a tribute to Desylva — and placed it at the bow. His massive hands trembled as he set it down.

The crew was unraveling. Killian was unraveling faster.

Week 3

One night, a storm rolled in — not magical, not hers, just a normal tempest. But Killian stood at the helm as if it were Desylva calling him. Rain lashed his face. Wind tore at his coat. Lightning cracked overhead. He whispered into the storm, voice breaking, “Des… if you’re out there… give me a sign.” Thunder cracked. But he knew it just normal thunder, not her. He sank to his knees, hook digging into the deck, rain mixing with tears he didn’t bother to hide.

The storm passed, leaving the deck slick with rain and the crew shaken. Killian remained kneeling at the helm long after the thunder faded, his hook buried in the planks, his breath shallow. Smee hovered nearby, afraid to touch him. Billy wiped his eyes with trembling fingers. One-Eyed Jack muttered a curse under his breath. Black Tom stood guard, silent as stone.

When Killian finally rose, he didn’t speak. He simply walked toward the bow, shoulders bowed, disappearing into the fog like a man carved from grief.

The crew exchanged terrified glances. The Jolly Roger rocked gently, her runes flickering weakly, as though mourning the captain she could no longer steady.

By morning, the ship drifted through mist-heavy waters, her enchanted heart dim. Her sails drooped. Her runes dimmed. Her timbers creaked like an old woman mourning her children.

Killian stood at the helm, hollow-eyed, his voice a rasp whenever he spoke. The crew marked his change with quiet unease, understanding that something inside him had broken.

Captain Hook — the pirate with vengeance pulsing in his veins — was stirring again. The man he had been before Desylva. Hard. Cold. Dangerous. His heart hardening into a blade once more. His blue eyes burning with a vengeance that threatened to consume him.

Killian’s hook gripped tightly around the helm. He was drowning. And the crew feared they would drown with him.

9th Month

Nine months had passed since Rumpelstiltskin had stolen her, each day carving deeper into Killian’s heart, leaving a hollow ache where her laughter once echoed, her sultry voice, her fierce gray eyes, her touch a spark against the darkness.

The sea was quiet — too quiet — its waves muted, its winds sluggish, as though even the ocean had grown weary of the endless search. The sky hung low and gray, clouds bruised with distant storms that never reached them.

A heaviness settled over the Jolly Roger like a shroud. The ship drifted through the mist like a ghost, her runes dim, her timbers groaning. She seemed to mourn. Time had carved deep wounds into her enchanted heart — each one mirroring the man who captained her.

The crew felt the shift.

Killian moved through the ship like a shadow. His hook tapped the helm in a slow, relentless rhythm — not out of impatience, but out of habit, a mechanical echo of the man he used to be.

Week 3

The ship swayed gently under a sky heavy with gray clouds, the sea stretching endlessly before her, its waves a muted indigo that churned with restless whispers of distant storms. The air carried the sharp bite of salt and the faint tang of rope, mingling with the creak of the ship’s enchanted timbers. Runes pulsed faintly as if mourning the absence of Desylva’s storm-born magic.

Billy perched high in the crow's nest, his lute cradled against his chest. His youthful frame silhouetted against the bruised sky His freckled face — once bright with boyish hope — was etched with worry as he looked down at the main deck. His fingers plucked absently at the strings, a mournful hum rising as his gaze shifted from the horizon to the crew below, their movements heavy with the weight of their captain's spiraling grief.

Smee polished a cannon with a rag, his nervous chatter reduced to a low mutter, his eyes darting to Killian with a flicker of fear. One-Eyed Jack leaned against the rail, sharpening his cutlass with slow, deliberate strokes, the rasp of steel a steady rhythm, his eye clouded with concern as he glanced at the helm. Black Tom coiled ropes with his massive hands, his dark gaze steady but softened with pity, his silence louder than any words.

The deck creaked beneath their steps, the Jolly Roger a living vessel sharing their sorrow, timbers groaning as if pleading for Desylva's return.

Killian stood at the helm, his black coat snapping in the gusting wind, its edges frayed from relentless pursuit. His hook gripped the wheel, runes flaring briefly to mend a fresh gouge from his restless tapping, the metal glinting like a blade in the dim light. His heart a compass locked on Desylva, undaunted by the realms he'd tear through to find her.

Billy's gaze lingered on Killian, his heart heavy with the sight of his captain unraveling. Once tempered by Desylva's love, now a shadow of the man who'd laughed under starlit skies, his soul hardening into the pirate who'd once hunted vengeance before her storm had softened him.

"He's slippin'," Billy whispered to himself, his voice barely audible over the wind, his fingers tightening on the lute. "She's gotta be out there. Our tempest's gotta bring him back from the rabbit hole he's fallin' into." He took a steadying breath, his eyes tracing the crew's weary forms, then the vast sea stretching to the horizon, its waves carrying echoes of their battles.

Clearing his throat, he began to recite a poem he'd been crafting in stolen moments, his voice soft at first, then rising with a mournful cadence, a shanty-like lament that carried over the deck, each verse a plea for Desylva's return. His gaze shifted from Killian to the crew, to the sea, and back again, his words weaving their shared grief into a tapestry of hope and fear.

Billy
Oh, we sail through the dark for our lady of storm,
Her lightning's gone, left our hearts torn.
Our captain's adrift, his soul's torn apart,
Chasin' her shadow with a vengeance-filled heart.

Smee paused, his rag stilling on the cannon, his ruddy face lifting as he caught Billy's words, a flicker of hope in his nervous eyes. "Sing it, lad," he called softly, his voice cracking with emotion, "for her. For him." One-Eyed Jack's sharpening slowed, his cutlass glinting as he nodded, his gruff voice joining in a low hum, "Aye, keep it goin'." Black Tom's hands stilled on the ropes, his massive frame swaying slightly as he listened, his deep rumble echoing the poem's rhythm, a silent vow to follow their captain.

Killian's gaze remained fixed on the horizon, but his hook twitched, the wheel creaking as his fingers tightened, the poem piercing the fog of his grief like a distant lighthouse.

Billy
Through realms we've roamed, from Tortuga's shore,
To Neverland's mists, seekin' her evermore.
Her sapphire ring calls, her storm's in our blood,
But our captain's fire might drown in the flood.

Billy's voice grew stronger, his lute strumming a soft, mournful chord to accompany the words, the notes blending with the sea's sigh and the wind's low howl.

The crew leaned closer, their tasks forgotten, drawn by the poem's rhythm, their faces reflecting the shared ache of Desylva's absence. "She's out there, ain't she?" Smee whispered, his fist clenching, his eyes bright with unshed

tears. “Our storm. Our lass.” One-Eyed Jack grunted, his blade resting on his knee, “She’d light up this sea if she could. Damn that imp.” Black Tom nodded, his dark gaze meeting Billy’s, a rare spark of warmth in his stoic expression, urging the lad to continue.

Billy
Oh, Desylva, our thunder, where’ve you gone?
Our captain’s breakin’, he can’t go on.
We’re scared he’ll burn out, his heart turned to stone,
Find us, dear tempest, bring our captain home.

The wind stirred, carrying Billy’s words across the deck, the Jolly Roger’s sails snapping as if answering

Billy’s voice wavered, his throat tight with emotion, but he pressed on. His gaze swept the crew. … Smee’s trembling hands, One-Eyed Jack’s clenched jaw, Black Tom’s steady nod. … then returned to the sea, its waves glinting like the sapphire in Desylva’s ring.

The poem grew, a vow to stand by their captain through the darkness.

Billy
Her gray eyes blaze where the tempests collide,
Her lightning’s our beacon, our hearts’ guide.
Through shadows and curses, we’ll follow his lead,
For Desylva’s storm is the fire we need.

Smee joined in, humming a beat with a fervor that shook his stout frame, “For our lass, lads!” One-Eyed Jack raised his cutlass, its blade catching the fading light as he growled, “For the captain’s storm!” Black Tom’s hands clapping the rhythm, the deck vibrating beneath their boots.

Billy
No realm’s too far, no curse too strong,
Her thunder’s echo pulls us along.
We’ll storm the gates where the Dark One hides,
With Hook at the helm, we’ll turn the tides.

Billy’s fingers danced on the lute, the chords rising with a defiant energy, the melody echoing their battles. The Jolly Roger rocked harder, its runes flaring to mend a splintered plank, as if the ship herself sang for Desylva, the enchanted heart pulsing in time with the poem.

Killian’s hand tightened on the wheel, the lanterns casting faint shadows across the deck, like her lightning dancing in the distance.

The crew’s voices wove together, in loyalty and longing, their unity a lifeline for Killian’s fracturing soul.

All
Oh, Desylva, our thunder, where’ve you gone?
Our captain’s breakin’, he can’t go on.
We’re scared he’ll burn out, his heart turned to stone,
Find us, dear tempest, bring our captain home.

Billy’s gaze returned to Killian, his eyes glistening with unshed tears, his lute falling silent. The last note drifted across the sea like a prayer.

The crew stood still, their breaths heavy in the quiet, their faces turned toward their captain, a silent plea for him to hold fast.

Killian’s hook gleamed in the dim light, his jaw clenched, but a flicker of something softer — hope, perhaps — crossed his hollowed eyes. “She’s out there, Billy,” he rasped, voice rough with pain but steady with resolve. “I’ll find her. By the stars, by the sea… I’ll bring her home.”

Smee nodded, his fist raised, “Aye, Cap’n. For her!” One-Eyed Jack slammed his cutlass into the deck, its blade quivering, “To hell with the imp!” Black Tom’s hand rested on the rail, his nod a quiet vow, while Billy strummed a final, hopeful chord, his voice soft, “For our storm, Cap’n.”

The Jolly Roger surged forward, sails catching a sudden gust that felt like her magic, guiding them toward the next realm. Killian’s heart — battered, frayed, but still beating — a compass locked on Desylva, her storm calling him through the dark.

That night, the crew slept lighter than they had in months. Billy’s poem lingered in the air like a promise. Smee whispered her name into the dark. Black Tom carved another wooden storm cloud and set it beside the first.

Killian stood alone at the bow, the wind tugging at his coat, the sea whispering beneath him. “Desylva,” he whispered into the night. “I’ll find you. I swear it.” The sea answered with a soft, mournful sigh.

And the Jolly Roger sailed on, guided by a captain whose hope flickered like a dying lantern… but had not yet gone out.

10th-12th Month

For months Killian pushed harder. He interrogated smugglers with renewed fire. He stormed taverns with his cutlass drawn. His voice grew hoarse from shouting Desylva’s name into the wind. He tore through realms with the ruthless precision of the pirate he once had been. His fury was a storm the crew could barely weather — sharp commands, cold interrogations, threats delivered with a voice that cut deeper than steel.

The crew’s spirits lifted at first, buoyed by the faint spark that had returned to their captain’s eyes. But sparks burn out, and vengeance is a fire that consumes its bearer first.

Week 2 Month 10

In the markets of Agrabah, Killian cornered a merchant who swore he’d seen a woman with sapphire lightning in her hands. Killian dragged him behind a tent, cutlass pressed to his throat.

The merchant trembled. “It wasn’t her, Hook — I swear it! Just a sorceress with a trick spell!”

Killian’s jaw clenched. His hook twitched. His breath shook. He left the man sobbing in the sand.

Week 3 Month 10

In the Enchanted Forest’s outer waters, a fisherman claimed he’d seen a ship struck by blue lightning. Killian forced the Jolly Roger into a storm to chase it — sails snapping, runes flaring, the crew clinging to the rails.

They found the ship. It was abandoned. Burned. Empty.
No Desylva. No magic. Only ash.

Killian stood on the deck, shoulders bowed, rain dripping from his coat like tears he refused to shed.

Week 4 Month 10

In the high cliffs of the Misty Coast, a wandering trader whispered of a hermit who lived alone in a cave carved by lightning. “Storm-touched,” the trader insisted. “Gray-eyed. Strange magic.”

Killian’s heart lurched.

He forced the Jolly Roger toward the jagged shoreline, the ship scraping against rocks as the crew lowered a skiff. Killian climbed the cliff path with his cutlass drawn, boots slipping on wet stone, breath sharp with desperate hope.

The cave glowed faintly — blue light pulsing like a heartbeat.

Killian stepped inside.

A man sat cross-legged near the back wall, surrounded by crystals that hummed with weak enchantment. His eyes were gray, but dull — not storm-bright. His magic flickered like dying embers, barely enough to spark the crystals around him.

He looked up, startled. “I don’t know any storm-lass,” he whispered. “I only mimic lightning to keep the wolves away.”

Killian’s cutlass lowered. His hook trembled. The blue glow dimmed, revealing nothing but a lonely man with borrowed magic.

Killian turned away, shoulders bowed, the cave’s false light collapsing into darkness behind him.

Every lead ended in ash. Every whisper dissolved into lies. Every storm felt empty — wrong — lacking the warmth of her magic.

Week 1 Month 11

One night, after chasing a rumor across three realms only to find it false, Killian stood at the bow, shoulders bowed, the wind tugging at his coat. His jaw clenched. His breath shook.

Week 2 Month 11

Another night, after cornering a smuggler who truly knew nothing, Killian’s rage faltered. His cutlass lowered. His hook trembled. The smuggler’s terrified denial echoed through the tavern, and Killian realized he was chasing shadows — ghosts — echoes of a storm that no longer answered.

He walked out into the night, shoulders bowed, the fire in his chest collapsing into a hollow ache.

The crew felt the change immediately. The Jolly Roger drifted through quiet waters, her runes dimming as her captain’s fury faded into numbness. Her timbers groaned under the weight of a man who had burned too hot for too long.

1 Year

The Jolly Roger’s timbers creaked with a low, aching groan, under the weight of a captain who had begun to believe the worst. She rested in a quiet lagoon, the water still as glass, the sky a dull gray bruise overhead.

The crew moved about the deck with sluggish purpose, their boots scuffing the planks, their faces drawn with worry.

Killian stood at the stern, staring into the foggy horizon as though waiting for it to speak. His hook tapped the rail in a slow, mechanical rhythm — the heartbeat of a man who had forgotten how to hope.

Smee approached him cautiously. “Cap’n… you should rest.”

Killian didn’t answer. His jaw clenched. His fingers tightened on the rail. His blue eyes stayed fixed on the horizon.

Smee swallowed hard. “Cap’n… please…” Killian’s voice cracked. “I can’t find her, Smee,” he bowed his head, “Why can’t I find her? …” Smee’s breath hitched. “Cap’n…”

Killian turned away, shoulders bowed, grief gnawing at him like a tide wearing down stone.

The crew moved quietly around him, their steps soft, their voices hushed. Billy plucked a single, mournful chord. Smee whispered a prayer. Black Tom placed a hand on the mast, eyes closed.

The Jolly Roger groaned — her timbers aching, her runes flickering weakly — as though she felt her captain's breaking.

A few nights later

The sun dipped behind the trees, casting long shadows across the lagoon, Killian walked to the quarterdeck starboard rail alone.

The crew watched from a distance, silent.

Killian closed his eyes and began to sing. Slow. Low. Broken.

Killian (voice rough, low)
I've chased every shadow, every lie, every storm…
But the sea keeps her secrets, and the dark keeps her warm.
I've hunted through hell for the lass I adore…
But the world keeps on takin', and I can't take much more…

His voice cracked.

Killian
Revenge was my compass, my fire, my spine…
But without her beside me, the world ain't mine.
I've torn through the realms, left blood in my wake…
But the storm stole my heart, and it won't let it break…

Smee's eyes filled with tears. Billy's hands trembled on his lute. Black Tom bowed his head. Killian's voice rose in anguish.

Killian
If revenge is my anchor, then let it drag me down…
If vengeance is all I have left, then let it drown.
But if she's still out there, if her storm still breathes…
Then I'll tear through the realms till the world finally sees…

His voice broke entirely. The last note drifted across the lagoon like a dying heartbeat. He sagged against the rail, breath shaking, grief pouring out of him in a way it hadn't since the night she was taken.

The crew stood frozen.

Night settled over the lagoon, heavy and still. Killian remained at the rail long after his song faded, staring into the fog as though waiting for it to answer. The crew watched from a distance, their faces drawn with worry, their breaths held tight. Billy plucked a single, trembling chord. Smee whispered her name into the dark. Black Tom rested a hand on the mast, eyes closed in silent prayer.

Next day

Dawn broke, pale and cold. Killian walked the deck like a man hollowed out. The crew exchanged quiet glances. They would keep sailing. Because he would not stop.

2nd Year

Killian sailed through storms without flinching. He walked through taverns without speaking. He interrogated informants with a voice so flat it frightened them more than his fury ever had. He no longer shouted, no longer threatened, no longer begged for answers. He simply asked. Most shook their heads. Some lied. A few pitied him. He walked away from all of them with the same hollow stare.

Smee tried to keep the ship running, but the Jolly Roger felt heavier now — slower — her enchanted heart dimming with every month Killian sailed without hope. Her timbers creaked like an old woman mourning her children. Her sails drooped. Her runes flickered like dying stars.

Killian barely noticed. He slept in fits, slumped over the helm. He ate only when Smee forced food into his hands. He spoke only when necessary. His eyes were empty. His voice was a rasp. His heart was a dead thing in his chest. He was ready to break. His hope was slipping.

Smee watched him fade with helpless grief. The Jolly Roger watched too — her runes dimming, her timbers groaning, her sails sagging — as though she mourned the captain she once carried into storms with pride.

4th Month (Stern) – (Year 2 Month 4)

Smee confronted him, voice trembling. “Cap’n… we can’t keep goin’ like this.”

Killian didn’t answer. He stared at the horizon, jaw clenched.

Smee’s breath hitched. “She wouldn’t want this.”
Killian’s voice cracked, “She’s gone.”
Smee’s face crumpled. He whispered, “No… no, Cap’n… don’t say that…”

Killian turned away. The conversation ended. The search did not.

A few days later (Quarterdeck)

He stood at the helm for hours, staring into the horizon, the wind tugging at his coat, the sea whispering beneath him. He called into the darkness, “If you’re out there, love, why can’t I find you?” The sea answered with silence. Killian closed his eyes, jaw trembling. “I’m losing myself,” he murmured. “I’m losing everything.”

He turned toward the companionway — exhausted, hollow, barely standing — and headed down.

3rd Year

Killian’s Cabin

On a storm-ravaged night, after three years of fruitless searching, Killian stumbled into his cabin, his boots heavy with mud, his black coat dripping seawater onto the planks, the fabric clinging to his broad shoulders like a shroud of despair. The air hung thick with the scent of salt, damp wood, and the bitter ache of his loneliness, the lantern’s flame swaying in its sconce, casting jittery shadows across the walls. He dropped his boots and dragged his hand through his tangled hair, his hook glinting faintly as he turned to shut the door.

Then he saw her. Desylva. Reclined seductively on the bed, wearing nothing but her leather cloak draped over her shoulders like dark wings. Her gray eyes glinted with a fire that could ignite the seas. Her dark hair spilling across the pillow in wild waves, framing her face. Her lips curving into a smile that stopped his heart mid-beat, a sultry promise in the curve of her mouth.

Gods, she’s a vision. My Des, my tempest. Every curve a memory I’ve bled for. Every glance a flame I’d burn in forever.

He froze, breath catching in his throat. His voice a ragged whisper torn between disbelief and longing. “Des… what? How? I…” he stammered. His blue eyes wide, searching her form. Was she real, or a cruel dream spun from his exhaustion, a phantom woven from the realms he’d chased her through?

She tilted her head. Her smile widened into a teasing, wicked grin. Her voice a low, velvet lilt that curled around him like smoke. “Are you just gonna stare, love, or join me? I’ve waited long enough to be back with you,” she purred, patting the bed beside her. The driftwood ring flashing on her finger as she beckoned him closer. Her gaze a dare, a hunger, a plea.

He crossed the room in a heartbeat. His hand trembled as he reached for her, pulling her into his arms with a desperation that shook him to his core. “Des, my tempest,” he rasped. His lips crashed against hers, hungry and fierce, tasting the salt on her skin, the warmth of her breath, as if to prove she was flesh and not a mirage.

She’s here. Warm, alive. Her lips a home I’ve been exiled from too long.

His fingers caressed her jaw, cupping her face, his thumb tracing her cheekbone. His hook pressed gently against her lower back, anchoring her to him. “I’ve missed you. Gods, lass, I’ve been so lost without you. A ship adrift, no star to guide me,” he murmured against her mouth. His hand tangled in her hair, fondling its silken strands.

Her tongue danced with his, a teasing flick that drew a groan from deep in his chest. Her storm magic flaring, a warm gust swirling through the cabin, rattling the lantern, the flame leaping as if mirroring their fire. She arched into him. Her fingers slide under his coat, peeling the sodden fabric from his shoulders with a slow, sensual glide. Her nails grazed his skin through the wet linen of his shirt, sending shivers down his spine. She tugged the shirt open, her hands caressing his chest, fondling the hard planes of muscle, her touch lingering on scars she’d once mapped with kisses.

“Oh, Killian, I’ve craved you. Every night. I’ve needed your hands on me. Your heat in me,” she purred, nipping his jaw, her voice a sultry whisper. She knelt before him, her fingers deftly unbuckling his belt, sliding it free with a playful tug. Her hands cupped his hips as she eased his pants down, revealing his straining arousal.

She’s fire itself. Her touch burning away years of ice. Her eyes promising a storm I’d drown in gladly.

She rose, stroking him with a teasing caress, her fingers warm and sure, “Touch me, love. I’m burnin’ for you. Aching to feel you inside me again.” She joined him on the bed, her thigh brushing his, igniting sparks where their bodies met. “Three years, pirate,” she teased, her lips hovering over his ear, her breath hot, “I’ve dreamed of you takin’ me. Wild. Rough. Like the sea we rule. Don’t make me wait another heartbeat.”

He growled low. His restraint snapped like a frayed rope. His hand caressed her side, cupping her hip, while the tip of his hook slipped beneath the cloak's clasp and unfastened it, letting it pool on the floor. “I need you, Des. More than breath. More than the sea itself,” he said, his voice thick with yearning, “I’ve been a shadow without you, love. Tearin’ through realms, half-mad, just to feel you again,” his fingers fondling the curve of her waist, tracing her spine.

Her body’s a map I’ve never forgotten. Every inch a treasure I’d kill for.

He reveled in the sight of her naked body. The curve of her breasts. The storm-marked skin he’d memorized in sweeter days. His hand cupped one breast, while his hook gently cupped the other. His fingers fondled the nipple in his hand until it hardened, drawing a soft moan, then moved to tease the nipple in his hook to a taut peak, drawing another moan.

She laughed, a husky sound that fueled his desire. She pulled him down atop her as she wrapped her legs around his hips. Her nails raked his back with a possessive hunger, her fingers caressing his shoulders, fondling his hair. “Take me, Killian. … Fill me. … I need to feel you inside of me, now,” she urged, her voice a seductive command, her body arching to meet his.

He entered her with a slow, deliberate thrust, his length filling her warmth. Her slick heat enveloping him, tight and pulsing. A perfect storm that tore a ragged groan from his throat. The bed’s enchanted oak frame creaking, runes glowing faintly to mend a splinter from his hook’s brace.

Gods, she’s everything. Tight, hot, mine. A sea I’d drown in. Her body like a tether, pulling me home.

Her storm magic surged, wind howling outside. The Jolly Roger rocking as waves crashed against the hull, echoing their rhythm.

“Aye, love. I’ll give you my everything,” he groaned, his lips caressing her throat, tasting her pulse, “I’ve missed this. Missed you. Every touch, every cry. It’s been a void without you.” His pace quickened, fierce and desperate. His

hand cupped her thigh, lifting her higher. His hook braced against the bed, runes healing a fresh gouge as he drove into her, chasing the connection he'd lost.

Riding her, I'm whole again. Her moans my compass. Her heat my true port, my anchor's home. Every thrust a vow to never lose her.

Her moans filled the cabin, a symphony of need and triumph. Her fingers threading through his hair, tugging hard as she rocked against him. Her voice a breathless taunt. "Harder, pirate, give me all of you. I've starved for this, for you," she gasped, her gray eyes locking with his, glinting with a playful fire as she added, "You're mine, Killian, and I'm yours. Claim me like the storm we are."

Her storm magic pulsed, a warm gust swirling around them. The air electric with her desire. Rain lashing the deck above as if her power wept for their reunion.

"I've been lost too, love," he panted, his forehead pressing to hers. His thrusts deep and unrelenting, "A wreck without you. Need you like the tide needs the moon. I'm whole again with you here." His hand fondled her breast, caressing her side,

She's my tide, my moon, my guiding star. Every move binding us. Her cries pulling me deeper.

Their bodies collided like a tempest meeting the sea. Wild and untamed. Her nails digging crescents into his shoulders. His lips bruising hers in a kiss that swallowed her cries. Their rhythm a dance of longing fulfilled, building to a crescendo that shook the ship's timbers.

She cried "Killian!" her body trembling beneath him, her legs tightening around his waist. Her warmth clenching around him as her magic flared. A burst of wind extinguishing the lantern, plunging them into darkness lit only by the sapphire's faint glow on her ring.

He followed her over the edge. A guttural groan tearing from his throat as he released himself deep within her. His heat flooding her, pulsing in waves that shook him to his core. His body shuddering as he buried himself in her embrace. The bed's runes glowing to mend a fresh scratch from his hook's grip.

She's my salvation. Her body taking all I am. This moment knitting my soul back together.

He collapsed beside her, breathless. Their limbs tangling as they spooned. Her back pressed to his chest, her warmth a balm to his battered soul. His hand caressing her hip, cupping her shoulder, fondling her hair.

"Never leave me again, Des. I can't bear it," he murmured, his voice soft now, raw with vulnerability. His hand tracing the ring on her finger, the driftwood rough against his skin, the sapphire cool. She turned her head, kissing his jaw with a tender, sated smile, "I'm yours, pirate, fates be damned," her voice a whisper as her warmth lulled him into a deep, dreamless sleep, the first peace he'd known in years, the storm outside calming with her touch.

Next day

Dawn seeped through the cabin's window, pale gray light washing over the bed. He stirred, his hand reaching for her. His fingers brushed cold, empty sheets where her warmth had lingered moments before. His eyes snapped open, the truth slamming into him like a rogue wave. She was gone, a dream spun from his aching soul.

Sitting up, his breath came in ragged gasps, a hand raking through his tangled hair as the lantern's dim glow cast flickering shadows. His hook grazed the bed's smooth enchanted oak, runes having mended any scratches.

"No way that was just a dream, love," he whispered, "It felt too real, too right, too much like you." His gaze drifted to the window, where the gray dawn stretched across the restless sea. "You're reachin' out," he murmured, "I feel it."

His eyes flicked to the desk, where her dagger rested, untouched since he'd placed it there the day after her abduction. The dream was a sign, a spark rekindling his resolve. She was out there, somewhere, fighting to return, and he'd continue to tear through every realm til he found her.

3 months Later (3 years 3 months)

Three months had passed since the storm-ravaged night of Killian's dream. Desylva's touch still lingered in his bones, her voice echoing in the cabin's silence, a haunting promise that fueled his relentless search. He knew the dream hadn't been real — not truly — but it felt like her, and that was enough to keep him moving.

The Jolly Roger rested in a quiet lagoon, sails furled tight. The sky was heavy with brooding clouds their edges tinged gray like ash smudged across a dying fire. The air hung damp and still, thick with the briny tang of the sea and the faint rot of mangrove roots curling into the water's edge. Her runes dim, her timbers groaning under the weight of a captain who had been hollowed out by grief.

Dock

The crew trudged back aboard after a night ashore, their boots scuffing from the gangplank to the salt-worn planks. Rum bottles clinked in their hands, their laughter muted by the weight of their captain's obsession.

Killian led them, his coat swaying with each heavy step, the hem sodden from wading through the shallows. His blue eyes were distant, fixed on some unseen horizon where she might still breathe.

The Jolly Roger loomed larger with every step, her dark hull reflected in the still waters of the lagoon.

Gangplank/Deck

Killian mounted the gangplank without breaking stride, his boots thudding against the weathered boards. He stepped onto the deck and drew a slow breath, the familiar scent of tar, salt, and damp timber washing over him. Around him, the ship lay quiet. Rigging creaked softly overhead. The runes carved into her rails glimmered faintly, their weak light reflecting across rain-dark planks. He paid it little heed. His thoughts remained fixed on the woman he had spent three years chasing across realms, seas, and impossible rumors. He turned toward the quarterdeck. Then he stopped.

Behind him, the crew continued filing aboard. Smee was halfway up the gangplank when he noticed their captain standing motionless. One by one, the others fell silent as they stepped onto the deck, their gazes following his toward the center of the ship.

Killian's breath snagged in his chest. His gaze locked on a note pinned to the mainmast with a dagger. The blade sank deep into the oak, the hilt quivering faintly in the morning breeze. His heart sank — a cold dread coiling in his gut like a serpent tightening its grip. A note like that never bore good tidings. Not in a pirate's life. Not after three years of chasing ghosts. He approached slowly, each step heavier than the last, the planks creaking beneath his boots as if groaning under the burden of what awaited him.

The crew's eyes followed, their movements stilled in tense silence, the air crackling with unspoken fear. Smee's breath hitched audibly, his face paling beneath his red hat as he clutched his bottle tighter, the glass trembling against his chest. One-Eyed Jack's hand rested on his cutlass, his eye narrowing, a low growl rumbling in his throat as if sensing a fight he couldn't yet see. Black Tom stood still as stone, his massive frame rigid, his harpoon dangling limply from his hand, his dark eyes flicking between Killian and the mainmast. Billy, freckles stark against his ashen skin, swallowed hard, his youthful bravado snuffed out, his fingers twitching toward the lute slung across his back as if a shanty might ward off the dread.

Killian reached the mast. His hook trembled — not from weakness, but from a fury and grief he couldn't yet name — as he unpinned the parchment, pulling the dagger free. The oak's runes glowed faintly to mend the gash left behind. He unfolded the note, the paper crinkling under his grip. His blue eyes scanned the scrawled words.

"She's dead, Captain.
Drained.
Her power. Her life.
Nothing left.
The tempest is gone, pirate.
Seek her no more."

Rumpelstiltskin's taunting script blurred as a wave of anguish crashed over him. Killian's knees buckled. His hook sank into the wooden rail, its runes shimmering to heal the splintered edge — a faint glow of defiance against his despair. Desylva. His storm. His love. Gone.

The world tilted beneath him. The lagoon's gentle lapping faded to a dull roar in his ears, drowned by the howl of his own breaking heart. His vision swam. The note slipped from his fingers, fluttering to the deck, landing in a puddle of seawater that bled the ink into mocking smears. "No… no, it can't be," he choked, voice raw and jagged.

He staggered to the helm, boots dragging as if wading through tar. His blue eyes stared into the horizon, the sea stretching endless before him, its vastness once a promise of adventure with her by his side, now an empty void swallowing his soul.

Rage surged beneath his grief — a wildfire scorching his veins. His hook slammed against the wheel. A snarl ripped from his lips. "That bastard… drained her? Took her from me?" he roared, His voice cracked into a sob. His chest heaved. He pounded the helm again, the wood's runes glowing to mend the dented edge. "I'll gut him. Tear his golden heart out and feed it to the sharks!"

But beneath the rage, doubt gnawed — sharp and insidious. Rumpelstiltskin had lied before. Spun webs of deceit to break stronger men. Killian's mind raced. "Is it a trick? Another of his games?" he muttered, his fingers tightening around the gem, his jaw clenching as he wrestled with the note's finality. "She's too fierce… could he really…?" His hook tapping the spokes — each clink a spark against the darkness.

The crew gathered behind him, their silence a shroud heavier than the clouds above, their faces etched with a mix of shock, sorrow, and unease. Smee's shoulders slumped as he whispered, "Cap'n… she can't be gone… not her," his voice trembling, a tear streaking his cheek as he shuffled closer, helpless to ease Killian's pain. One-Eyed Jack's growl softened into a gruff murmur, "That imp's a liar, always has been, but if it's true…" He trailed off, his hand flexing on his cutlass, his eye glinting with a flicker of vengeance, ready to follow Killian into any fight, yet shaken by the loss of the woman who'd tamed their storms.

Black Tom's harpoon clattered to the deck, the sound sharp in the stillness, his fists clenched, his gaze dropping to the note as if willing it to burn, his loyalty warring with the grief etching lines into his face. One-Eyed Jack continued, "She was our thunder, kept us alive through worse than this." Billy's hum died in his throat, his freckled hands fumbling with his lute, a broken chord spilling out before he muttered, "She'd sing with me… taught me that shanty… she can't…" His voice broke, his youthful frame trembling as he looked to Killian, wide-eyed, seeking the captain's strength to deny the news.

The crew's reactions swirled around Killian — a chorus of loss and disbelief. Their faith in Desylva's resilience mirrored his own. Their fear for his unraveling state was palpable.

Killian's coat hung heavy, sodden with the morning's mist, clinging to his frame like a second skin, its weight dragging at his shoulders as he stood at the helm. Her storm magic — those warm gusts that had shaken the cabin — her fierce laugh that had once echoed off these sails — her gray eyes that had anchored him through every hellish fight, all snuffed out, the note claimed, drained by Rumpelstiltskin's insatiable greed.

His mind replayed the dream. Her touch. Her voice. Her presence. The sapphire glinting in her ring. Too vivid to be a lie. Too real to dismiss. "She reached me," he whispered, voice a ragged thread. "Felt her in my bones. Could he fake that? Twist her storm into his web?" Doubt clawed deeper, warring with the grief that threatened to drown him. "She's too much to me… my heart… my fight… I can't give up… I won't give up." he rasped, his resolve hardening, raw but resolute.

The crew watched. Their silence shifting. A quiet rally behind their captain's flicker of hope.

"No," Killian growled, his voice cutting through the lagoon's hush. "She's out there. I'd feel it if she were gone. Damn him."

He tore his gaze from the horizon. The grief that had hollowed him out seemed to crack apart, revealing steel beneath. Blue eyes blazed with a fire that had lain dormant for far too long.

His voice swelled across the deck, commanding and fierce, carrying the old magic of a pirate king returned to life. “Raise the gangplank, lads. We’re sailin’ now. Jack, Tom, ready the guns. Billy, get that lute strummin’. We’re not mournin’ yet.”

The crew straightened as his voice rang across the ship, no longer the weary rasp of a broken man but the command of Captain Hook himself. They snapped to action at once, boots thundering across the deck as the long-familiar rhythm of preparation sprang back to life.

“Weigh anchor! Spread the sails!”

The Jolly Roger answered her captain's command with a low groan of timbers. Along her rails, the fading runes flared brighter, as though the ship herself had awakened from mourning, renewed purpose stirring through every plank, sail, and soul aboard.

The crew moved at once. Billy, quick and sure, scrambling to untie the guide ropes, while One-Eyed Jack and Black Tom hauled the gangplank back aboard, the wood sliding smoothly over the rail, its runes glowing to mend a scuff from the dock.

Smee, eager to please, coiled the ropes, his hands fumbling under Killian’s watchful gaze, the gangplank restowed in its brackets, lashed tight. One-Eyed Jack secured the cannons. Black Tom, muscles straining, led the crew at the capstan, its runes glowing faintly as they hauled the anchor, the chain clanking into the chain locker with a thud, the hull’s frame stirring. Billy, nimble as a sprite, scrambled up the rigging to the mainmast, joined by Smee, whose nervous hands unfurled the sails, their enchanted canvas snapping taut, runes shimmering to catch the wind.

The ship’s bell rang Smee’s eager chime, signaling readiness. As the anchor broke free, the crew shouted, “Anchor aweigh!” The sails unfurled, catching a mournful wind that sighed through the lagoon. Killian clutched the wheel, his hook embedded in its mended edge, its runes glowing faintly to heal the dented wood, his coat dripping mist onto the plank, his eyes on the crow’s nest, where Billy signaled clear waters.

Killian stared ahead, the sea stretching bleak and unyielding. “You’re a liar, imp, I’ll prove it,” he muttered, his jaw tight, his heart a compass fixed on a love he’d never surrender, a storm he’d chase through every realm until he held her again or died trying.

The Jolly Roger surged forward, her black hull slicing through the lagoon’s still waters, the crew moving with renewed purpose — grief-stricken, loyal, determined. The note lay forgotten on the deck, ink bleeding into the wood as the ship sailed on, her captain a shadow of the man he’d been with her, yet a pirate unbroken, driven by grief, rage, and the stubborn flicker of doubt that whispered she still lived.

5 months later (3 years 8 months)

The months after the note brought no clarity — only exhaustion. Killian’s brief spark of hope had burned hot, then guttered out like a candle in a storm.

The Jolly Roger sliced through a twilight sea, her sails taut under a sky streaked with purples and golds, the horizon ablaze with the dying embers of a sinking sun that cast molten light across the waves. The air thrummed with the briny tang of salt, laced with the faint musk of the ship’s enchanted timbers, their runes pulsing faintly with a blue glow, as if resonating with the crew’s restless resolve and the distant echo of Desylva’s storm-born magic. The sea lapped at the hull with a restless rhythm, each wave whispering memories of their battles, Skulls Archipelago’s jagged reefs, the Crimson Abyss’s blood-red depths, the Labyrinth of Echoes’ maddening whispers. The ship rocked gently, a living vessel bound to their quest, its creaking timbers a heartbeat urging them onward.

Killian stood at the helm, his black coat snapping in the rising wind, its leather patched from clashes in Tortuga’s alleys and Neverland’s mists. His hook gripped the wheel, its runes flaring to mend a fresh nick from his restless tapping, the metal glinting in the twilight like a blade honed for vengeance. His blue eyes, shadowed by sleepless nights yet burning with unyielding fire, scanned the waves, searching for a sign of Desylva, his tempest, stolen by Rumpelstiltskin’s cruel hand. Her memory seared his chest, her sultry laugh, her stormy gray eyes blazing, her touch a spark against the darkness a fire that fueled his resolve to storm any realm to reclaim her.

The crew moved with quiet purpose across the deck, their faces etched with loyalty and the weight of their shared loss, their movements a silent vow to find their tempest. Smee polished the ship's bell, his stout frame hunched, his nervous glances darting to Killian, his face creased with worry yet alight with hope as he muttered, "We'll find her, Cap'n, I swear it." One-Eyed Jack sharpened his cutlass at the rail, the blade's rasp a steady rhythm, his eye glinting with fierce support, his growl low, "That imp'll bleed for this." Black Tom coiled ropes with massive hands, his dark gaze meeting Killian's with a nod of iron resolve, his silence a pillar of strength. Billy, perched on a barrel near the mast, tuned his lute, its strings humming softly in the twilight, his freckled face brightening as he caught the captain's eye, his voice eager, "Give us a song, Cap'n!"

The deck creaked under their steps, the Jolly Roger alive with their mission, timbers vibrating as if Desylva's storm still lingered in her bones, urging them toward her.

The crew watched from a distance, silent. He gripped the wheel, his hook tapping a slow rhythm, and he began to sing a song born of vengeance. each beat a pulse of his unyielding heart.

His voice broke the dusk's hush, low and raw at first, then rising like a gale, a pirate's shanty bursting from his chest, fierce and defiant. The melody wove through the wind, a vow to the sea, to Desylva, to the crew rallying behind him. A promise to reclaim his love from Rumpelstiltskin's. He sang, his baritone carrying over the waves like a beacon.

Killian
My dear Rumpelstiltskin, your magic's a jest,
Your curses mean naught to my quest.
Your gold is just glitter, your lies I'll outrank,
I'll carve through your shadows, make you walk the plank!
Your tricks may deceive, your spells may confound,
But her storm's fierce heart will never be bound!

The crew paused, their eyes locking on their captain, drawn by the fire in his voice, the raw edge of his longing cutting through the twilight like a blade. Billy's lute joined in, its lively chords lifting the melody, the strings humming with a vibrant energy that urged the men to stomp their boots on the salt-worn planks, the rhythm pulsing like a storm's heartbeat shaking the deck beneath them. Smee straightened, his rag forgotten, his fist pumping the air as he bellowed, "Sing it, Cap'n, for her!" One-Eyed Jack's rasp turned to a roar, his cutlass flashing as he raised it high, catching the twilight's glow like a flame. Black Tom's hands clapped a steady beat, the ropes abandoned as he swayed with the ship, his deep voice rumbling in harmony. Billy's fingers danced on the lute. Killian's voice like wind and wave, a defiant anthem against the darkness.

Killian
Singin' yo ho, keep your tricks divine,
Yo ho, they're a waste of my time!
Her sapphire's gleam lights my design,
my storm, my storm, my storm she's gonna be mine!

All
His storm, his storm, his storm

Killian
She's gonna be mine!

Their voices swelled, a raucous, unified cry that echoed across the twilight sea, their boots pounding the deck in a thunderous rhythm, the sails snapping as if Desylva's magic stirred the air, a faint gust swirling around the mast. Killian's eyes blazed as he sang of her lightning, her gray eyes, her driftwood ring, each verse stoking his resolve.

She's out there, my tempest, her storm callin' me through the dark, he thought.

The crew's voices grew louder, their faith in their captain and their lost tempest fueling the anthem. Smee's grin widened, his nervous edge giving way to fervor as he clapped Billy's shoulder, "Keep that tune, lad!" One-Eyed Jack

spun his cutlass, its blade whistling through the air, while Black Tom's steady claps anchored the rhythm, his nod to Killian a silent oath.

Killian
I've battled through realms where the tempests collide,
Her lightning's my beacon, my heart's guide.
Each curse that I shatter, each realm that I rend,
I'll storm through the dark my search ne'er'll end!
My heart is burning, as fierce as her storm,
Won't rest 'til she's back in my arms, safe and warm!

Singin' yo ho, I'll shatter his shrine,
Yo ho, it's her heart I'll find!
That imp in my grasp, I'll tear out his spine,
My storm, my storm, my storm she's gonna be mine!

All
His storm, his storm, his storm

Killian
She's gonna be mine!

The Jolly Roger surged forward, hull cutting through the waves as if propelled by the shanty's fervor, the runes on the timbers flaring brighter to mend a splinter from Black Tom's enthusiastic stomp, the ship alive with their shared purpose.

Killian's voice grew fiercer, his hook tapping faster as he sang of their unbreakable bond, forged through krakens in the Crimson Abyss and wraiths in the Labyrinth of Echoes.

The crew leaned into the song, their movements a dance of defiance. Smee swayed, his fists raised like a boxer ready for a fight. One-Eyed Jack spun his cutlass in a flourish, its blade catching the last rays of the sun. Black Tom's claps echoed like thunder; and Billy's lute sang with wild, joyful energy, his fingers a blur. He grinned bright as he called, "For our storm, Cap'n!"

Killian
Once I sailed with her laughter to guide,
Where love lit the seas far and wide.
'Til that imp stole my heart from my side,
And filled me with rage I can't hide!

Some say, "Let her go," but I say, "Hell no!"
I'm set on a path that's my own,
Soon that Dark One will feel, he'll feel,
The wrath of this pirate's steel!

Singin' yo ho, I'll slaughter that swine,
Yo ho, it's fate's own design!
Our hearts will entwine by the starlight's shine,
My storm, my storm, my storm she's gonna be mine!
Oh, she's gonna be,
Oh, she's gonna be,
Oh, she's gonna be mine!
Oh, she's gonna be,
Oh, she's gonna be,
Oh, she's gonna be mine!

His voice lingered on the wind, a defiant echo rippling across the sea, answered by a distant rumble of thunder, as if Desylva's magic stirred in response, urging them onward.

Killian gripped the wheel tighter, his hook gleaming in the fading light, his jaw set with unyielding resolve. “She’s alive, lads,” he declared, his voice rough but steady, cutting through the wind’s howl like a blade through fog. “That imp’s note was a lie to break us. Desylva’s storm don’t bend, and neither do we. We're not giving up. We'll keep searching. We’ll bring our tempest home!”

The crew roared, fists raised high, Smee’s cheer the loudest, his voice cracking with fervor, “For the Cap’n and his lass!” Billy struck a triumphant chord on his lute, the notes ringing clear, while One-Eyed Jack slammed his cutlass into a barrel, its blade quivering as he bellowed, “To hell with the Dark One!” Black Tom nodded, his hand clapping Killian’s shoulder with a steading force, his dark eyes gleaming with a vow.

The Jolly Roger surged forward, sails catching a sudden gust that felt like her magic, guiding them toward the next realm. Killian’s song a compass for their quest, his heart fixed on the storm he’d claim again.

4th Year

The Shadowlands were a place no sane pirate entered willingly — a realm where fog clung to the skin like cold fingers and the air tasted of old magic and older graves. The Jolly Roger drifted through the murk, her runes flickering weakly, her timbers groaning under the strain of a captain who no longer feared death.

The attack came without warning.

Wraith-creatures rose from the fog like living shadows, their forms shifting, their blades forged from darkness itself. One-Eyed Jack met them at the rail, cutlass flashing, laughter booming, his eye blazing with the fire that had carried him through a hundred battles. “Come on then!” he roared, swinging hard. “Let’s dance!”

Killian fought beside him, hook gleaming, cutlass slicing through shadow. But the wraiths were relentless — silent, swift, cold. One slipped behind One-Eyed Jack. Killian saw it too late.

The shadow-blade pierced One-Eyed Jack’s ribs, sinking deep. He staggered, breath catching, laughter dying on his tongue. Killian lunged, cutting the wraith down with a furious strike, but the damage was done. He caught him as he collapsed, lowering him to the deck boards, fog curling around them like mourning cloth.

One-Eyed Jack’s fingers curled weakly into Killian’s coat. “Cap’n…” he rasped, voice thin. “Find her… don’t let the imp win…”

Killian’s jaw clenched, his blue eyes burning with grief and fury. His grief sharpened into something colder. Harder. More dangerous. One-Eyed Jack’s eye dimmed. His cutlass slipped from his fingers. His body went still.

He stayed there a moment — kneeling on the deck, One-Eyed Jack’s weight in his arms, fog swallowing the last warmth from his friend’s skin.

Smee sobbed behind him. Billy cried openly. Black Tom stood frozen, jaw tight, his massive hands trembling. The Jolly Roger’s runes flickered in mourning.

Killian rose slowly, every movement heavy, deliberate — a man carved from grief. He crossed the deck without speaking, stepped up onto the quarterdeck, and took the helm with hollow eyes. His hook tapped the wheel in a slow, mechanical rhythm — the heartbeat of a captain losing himself.

Dawn broke gray and cold.

The crew gathered at the rail, One-Eyed Jack’s body wrapped in canvas, his cutlass laid atop the shroud. Fog drifted low across the deck, muffling every sound. Killian stood apart from them, jaw clenched, eyes hollow, his hook resting against the rail like a silent vow.

Black Tom stepped forward — silent, solemn — and placed a small wooden marker at the bow. He had carved it through the night, each stroke of the knife a prayer he could not speak. Billy whispered a shanty under his breath. Smee wiped his eyes with shaking hands.

They slid One-Eyed Jack's body into the sea. Killian's breath hitched — barely — but it was enough for the crew to see the crack forming in their captain's soul.

4 Months later (4 years 4 months)

The sea betrayed them again.

A cursed reef rose beneath the waves without warning — jagged, black, pulsing with faint runes that whispered of old enchantments. The Jolly Roger struck hard, her runes flickering in pain.

Black Tom reacted instantly. He dove into the water, harpoon gripped in one massive hand, muscles straining as he fought the tangled anchor chain. The sea churned around him, dark and violent, as though trying to claim him.

"Tom!" Smee shouted from the rail. "Tom, get back here!"

Killian leaned over the side, eyes wide, hook gripping the rail so tightly the wood splintered — runes flaring as they mended beneath his hand.

Black Tom freed the chain — but the reef shifted. A jagged spike rose beneath him, slicing through the water like a blade. He vanished beneath the surface.

Killian dove after him. He searched until his lungs burned, until the sea blurred into darkness, until his arms trembled. He found only Black Tom's harpoon drifting in the current, its wooden shaft cracked, its tip stained with blood.

Smee screamed his name. Billy collapsed to his knees.

Killian surfaced with a roar that shook the deck — a sound torn from the deepest part of him, raw and furious, echoing across the cursed reef. He clenched the harpoon between his teeth, the wooden shaft jutting from his jaw like a grim banner and seized the rope ladder with his hand. His hook scraped against the hull as he climbed, metal ringing against wood with each desperate pull.

Water streamed from his coat as he hauled himself upward, boots slamming against the planks. He dragged himself over the rail with a violent, grief-stricken motion, the harpoon dropping from his teeth and clattering onto the deck.

He hit the boards hard, breath heaving, eyes wild. Then slammed his hook into the rail, splintering the wood — a blow carved from rage, loss, and the unbearable truth that Black Tom was gone. The runes glowed faintly to mend the damage.

Killian whispered, voice breaking, "I'm losing everyone."

The sea answered with silence.

Dawn broke bleak and colorless, the sea flat as hammered steel. The crew gathered at the rail in heavy silence, their boots scuffing the planks, their faces drawn with grief. No canvas-wrapped body lay before them — only Black Tom's harpoon, the weapon that had been an extension of his massive hands, the tool that had spoken for him when his voice could not.

Smee held the harpoon with trembling fingers. Billy stood beside him, eyes red, clutching the rail as though it might steady him. The remaining crew bowed their heads.

Killian stood apart from them, jaw clenched, eyes hollow, his hook resting against the rail like a vow carved from steel.

Smee swallowed hard. "He… he'd want this," he whispered, voice cracking.

“It’s the only way, lads.” Billy nodded, tears slipping down his freckled cheeks.

They wrapped the harpoon in canvas — not to mimic a body, but to honor the man who had wielded it. Smee tied the knots with shaking hands. Billy placed a small weight inside the folds, a smooth stone from the reef that had taken Tom.

Smee whispered, “Goodbye, Tom,” and slid the wrapped harpoon over the rail.

It sank slowly, the canvas billowing like a ghost beneath the surface before the weight pulled it down. The sea swallowed it without a ripple, as though claiming what had always belonged to it.

Billy sobbed. Smee wiped his eyes. The crew stood frozen.

Killian’s breath hitched — barely — but it was enough for the men to see the crack forming deeper in their captain’s soul. He turned from the rail and walked back to the helm, boots dragging across the planks, his hook tapped the wheel with a tender rhythm — the heartbeat of a man losing everyone he had left.

4 months later (4 years and 8 months)

The sea was calm — unnervingly calm — its surface smooth as glass. Then a fog rolled in thick and unnatural, swallowing the horizon until the sea looked like a sheet of dull silver. The Jolly Roger drifted through the stillness, her runes flickering weakly, her timbers groaning under the weight of grief that had begun to hollow her out.

Billy sat near the bow, lute cradled against his chest, plucking a soft, mournful tune. The melody drifted across the deck like a sigh — fragile, trembling, the last thread of hope left aboard the ship.

Killian stood at the helm, hollow-eyed, his hook gripping. Smee moved quietly across the deck, his boots barely whispering against the planks, his face drawn with worry.

Suddenly a monstrous wave rose. Silent. It surged up from beneath the bow like a living wall, swallowing Billy in a single, merciless sweep. His lute clattered against the deck, strings humming with the last note he’d played.

“Billy!” Smee screamed, lunging forward. Killian shouted his name “Billy!” voice cracking, but the fog swallowed the sound.

Billy’s hand broke the surface once — reaching, grasping — then vanished into the silver depths.

Killian ran to the rail, his hook gripping the wood so tightly it splintered — runes flaring as they mended beneath his hand. He leaned over the edge, searching the water with wild, desperate eyes. Nothing.

Smee scrambled for the fishing net — hands shaking, breath hitching — and cast it over the rail with a desperate, clumsy throw. The net sank, then tightened as the lute caught in its weave. Smee hauled it up with trembling arms, the instrument dripping, waterlogged, bruised by the sea. He laid it gently on the deck, as though Billy himself were inside it.

They searched for three days. Never found a trace. Smee wept openly. Killian did not.

Killian stood at the helm, jaw clenched, eyes hollow, hook resting against the wheel, The Jolly Roger’s runes dimmed to a faint, sickly glow.

On the morning of the fourth day, the sea lay flat and gray, as though exhausted by grief. The remaining crew gathered at the rail, their faces pale, their boots dragging across the planks.

Smee held Billy’s lute — the instrument that had carried their hope through storms, battles, and grief — its wood swollen from seawater, its strings slack, the whole thing bruised by the storm. He cradled it like a child, hands trembling. “Lad played for us even when he was scared,” Smee whispered, voice cracking. “He deserves… somethin’ proper.”

Killian stood apart, jaw tight, eyes hollow, his hook resting against the rail like a vow carved from steel. For a long moment he said nothing. Then his voice emerged rough as worn rope. “He never once failed his crew.” The words were simple, but every pirate aboard lowered their gaze.

They didn't wrap the lute in canvas. Billy had always carried it bare, letting the wood weather the sea air and the strings sing whenever the mood struck him. Wrapping it now felt wrong. Instead, Smee tied a single strip of cloth around the neck — Billy’s old bandana, faded blue, the one he wore on calmer days.

One pirate placed a small pouch of Billy’s spare strings inside the hollow of the lute — a quiet tribute only a musician would understand.

Smee swallowed hard and looped a thin line around the neck of the instrument. “Goodbye, lad,” he whispered. With trembling hands, he lowered the lute over the rail, slowly paying out the rope until the instrument touched the gray water below. It floated gently on the swells, the faded blue bandana fluttering from its neck.

Smee held it there for a moment, his knuckles white around the line, as though reluctant to let go. Then he drew his knife, sliced the rope clean, and watched the lute drift free.

The lute floated for a moment, bobbing softly, the blue bandana fluttering like a tiny flag.

No one spoke.

Then the sea pulled it under, slow and deliberate, as though taking care with something fragile.

Smee wiped his eyes. The crew stood frozen. The Jolly Roger’s runes dimmed further, flickering like dying stars.

Killian turned from the rail and walked back to the helm, boots dragging across the planks, his hook clenched around the helm

5th-6th Year

The remaining crew had begun to fracture.

Quarterdeck

Killian stood alone at the stern rail, a dark silhouette against the moonlit sea. He hadn't moved in hours. His hook tapped softly against the wood in an endless rhythm.

Tap.
Tap.
Tap.

The sound seemed unnaturally loud.

Main Deck

The three pirates exchanged uneasy glances.

Grizzly Dan rubbed the back of his neck. "You tell him."
Stumpy Bob stared at the deck. "Not a chance."
Red Mark let out a nervous laugh that died almost immediately. "It was your bloody idea."

None of them wanted to be there. They had seen what grief had done to him. Seen the hollow look in his eyes. Seen him go three days without sleep after a false lead. Seen him steer the ship straight through a storm that should have sunk them all because some drunken fisherman swore he'd spotted a woman matching her description.

Still, someone had to say it.

Quarter Deck

They approached Killian, their boots dragging across the deck as though afraid the ship herself might judge them. Even together, they nearly lost their nerve.

Grizzly Dan swallowed hard and stepped forward. "Cap'n..."
Killian didn't answer. His gaze remained fixed on the endless horizon.
Stumpy Bob shifted nervously, twisting his cap between his fingers. "Cap'n, we're beggin' you to listen."

Nothing. Only the slow tapping of steel against timber.
Tap.
Tap.
Tap.

Red Mark wet his lips and glanced at the others. "Maybe we should leave it..."
Grizzly Dan shook his head. "No. Someone has to say it."

The three men exchanged uneasy looks, suddenly wishing they were facing a sea witch, a navy broadside, or a hurricane instead of the man standing before them.

Finally, Grizzly Dan drew a shaky breath. "This can't go on, Cap'n. The crew's exhausted. We've chased rumors across half the realms. Men are gettin' hurt. Some aren't comin' back." His voice cracked. "We're not sayin' stop lookin' for her. Gods know we'd help if we could. But this..." He gestured helplessly toward the endless sea. "This is killin' us."

Stumpy Bob shifted his weight, suddenly looking far older than his years. "Cap'n... please." His eyes glistened. "We all loved her. Every man aboard did. We'd sail through hell itself for her. But she'd never want this. She'd never want to watch you tear yourself apart

Red Mark swallowed hard. He almost backed away. Almost. "We're scared for you, Cap'n." The words came out barely above a whisper. "Truth is..." He hesitated. "We're scared of you, too."

Something flickered across Killian's face. Not anger. Not surprise. Pain. For the briefest moment, the hollow mask slipped, and he looked impossibly tired. He remembered Red Mark laughing beside Billy during calmer voyages. Remembered Stumpy Bob teaching younger deckhands how to splice rope. Remembered Grizzly Dan standing beside him through storms most sane sailors would have fled. They weren't wrong. That was the worst part. They weren't wrong at all.

The hook stopped tapping.

All three men immediately wished they had said nothing.

Grizzly Dan's stomach dropped. Stumpy Bob wished he'd kept his mouth shut. Red Mark felt every hair on his arms stand on end.

Slowly, Killian turned. His blue eyes were cold. Hollow. Dangerous.

The men froze.

Killian didn't shout. He didn't threaten. He didn't raise his cutlass. He simply looked at them. A stare so sharp, so empty, so utterly broken that the men stepped back without meaning to. "Go," Killian said, voice flat as winter. "If you're afraid... go." The words tasted like ash. Some distant part of him wanted them to stay. Wanted someone to drag him back from the edge. But that part had been drowning for years.

Main Deck

The men exchanged terrified glances and walked away. None of them looked relieved.

Grizzly Dan paused at the bottom of the quarterdeck stairs and glanced back one last time

For a moment, Killian thought he might say something else. Might try one final time. Instead, the Grizzy Dan lowered his head and walked away.

The conversation spread through the ship before sunrise. No shouting. No mutiny. No angry demands. Just quiet voices and worried looks. Men speaking about their captain as though he were already becoming a ghost.

A few days later

They left at the next port. The morning was gray and drizzling.

Quarterdeck

Killian stood on the quarterdeck while the crew gathered near the gangplank below.

Main Deck

No one spoke for a long while.

Grizzly Dan finally hefted his sea chest onto one shoulder. Stumpy Bob carried a battered sack and the wooden tool box he never let out of his sight. Red Mark wore only a bedroll across his back.

Their belongings looked pitifully small for men who had spent years aboard the Jolly Roger.

Smee hovered nearby, wringing his hands. "Lads..." he whispered. "You don't have to do this."

Nobody answered. What could they say?

Gangplank

One by one, the pirates stepped onto the gangplank. The ship's timbers groaned softly beneath their feet. Almost mournfully.

Halfway down, Grizzly Dan stopped and looked back at the vessel that had been his home for years. His eyes found Killian. The captain never moved. Never spoke. Never called them back.

Stumpy Bob removed his cap and held it against his chest for a moment before continuing ashore.

Red Mark lingered longest. His hand rested on the railing. His eyes were bright with unshed tears.

Quarterdeck

For a heartbeat, Killian thought he might turn around. Might come back. Might choose the ship.

Gangplank

Instead, Red Mark looked up at the quarterdeck. His gaze met Killian's across the distance. For a moment, the years seemed to fall away, leaving only a sailor and the captain he had once followed without question.

Red Mark lifted two fingers to his brow in a final salute. the gesture carrying all the respect, loyalty, and sorrow he could no longer put into words.

Quarterdeck

Killian did not return it. He only watched. The silence between them said everything neither man could.

Gangplank

Red Mark's eyes glistened. Then he lowered his hand, turned away, and made his way down the gangplank.

Dock

A moment later, he stepped onto the dock and vanished into the crowd.

Quarterdeck

Killian never saw any of them again.

Next few months

Over the next few months more slipped away. Not all at once, but in quiet, fearful trickles. A man would step off the gangplank to fetch supplies and simply… not return. Another would mutter something about needing air, needing space, needing a night ashore, and vanish into the streets.

Every time they docked, fewer came back aboard. Empty hammocks began appearing below deck. Unclaimed mugs gathered dust near the galley. Familiar voices vanished from evening card games and work shanties.

The ship grew quieter with every passing month. Too quiet.

The Jolly Roger felt it. Her timbers groaned, her runes dimmed, her sails sagged as though mourning each loss.

Killian noticed every absence. He said nothing.

Yet some nights he found himself staring at an empty place at the supper table, trying to remember who had once sat there. Other nights he caught himself listening for Billy's lute. For laughter. For life. The sounds never came.

But when someone hesitated at the gangplank, glancing back with guilt in his eyes, Killian's stare turned icy, a cold, hollow look that froze the man where he stood. Sometimes Killian barked a single word, sharp as a blade. "Go." Other times he said nothing at all, just watched with a gaze so empty it made the men flinch.

By the end of the sixth year, only Smee remained. Trembling. Loyal. Terrified. Watching the captain he loved fade into a ghost.

7th-10th Year

With the crew gone, Killian changed. Not gradually. Not quietly. But like a storm snapping its tether.

For almost three years, Killian hunted with a fury that frightened even the sea. He tore through the realms, slammed informants against walls, pressed his hook beneath trembling chins, his questions short, clipped, deadly. He interrogated smugglers with cold precision, cutlass glinting beneath lantern-light, his hook tapping the table in a deliberate rhythm that made grown men tremble. He stormed taverns with his coat snapping behind him like a banner of war, boots pounding across floorboards, voice sharp enough to cut bone. And when threats were needed, his voice went flat — a quiet, merciless tone that frightened informants more than his fury ever had.

Captain Hook was back — but a colder version, stripped of swagger, stripped of laughter, stripped of mercy.

Smee watched him slip back into his old ways, his heart breaking a little more each day — and he followed, because there was no one left now. Only him. A loyal first mate and a captain burning himself alive.

The Jolly Roger carved through realms like a blade, her runes flaring with each violent turn of the helm.

Killian’s fury became a ritual. A rhythm. A way to keep breathing. But vengeance is a fire that cannot last.

One night, after chasing a rumor across two realms only to find it false, Killian cornered a trembling informant behind a tavern. Rain poured down the alley, turning mud to black sludge. The man swore he knew nothing — no storm-lass, no lightning, no gray-eyed woman.

Killian's fury surged. His cutlass rose. His hook trembled with the promise of violence. Then — it faltered. His arm dropped. His breath shook. His shoulders bowed as though the weight of the entire sea had finally crushed him. The rage that had carried him for years guttered out in an instant, leaving only a hollow ache behind — a void where fire used to live.

Smee watched from the alley mouth, his small frame silhouetted against the lantern-light. He didn't speak — couldn't — not when Killian looked like a man who had finally realized he was chasing ghosts.

Killian walked past him without a word, boots dragging through the mud, his coat heavy with rain and exhaustion. Smee followed, silent, his heart breaking for a captain who no longer had the strength to burn.

The Jolly Roger drifted through quiet waters that night, her runes dimming, her timbers groaning — as though she mourned the fire that had finally gone out in the man she had carried for almost 200 years.

Killian no longer hunted with fury. He hunted because he didn't know how to stop.

12th Year

Killian still interrogated. Still hunted shadows. Still asked the same questions. But the fire was gone.

The Jolly Roger drifted through quiet waters, her timbers groaning under the weight of a captain who no longer believed in storms or miracles. Her runes flickered like dying stars, her sails sagging as though exhausted by the endless search.

Killian stood alone at the stern, the wind tugging at his coat, the sea whispering beneath him. His blue eyes rimmed with red, shadowed by sleepless nights. He whispered into the dark, "I should have found you by now… Are you really dead? … My heart is saying no. But…" The words broke in his throat.

He leaned over the rail, bowing his head, shoulders trembling. The sea below was black and endless, a mirror of the void inside him. "I'm losing myself," he whispered. "I can't go on like this. … I…" He didn't finish the thought. He couldn't. He stayed there a long moment — a man carved from grief, a captain hollowed out by thirteen years of failure — until the wind shifted and the Jolly Roger groaned beneath him, urging him back to the helm.

Killian slowly raised his head and turned toward the wheel — exhausted, hollow, barely standing.

13th Year

The Jolly Roger lay moored in a forgotten inlet of the Enchanted Forest, her black hull half-swallowed by reeds and fog. She looked tired — timbers dulled, runes dimmed, sails hanging limp like mourning shrouds. Fifteen years had carved deep wounds into her enchanted heart, each one mirroring the man who captained her.

Quarterdeck

Killian stood by the rail, his black coat hanging heavy, patched and salt-stained, the leather cracked from storms he'd sailed through without purpose. His blue eyes were hollow, shadowed by the slow, suffocating belief that Desylva truly was gone. His hook tapped the rail in a restless rhythm — not impatience, but the echo of a grief that had worn him thin.

Most of the crew were dead or had left. Only Smee remained.

Smee approached cautiously, wringing his hands, his voice small in the fog-thick air. "Cap'n… maybe we oughta get supplies. The town's close. Someone might've heard somethin'. Even if it's small."

Killian didn't answer at first. He simply stared at the water — at the reflection of a man he barely recognized. Then he exhaled — a slow, weary breath — and nodded once.

Smee's shoulders sagged with relief. "I'll head in first, Cap'n. Make sure the place ain't trouble." He turned and headed down the stairs.

Main Deck

He crossed the deck, boots thudding against the planks, and descended the gangplank.

Dock

He moved down the dock toward the lantern-lit town, glancing back only once at the Roger as though afraid she might drift away without them.

Quarterdeck

Killian watched him go, the fog swallowing Smee's silhouette. For a moment, he stood utterly still — a man carved from grief and salt and years of loss.

Then he turned toward the companionway, moving with the heavy, deliberate steps of someone carrying more ghosts than hope.

He opened the hooded door and descended the narrow steps into the quiet belly of the ship.

Companionway corridor

He walked the familiar passage to his cabin. The air was still down here — heavy with salt, wood, and the weight of memories that refused to fade.

Killian's Cabin

He entered his cabin and crossed to the small chest tucked beneath his desk — the one he had not opened since the last of his crew had died. He lifted the lid.

Inside lay a treasure box he had prepared for Smee — a gesture he had never spoken aloud, a promise he had never been able to give. Killian picked it up, its weight solid and final in his hand.

He closed the chest, turned, and exited the cabin.

Companionway

He climbed back up the companionway steps and opened the door.

Quarterdeck

The deck greeted him with a soft groan, as though mourning the moment he would leave her alone again. He descended the stairs to the main deck

Main Deck/Gangplank

Killian crossed the deck slowly, the small box tucked under his arm and descended the gangplank.

Dock

He stepped onto the dock. His boots dragged across the planks as he headed toward the lantern-lit town, each step sounding like a farewell.

Tavern (outside)

The tavern's lanterns flickered in the dusk as he approached. Killian pushed open the door, the hinges groaning as warm light spilled across his worn coat. He stepped inside.

Tavern (inside) (A few hours later)

The tavern was nearly empty, its lanterns guttering low, its air thick with stale rum and the ghosts of men long gone. Killian sat across from Smee at a corner table, the wood scarred by knives and time. Rain pattered against the roof, a soft, steady rhythm that matched the heaviness in Killian's chest.

Smee's hands trembled around his mug. "Cap'n… we've lost so many," his voice cracked, "Jack… Tom… Billy…"

Killian didn't look up. His gaze stayed fixed on the small chest he'd placed between them — a chest filled with enough treasure — gold, jewels — to buy a quiet life far from danger. His hook rested atop it, the metal dull in the lantern light.

"I won't lose you too," Killian said, voice low, rough, barely human. "Not after all this."

Smee shook his head hard, tears already forming. "Cap'n… I ain't leavin'. The Roger's a big ship. You can't run her alone."

Killian finally met his eyes — and Smee flinched. There was nothing left of the man who'd laughed with Desylva under starlit skies. Only a ghost wearing his face.

Killian broke the gaze and turned away. "You're done, mate." He pushed the chest toward him. "That's an order." Smee shook his head hard, tears spilling. "Cap'n… please…"

Killian stood, shoulders bowed under the weight of fifteen years of grief. "Goodbye, Smee." He walked toward the door, moving as though the act of leaving cost him something he no longer had to give.

The lanternlight flickered across the empty tables, catching the gleam of the small chest still sitting before Smee like a cruel promise. Smee didn't move — didn't speak — just stared at the chest through a haze of tears. His shoulders shook. His breath hitched. His hands hovered over the chest as though touching it might break him.

Killian reached the tavern door, his hand resting on the worn wood. He looked back one last time, his blue eyes lingering on the man who had followed him through storms, realms, and grief — the last friend he had left. His jaw tightened. He stepped out into the night, the door closing behind him with a soft, final groan — a sound that felt like the world letting go.

The Jolly Roger (A short while later)

Fog clung to the inlet like a shroud as Killian boarded the ship alone. The gangplank creaked under his boots — then, without his touch, it lifted itself, rising with a soft groan as the runes along its edges glowed faintly and sealed it into place.

Killian froze mid-step. The Roger had never done that before. For a heartbeat he simply stared, breath caught, the fog curling around him like a held breath. A wild, impossible thought struck him so hard it staggered his chest.

Desylva? … Is that you?

His throat tightened. He laid his palm on the rail, fingers trembling. "If that's you, love… give me somethin' more." The runes pulsed once beneath his hand — faint, weary, but answering.

Killian's eyes burned. "Aye," he whispered, voice cracking. "I know. You're tryin'."

The ship seemed to sense his solitude. Her timbers shuddered. Her runes flickered weakly. Her sails rustled like mourning veils.

Quarterdeck

Killian took the helm, his hook gripping the wheel with a hollow determination. “Just us now, old girl,” he murmured to the fog. The runes along the helm pulsed once beneath his hook — a tired, sympathetic flicker — as though the ship herself understood the finality of his surrender.

The Jolly Roger slipped from the inlet, her black hull cutting through the mist like a blade. Only one man aboard — a broken captain who no longer believed he deserved a happy ending.

15th Year

Killian stopped searching. Stopped hoping. Stopped believing. He sailed the outer edges of the Enchanted Forest, skirting the coastline like a ghost haunting the realm he once fought to escape. His heart was a dead thing in his chest, his grief a constant ache.

One bleak morning, as the Jolly Roger drifted through a narrow channel, the wind died. The sea stilled. The air thickened. A distant rumble rolled across the horizon — unnatural, heavy, wrong.

Killian lifted his head.

A wall of violet-black magic surged across the land, devouring forests, mountains, villages, everything in its path. It rolled like a living storm, swallowing the world in a single, merciless sweep.

Killian’s breath caught. “What in the bloody hell…”

It raced toward the sea — toward him — its edge crackling with dark power. The Jolly Roger rocked violently as the magic approached, waves rising in frantic swells.

Killian braced at the helm, heart pounding.

It reached the shoreline — and stopped.

A perfect wall of swirling darkness froze a few miles from the bow of the ship, its edge hissing against the sea like acid meeting salt. The magic strained forward, clawing at the water, but it could not cross.

Killian stared, stunned. Magic he understood — storms, enchantments, wards, the strange rules that governed realms. But this… this was something else. Something vast. Something wrong. He gripped the wheel, knuckles whitening around the spokes.

“Is it a barrier?” he muttered to himself. “A ward? A realm-wall? … Wards don’t swallow mountains. Barriers don’t devour villages. Realm-walls don’t pulse like a living heart.”

The darkness churned, its surface rippling like a storm with no wind.

Killian’s jaw tightened. “Not natural,” he whispered. “Not a storm. Not hers.”

He watched the wall strain against the sea, clawing at the water as though furious it could not cross. The magic recoiled, then surged again, as if testing its limits. A boundary? A prison? A curse?

Killian swallowed hard, dread settling in his bones. “Whatever this is… it’s sealing the realm. … And I’m lucky to be on this side of it!”

Then the realization struck him like a blade. Smee had been in the Enchanted Forest the last time Killian saw him. He left him sitting in a tavern with a chest of treasure between them.

His breath hitched, a tremor running through him. “Gods… Smee…” he whispered, voice cracking. “If you’re still in there…”

The wall of magic pulsed once, twice, then solidified — a dome sealing the Enchanted Forest inside a prison of eternal night.

Killian stood alone on the deck, the Jolly Roger drifting in the quiet aftermath, the sea eerily calm. He wasn’t sure what it was, but he knew it was bad. Magic that swallowed realms was never cast for mercy. His hook tightened on the wheel. His blue eyes fixed on the dark dome swallowing the land he once called home.

“Desylva… Smee… all of them…” he whispered, voice breaking.

The wind rose, cold and sharp, carrying the faint scent of distant storms.

Killian closed his eyes. “I’m still here,” he murmured to the empty sea. “And I’ll find you. One day.”

The Jolly Roger drifted along the wall’s edge, a lone ship in a world frozen by dark magic — her captain a ghost chasing storms that no longer answered.

Desylva's Captivity

Rumpelstiltskin's Tower

The tower was a spiraling edifice of black stone and gilded decay, its halls lined with tapestries of twisted gold and windows cracked by storms, a twisted labyrinth of shifting stone walls that groaned like living things, their surfaces slick with damp and etched with arcane runes pulsing faintly in the gloom like trapped lightning. Traps sprang in the tower's shadows, gears clattering, blades hissing. Phantom voices echoed in stairwell, their words fog-like tendrils of despair.

Stairwell

The staircase spiraled upward like the spine of some ancient beast, each step carved from black stone worn smooth by centuries of use. The air grew colder the higher they climbed, the chill clinging to Desylva's skin like damp fingers. An inhibitor collar and cuffs—heavy, rune-etched bands of gold—bit against her wrists and throat with every movement, muting her storm magic until she felt hollow, muted, wrong.

Rumpelstiltskin ascended ahead of her, his gait light and almost jaunty, claws clicking faintly on the stone. His crocodile skin shimmered in the dim torchlight, each scale catching the glow like tarnished gold. "When you destroyed Myrra's tower and dove into the sea," he said conversationally, as though discussing the weather, "you should have died." Desylva's breath puffed in the cold air. "But I didn't."

"No," he agreed, glancing back with a sly smile. "You didn't. Fate stepped in and brought Storm and Steel together." Her voice dropped to a mutter. "Killian…"

"Yes," Rumpel purred, rolling the name like a sour candy on his tongue. "The pirate with the hero complex."

"I was lucky he came along," she said, chin lifting despite the cuffs. Rumpelstiltskin stopped mid-step, turning just enough for one golden eye to fix on her. "Lucky?" Desylva stiffened. "That portal opening when it did. It was—" He laughed, sharp and delighted, the sound bouncing off the stone walls like a taunt. "Luck had nothing to do with it, dearie." She raised an eyebrow. "You mean it was opened on purpose?"

"Yes," he replied.

Desylva's pulse quickened. "I remember thinking about maybe being saved. And I wasn't aware of the depth of my abilities yet. Could I have somehow willed the portal into existence?" Another laugh—higher, crueler. "You? No, dearie. Portals are beyond your abilities." Desylva raised and eyebrow, "Then who…"

Rumpel's voice dipped low, a whisper slithering through the stairwell. "Something older. Something ancient. Something sinister." A shiver crawled down her spine. "They scare you." His jaw tightened. "They cannot be allowed to rise. Why do you think Regina and I have tried so hard to destroy you?" Desylva blinked. "Me? I thought your vendetta was with Killian. Why…"

"The pirate was an added bonus," Rumpel said with a dismissive flick of his hand. "You both had to die."

Silence fell between them, heavy as the stone walls. Their footsteps echoed in the vast stairwell, the only sound in the suffocating quiet.

The staircase ended abruptly at a single door. Black wood, iron hinges, runes carved deep into its surface. Desylva frowned. "Why the long trek up the stairs? Why not just appear in the room directly?" Rumpelstiltskin's grin stretched wide, wicked. "And ruin the surprise?"

Desylva's eyebrow arched. Her thoughts tightened. *Surprise? What sort of surprise? A good one, or a bad one? Nothing good ever hid behind a door at the top of a long winding staircase inside a tower belonging to the Dark One.*

Rumpelstiltskin chuckled, placed a clawed hand on the latch, and swung the door open.

They stepped inside.

Room at top of Stairs

The chamber beyond was vast and circular, lit by flickering torches that cast long, trembling shadows across the black stone walls. Runes crawled along the floor like veins of lightning trapped beneath glass.

Desylva's breath caught. There, on a pedestal of obsidian, sat the Storm Crystal, pulsing faintly with a cold, familiar light. "The Storm Crystal," she whispered, shock rippling through her. "Yes," Rumpel replied, savoring her reaction. Desylva raised an eyebrow in confusion, "But… it was destroyed when…"

"No, dearie." He stepped past her, claws tapping lightly. "I was there. I took the Crystal as the tower fell." She turned sharply, eyes narrowing. "You? What were… Wait. You were the one Myrra was so afraid of. The one…"

"Myrra," he said with a disappointed sigh. "She was such a disappointment." Desylva's jaw tightened. "She had one job," Rumpel continued, voice sharpening. "One job."

"Which was?" Desylva asked, dread curling in her stomach. "To kill you." His eyes gleamed. "And she failed. … The day your parents died… she should have killed you. … But she didn't. The day she caught you trying to steal the Storm Crystal… she should have killed you. … But she didn't."

Desylva stared at the crystal. "I can't believe it's been with you all this time. I…" Her voice thinned, caught between disbelief and dawning dread.

Rumpelstiltskin's smirk curled sharp and knowing. "Oh, dearie," he purred, tilting his head with that familiar predatory amusement, "how do you think I always knew where you were?" Desylva shot him a look—half accusation, half weary resignation. He lifted his brows, delighted by her suspicion. "The crystal is linked to you," he said lightly, as though explaining something obvious. "It—" She cut him off, "That was all you needed? That seems unlikely."

Rumpel's grin widened, pleased she'd walked straight into the trap he'd set. "True," he said, savoring the word. "I also needed… this." He extended his hand, palm up. A soft ripple of gold magic shimmered through the air, and a jar materialized, glass, sealed, and filled with a pale alchemical liquid. Suspended inside it, unmistakable even after more than a century, floated a severed hand. Killian's hand.

Desylva's eyebrow arched. "Is that—" Rumpel's voice slid into a taunting lilt. "Yes. The pirate's hand." He turned the jar slightly, letting the light catch the curled fingers. "A trophy of sorts." Desylva leaned closer, curiosity threading through her tone. "You've kept it all these years." Rumpel gave her a look, one part condescension, one part wicked delight. "Of course I have. You never know when it could come in…" His lips twitched, savoring the pun before he delivered it. "…handy." With a puff of gold smoke, the jar vanished as though it had never existed.

Desylva looked from him to the Crystal, its glow deepening into a sinister pulse. "So, what now?" she asked quietly. "What…"

"Now," Rumpel said, stepping beside the pedestal, "I keep you here. … Away from him. … Stop this once and for all." His grin widened. "And…" he pointed at the Crystal, "Watch as the Crystal that awakened your storm magic… takes it back." He flicked his wrist.

Everything happened at once. The Storm Crystal pulsed violently, emitting a purplish-black glow that filled the chamber with creeping shadows.

Desylva's body jerked as dark magic seized her, teleporting her across the room. Chains of enchanted gold, infused with runes, erupted from the floor, coiling around her wrists, ankles, and waist, anchoring her to a stone slab beneath a hovering orb that pulsed hungrily. Her inhibitor collar flared, reacting to the Crystal's magic. Her cursed mark blazed blue, then flickered, then dimmed.

"No," she gasped. "No. You can't." Rumpelstiltskin smirked. "Oh yes I can, dearie."

Her power began to drain—slow at first, then with a steady, relentless pull. The orb above her glowed brighter, siphoning her stormlight drop by drop.

Rumpel rubbed his hands together, delighted. “Might as well make yourself comfortable—at least as comfortable as possible, considering you will never leave here.” He turned toward the door, chuckling.

“Oh,” he added lightly, “and the room is enchanted with Neverland magic. Keeps everything tidy. Keeps you young and healthy. Wouldn’t want my little storm burning out too quickly.” He stepped through the door. The door vanished.

The chamber fell silent.

Desylva’s breath trembled. Her mark flickered weakly, the Crystal’s dark pulse dominating the room. She lifted her chin, defiant even as her strength bled away. “Never say never,” she whispered. “He will find me. He always does.” Her voice softened, cracking around the edges. “Killian… I love you.” She dropped her head and closed her eyes, letting the words echo through the chamber like a vow carved into stone. “Find me.”

The silence after Rumpelstiltskin’s departure pressed in like a physical weight. Suffocating. Thick, heavy, pressing against her ears until she could hear nothing but her own heartbeat and the faint hum of the draining orb above her.

She lifted her chin and opened her eyes, blazing with defiance. She stared at the blank wall where the door had been, her breath shaking.

The chamber was cruelly designed, and without his voice, without the scrape of his claws on stone, it felt even larger—an echoing void that swallowed sound and hope alike. Its ceiling was lost somewhere in the shadows above. The walls were carved from black stone, slick with a faint sheen as though perpetually damp. Runes crawled across them like living scars, pulsing faintly with Neverland magic—ancient, timeless, indifferent. There were no windows. No cracks. No escape. The walls were seamless, the floor smooth, the ceiling unreachable. The room was a perfect trap—clinical, timeless, merciless. And clean. Too clean. No dust. No debris. No imperfections. The air smelled fainty of cold stone, old magic, and the metallic tang of the Storm Crystal’s dark pulse. The orb above her hummed steadily, a low, predatory vibration that resonated through her bones. Her chains rattled softly as she shifted, the enchanted gold warm against her skin, pulsing in time with the siphoning. Every pulse tugged at her mark, pulling threads of stormlight from her veins, unraveling her magic strand by strand.

To her left sat a small bucket—enchanted, self-emptying, self-cleaning. The contents vanished after each use, leaving the metal spotless. It was humiliating, but necessary, and the magic made it eerily efficient.

To her right stood a black marble pedestal carved with shimmering green Neverland runes enchanted with the realms timeless magic. Upon it sat an empty pitcher and a single dense, brick-like bar, that smelled faintly of grain.

Her mouth felt dry—too dry. The magic drain made her tongue thick, her throat tight. She swallowed hard. The pitcher filled itself. Clear, cold water surged upward from nothing, rising to the brim with a soft, shimmering sound.

Desylva blinked. “Water’s nice, but I could really use rum right now.”

The water darkened instantly, shifting to a warm amber. The scent of rum drifted upward, rich and sharp. She stared at it, stunned, then reached out with trembling fingers. The pitcher was cool in her hands. She lifted it and drank deeply, the rum burning warm down her throat, steadying her breath and the tremor in her chest. When she lowered the pitcher, she realized she was still thirsty. She tipped it back again, finishing the contents in a few long swallows. She set it back on the table. It refilled automatically, clear water this time, waiting. She left it, full beside her, quietly waiting, its surface shimmering faintly with enchantment.

Her stomach growled. She eyed the bar. “Guess that’s dinner.” She picked it up and took a bite. Her face twisted. “Tastes worse than Smee’s hardtack.” But she forced herself to finish it, chewing through the dense, chalky mass until it was gone. Another bar appeared instantly in its place. She stared at it, grimacing. “Looks like I’ll be eating these for a long time.” She didn’t touch the new one. Not yet.

Energy flowed from her mark into the orb, guided by the Crystal's dark pulse. The drain was constant, relentless, a slow bleed of her very essence. It felt like being hollowed out from the inside—like her storm was being unraveled thread by thread. Her chains hummed softly, reacting to the siphoning. The collar around her throat glowed faintly, suppressing any spark of magic that tried to rise.

Desylva exhaled slowly, forcing her breath to steady. She lifted her head, storm-gray eyes burning with quiet, unbroken fury. This was her prison. For how long remained to be seen. But it would not be her grave.

Hours passed. She wasn't sure how many. The chamber had no windows, no sun, no moon. Time was a shapeless thing here, stretching and folding in on itself.

Her legs trembled from standing so long, her arms aching from the weight of the chains. The orb's pull grew stronger as exhaustion set in, as though sensing weakness and feeding on it. Her mark flickered weakly, a dim blue pulse barely visible beneath her skin. She closed her eyes, trying to imagine the sea. The sound of waves. The creak of the Jolly Roger's timbers. Killian's heartbeat under her ear.

But the orb hummed louder, drowning out the memory.

Her breath hitched. Panic rose—sharp, sudden, suffocating. She forced herself to inhale slowly. Then again. Then again. Her storm responded instinctively, a faint spark rising in her chest. The collar flared. The cuffs tightened. The chains heated. The spark died instantly, snuffed out like a candle in a storm. Pain lanced through her wrists and throat, sharp and electric. She gasped, knees buckling, chains clinking as she sagged forward.

The orb pulsed greedily, siphoning the flare of magic she'd tried to summon. "No," she whispered, voice cracking. "No, no, no…" The inhibitor cuffs still held strong, her magic still trapped deep inside her like a wounded animal. She bit back a sob.

Desylva braced her feet, planting them firmly on the stone floor. She clenched her jaw, muscles trembling, and pulled against the chains with everything she had. The gold links didn't budge. She pulled harder, teeth gritted, breath shaking. Her shoulders burned, her wrists screamed, her arms shook violently. The chains remained unmoved.

She tried twisting her body, shifting her weight, pulling at different angles. She tried bracing her foot against the pedestal base. She tried leaning back, using her full weight. Nothing. The chains didn't even rattle. She screamed in frustration, the sound tearing from her throat, echoing off the stone walls.

The orb pulsed, reacting to her distress. Her mark flickered. Her knees buckled. She sagged forward, panting, sweat beading on her forehead. Her storm felt distant—like a memory instead of a power. Like something slipping through her fingers.

Her breath trembled. Her vision blurred. Her heart pounded painfully. She whispered, voice barely audible, "Killian…"

Day 3

The silence pressed in again, heavier now, suffocating. The orb's hum became a constant presence, like a predator breathing down her neck. Her thoughts spiraled.

What if he doesn't find me?
What if Rumpelstiltskin keeps me here forever?
What if my magic drains until nothing is left?
What if Killian thinks I'm dead?

Her chest tightened. Her breath hitched. Her eyes burned. She forced herself to look at the pitcher, full, waiting. At the bar, sitting there, dense and unappealing. At the bucket, silent, spotless. At the walls, smooth, seamless, unbreakable. This was her world now. This room. This orb. This drain.

She swallowed hard, lifting her chin. "No," she whispered. "I won't break. I won't." Her voice trembled, but the words held. She closed her eyes, imagining Killian's face. His blue eyes fierce and soft all at once, his hand warm on her

back, his hook resting gently at her hip. She breathed in the memory like air. “I’m still here,” she whispered. “I’m still me.”

The orb hummed, pulling at her magic. She glared up at it, storm-gray eyes burning. “You won’t win.” Her voice was quiet. But it was steady. And in the silence of the tower, that steadiness was a rebellion.

Montage

Every few days, a woman appeared—never the same twice. A door materialized in a random spot on the wall, she entered, washed Desylva in silence, then left. The door vanished behind her. The women never spoke, never met her eyes, never lingered. They were like ghosts—present only long enough to maintain the prison’s cruel routine.

The room remained spotless, the air fresh, the stone warm. Neverland magic pulsed faintly through the walls, preserving her youth, her strength, her body—so Rumpelstiltskin could drain her forever.

In the suffocating grip of captivity, Desylva had endured unrelenting torment within the tower. She’d been torn from Killian’s side the night before their wedding, the memory of his proposal searing her soul. He’d carved a ring from a driftwood spar of their first storm together, its center set with a polished sapphire from the dragon’s hoard they’d raided, its deep blue glinting like his eyes.

Kneeling before her, he’d said, “*Desylva, my tempest, through every realm, every fight, every storm, you’re my heart, fought beside me through hell itself. I’ve no riches but this ship, no title but pirate, yet I’d give you my soul. Marry me, love, and let’s defy the fates together*,” his voice rough with devotion as he slipped the ring onto her finger.

One wall gleamed like a living monolith, its surface forged from polished obsidian slabs rising unbroken from floor to ceiling. The stone held a cold, predatory sheen, as though the darkness within it breathed. Mirrors—cruel, remembering things no mortal should—were set into the wall with deliberate symmetry, each one a window into time’s merciless ledger.

At the center hung the largest mirror, a towering pane of black-silver glass that shimmered with the present, always and only Killian as he was in this moment.

To its left, five smaller mirrors formed a staggered pattern—three rows, the top and bottom holding two mirrors each, the middle row a single mirror centered beneath them. These were Desylva’s past, each one a chapter carved into reflection. The images were on an endlessness loop, each mirror resetting to the beginning when the chapter reached the end.

The first mirror of the top row - Birth to Tower
The second mirror of the top row - Year One with Killian
The lone mirror in the middle row, centered like a heartbeat - Year Two with Killian
The first mirror of the bottom row - Year Three with Killian
The second mirror of the bottom row - Year Four with Killian

To the right of the center mirror, six panes formed a perfect grid—three rows, two mirrors in each—each one chronicling Killian’s past in sweeping arcs of years. These were also on an endlessness loop, resetting to the beginning when the end was reached.

The first mirror on the top row - Ages 1–33
The second mirror on the top row - Ages 34–66
The first mirror on the middle row - Ages 67–100
The second mirror on the middle row - Ages 101–133
The first mirror on the bottom row - Ages 134–166
The second mirror on the bottom row - Ages 167–200

She fixed her gaze on the center mirror—on Killian as he was now.

His blue eyes, once bright as open sea, had hollowed into storm-lit caverns of despair. He moved through bustling ports like a man carved from grief, his black coat fraying at the edges, the fabric worn by sleepless nights and relentless searching. His voice had grown hoarse from shouting her name into crowds that never answered. His hook flashed like a warning as he interrogated smugglers, sailors, thieves—anyone who might have seen even a whisper of her. Desperation had etched his face gaunt, sharpening the lines beneath his dark, storm-tangled hair. He tore through realms with a fury that bordered on ruin, chasing shadows of her across seas and mists. Every step was a vow, every breath a promise now fracturing under the weight of her absence.

Desylva's chains clinked as she strained against them, her wrists raw from the enchanted gold that sapped her storm magic. Rumpelstiltskin's cackle slithered through the gloom, his figure materializing in a swirl of brimstone-scented shadow. "Still fighting, tempest?" he taunted, his gnarled fingers twitching as he spun a thread of gold at his wheel. "You're wasting your fire." She glared, her gray eyes blazing despite her weakening body. "I'll never stop, imp. You'll choke on your greed before I break," she spat, her voice hoarse but unyielding.

His golden eyes glinted with cruel amusement as he flicked a hand, and the inhibitor collar around her throat snapped open with a sharp metallic click. A second gesture dissolved the chains at her wrists and waist entirely, the gold links shed like serpents. Falling, evaporating into drifting motes of green light. Only the chains fixed to her ankle cuffs remained, their runes pulsing faintly. For a heartbeat, Desylva stood unbound, confusion flickering through her, *why was he being gentle?* She kept the thought buried; she would not risk seeming ungrateful.

Rumpelstiltskin's fingers twitched, and the runes along her ankle-chains flared with a sickly green pulse. The links shimmered, stretching longer with a grinding metallic groan, granting her just enough slack to drag herself toward the obsidian wall. "A gift, dearie," he sneered, his voice dripping with mockery. "These chains now grow. To an extent. … They'll never reach the door. You are mine, tempest."

Desylva's lips curled in defiance as she tested the new length, her bloodied fingers brushing the cold obsidian. Her storm magic flickered in a faint gust that rattled the stretched chains. "Every inch you give me," she hissed under her breath, "is an inch closer to Killian."

Rumpelstiltskin's laughter echoed, sharp and grating, as he vanished into the shadows, leaving her pressed against the wall, her resolve a storm he could not quell.

A few days later

Rumpelstiltskin weaved nearby, his smirk a jagged slash across his reptilian face. "No pirate saves you now, tempest," he sneered, his voice a dagger in her gut, his gnarled fingers spinning gold thread, the wheel's creak a relentless taunt. His cackle echoed as he leaned close, brimstone and old magic thick on his cloak, his words clawing at her spirit.

Then, with a flick of his hand, a folded blanket and a small pillow appeared at her feet—simple things, soft things, out of place in the merciless chamber. Desylva stared at them, a flicker of confusion tightening her chest. *Why this? Why now?* She didn't dare voice the question. She didn't dare let him think she wasn't grateful.

Rumpel's golden eyes gleamed with cruel amusement. "Can't have my little storm collapsing too soon," he purred. "Comfort keeps the body obedient. And an obedient body drains so much better." His smirk widened, savoring her defiance. "Sleep well, tempest," he crooned, gesturing lazily toward the blanket and pillow. "Dream of him. It makes the breaking so much sweeter." He vanished in a curl of shadow, leaving her alone with the thin blanket, the small pillow, and the cold truth that even kindness here was a weapon.

Her Veyran blood burned fierce, a flame stoked by Killian's proposal, his blue eyes softening with *Marry me, love*. She lifted her gaze to the driftwood ring, its sapphire catching the pitcher's glow, scratched but unbroken. Her voice, soft and cracked, pierced the tower's silence. "I love you, pirate," she whispered, a vow anchoring her, a thread of hope as the center mirror flickered with his search.

2 months into captivity

She turned captivity into a battlefield, memorizing Rumpelstiltskin's habits, his twitching fingers, his gloats, and taunted him back. "Spin your gold, coward. You can't break a pirate's betrothed," she spat, her gray eyes blazing.

The thin blanket he'd conjured lay folded with precise care beside her, its edges straight, its softness a small rebellion against the chamber's merciless stone. The pillow rested beneath her knees when she knelt, easing the ache the chains inflicted. She refused to let either item become a symbol of defeat. If Rumpel meant them as tools of obedience, she would turn them into tools of endurance.

At night—whatever "night" meant in a room without time—she lay curled on the blanket, her cheek pressed to the pillow, imagining Killian's heartbeat beneath her ear. The Neverland magic kept her body young, but the bedding kept her spirit from fraying. She clung to both with quiet discipline, refusing to let despair seep into their threads. Her resolve to return to Killian and defy the fates remained unyielding.

3 months into captivity

The tower groaned, the crystal and orb casting eerie shadows. Desylva pressed her hands to the obsidian, her breath fogging the mirror. The blanket lay draped around her shoulders, a thin barrier against the chamber's cold. The pillow sat at her feet, a small anchor she nudged with her toes, grounding herself in the rhythm of the words. The softness against her skin contrasted sharply with the chains at her ankles, the runes pulsing in time with her storm-flicker. Her voice rose, raw but steady, her desire to return to Killian in every note.

Desylva
Somewhere out there, 'neath the stormy skies,
My heart's a-calling through these cursed lies,
In chains I'm bound, this ring holds me,
Oh, Killian, love, I'll come back to thee.
Through seas and shadows, my will won't bend,
I'll fight this tower till I'm home, my friend.

And though this dark keep holds me tight,
I dream of you each endless night,
My storm will rise, my heart will soar,
To find you, love, on freedom's shore.

This driftwood band, with sapphire gleam,
Binds me to you, my waking dream,
Your words still echo, soft and true,
Through realms apart, I'll run to you.
No imp can break what storms have tied,
I'll sail to you, my pirate's pride.

And though this dark keep holds me tight,
I dream of you each endless night,
My storm will rise, my heart will soar,
To find you, love, on freedom's shore.

A faint breeze stirred, a spark against the gloom. The blanket fluttered around her shoulders, the runes along the walls pulsing as her song defied the tower's chains.

4 months into captivity

The tower's chains melted away, and Desylva stood in its shadowed chamber, the obsidian mirrors reflecting a sudden burst of light as the stone wall exploded inward, dust and runes scattering like ash. *A portal. But from where? Who could…*

Killian stormed through the breach, his black coat billowing, his hook gleaming with lethal intent, his blue eyes blazing with a fury that could sunder realms. "Des!" he roared, his voice a thunderclap, cutlass in hand as he slashed through shadow-thorns, their writhing forms dissolving under his blade.

Her storm magic surged, a jagged bolt of lightning arcing from her hands to meet him, illuminating his path as she ran toward him, her tattered shirt clinging to her, her gray eyes alight with desperate hope. The thin blanket she slept on lay forgotten behind her, rumpled where she had tossed it aside in her rush toward freedom.

He reached her in a heartbeat, his hand seizing her waist, pulling her against him as his lips crashed into hers, a fierce, hungry kiss that tasted of salt and defiance. “I’ve found you, lass,” he growled, his hook slicing through a chain that snaked toward her, its runes sparking as it fell. “No imp keeps you from me.” Her fingers clutched his coat, nails digging into leather as she kissed him back, her storm magic flaring, wind howling through the tower, shattering a mirror into glittering shards. “Killian, my pirate,” she gasped, her voice trembling with relief, “you came.”

The pillow she used for sleep rolled across the floor as the chamber shook, skittering toward the wall like a startled creature. She barely noticed—her focus was Killian, the portal, escape. He shielded her, his hook deflecting a shadow-vine, its thorns grazing his arm, blood welling but ignored as he pushed her behind him. “Stay close, love,” he barked, his hand caressing her arm briefly, fondling her strength before slashing another vine. Her magic pulsed, rain flooding the chamber, washing away the tower’s gloom as they neared the portal he’d torn open, its edges glowing with starlit promise.

The portal loomed, freedom within reach. Rumpelstiltskin’s cackle echoed, his form coalescing from shadow. Killian charged, his hook aimed for the imp’s heart, but Desylva’s lightning struck first, a blinding arc that sent Rumpelstiltskin reeling.

Her hand gripped Killian’s as he pulled her through the portal, their bodies tumbling onto the Jolly Roger’s deck, the sea air sharp and sweet, the ship rocking under a stormy sky as her magic calmed, waves lapping gently.

They collapsed together, his arms enveloping her, his hook resting on her hip as he kissed her fiercely, her fingers fondling his hair, caressing his scarred cheek. “You’re safe, Des,” he murmured, his voice thick with relief, “my tempest, my bride-to-be.” She laughed, tears mingling with rain on her face, “You’re my sea, Killian, always.” The crew cheered from the rigging, Smee’s voice ringing out, the lanterns glowing as the storm cleared, stars emerging to bless their reunion.

A sharp pain yanked her back, the tower’s chains biting her ankles as Desylva woke with a gasp. The blanket lay twisted under her legs, the pillow pressed against her cheek where she had collapsed into sleep. The center mirror mocking with Killian’s distant search. Her breath shuddered, tears streaking her face as she clutched her ring, its sapphire dim in the Crystal’s glow. “Just a dream,” she whispered, her voice breaking. But the fire in her gray eyes burned brighter, fueled by the vision of his rescue. “You’ll come, pirate, I know it,” she vowed, her storm magic flickering, a faint rumble in the sky, her hope unyielding as she pressed her bloodied hand to the obsidian, willing him to feel her fight.

6 months into captivity

After months of subtle effort, Desylva worked a chain link loose. Her fingers, raw and bleeding from scraping the iron, trembled as she twisted it free during Rumpelstiltskin’s absence, the spinning wheel’s silence a rare reprieve.

She used the blanket to muffle the sound of the shifting chain, pressing its thin fabric against the metal so no clink would betray her. The pillow lay nearby, its surface smudged with dust and dried blood from nights she’d collapsed onto it after Rumpel’s siphoning sessions. Both items had become part of her survival—quiet tools she wielded with care. She lunged for his dagger, its blade glinting amidst his tools, a promise of freedom to return to Killian, to stand at his side, to be his wife. Her heart raced with his proposal echoing, *Marry me, love, and let’s defy the fates together*.

Rumpelstiltskin materialized in a swirl of shadow, his cackle shattering the silence as he caught her wrist, his grip iron, nails drawing blood. “Feisty, aren’t we?” he mocked, his breath hot, his magic snapping the chains back. Shadow-thorns digging into her flesh until she gasped, pain searing her side.

Her knees buckled, the dagger clattering away. She fell onto the blanket, its softness doing nothing to cushion the agony. The pillow slid beneath her cheek as she slumped, her gray eyes burning with hate as he siphoned more magic until she slumped against the stone, chest heaving, trembling from the drain. “You’ll pay, imp,” she rasped, her spirit unbroken, her defiance a shield against exhaustion.

The center mirror flickered, showing Killian on the Jolly Roger, his hook slashing rigging in frustration, his shouts lost to the wind, the crew shrinking from his fury, his search frantic, his hope fraying like the coat from their engagement night. Rumpelstiltskin's laughter grated, but she clung to Killian's words, "*You're my heart*" refusing despair, her driftwood ring a vow she'd fight to fulfill.

Later

The tower quieted, Desylva dragged herself to the obsidian wall, her bloodied hands smearing the stone. She lifted her gaze to the driftwood ring, its sapphire glinting like a captured storm, a promise of the wife she'd be. Her voice rose, hoarse but resolute, pleading for Killian to hold fast.

Desylva
Somewhere out there, where the wild winds blow,
Don't lose your fire, let your spirit grow,
I'm fighting still, in this cursed keep,
Oh, Killian, hold, don't fall too deep.
This sapphire shines, through all my strife,
I'll break free soon, to be your wife!

And though these chains may bind my frame,
My heart still calls your pirate name,
Through dark and pain, my hope holds true,
Keep faith, my love, I'll come to you.

The seas may rage, the nights may fade,
But don't let hope be swept or swayed,
Your soul's my anchor, carved in wood,
Oh, search for me, as pirates should.
Each breath I take, I fight for us,
Hold on, my love, in me trust!

And though these chains may bind my frame,
My heart still calls your pirate name,
Through dark and pain, my hope holds true,
Keep faith, my love, I'll come to you.

The blanket pooled around her hips, the pillow supporting her trembling spine as she sang, her hope unbroken.

9 months into captivity

Desylva slumped against the stone slab. The thin blanket lay crumpled beneath her knees, its once-soft threads worn from months of use. The pillow rested near her hip, a small island of comfort in the merciless room.

A sudden crash shattered the silence, wood splintering, metal clanging, as the door suddenly appeared and burst inward, shards scattering across the floor. Killian stormed in, his black coat billowing, his hook gleaming with blood, his blue eyes blazing with a pirate's fury. "Des!" he roared, his voice a lifeline cutting through her despair.

He crossed the room in a heartbeat, his cutlass slashing the air, shadow-thorns recoiling from his blade's steel. "Hold on, love," he growled, wrenching at her chains. The runes snapped under his hook's brutal force. She reached for him, her fingers trembling, brushing his jaw as she whispered, "You came."

He grinned, fierce and wild, and kissed her hard, desperate relief in every breath. "Always, my tempest." He lifted her into his arms, her body pressed to his chest. His hook steadying her as slashed the orb, shattering it. The blanket slipped from her legs as he carried her, falling to the floor like shed skin. The pillow tumbled after it, rolling to a stop against the pedestal.

They fled through the tower's twisting halls, his boots pounding the stone, her arms around his neck, her storm magic stirring a faint gust that rattled the tapestries. Rumpelstiltskin's cackle echoed, shadow-vines lunging, but Killian slashed them down, his cutlass a blur, his voice a snarl, "You'll not touch her again, imp!"

They burst onto a balcony, the Jolly Roger waiting below, sails catching a stormy wind. He leapt, carrying her to the deck, the ship lurching as waves crashed, her magic flaring to life, summoning thunder to cover their escape.

On the deck, he set her down, his hand caressing her face, fondling her hair, his hook resting at her waist. "You're safe, Des," he murmured, kissing her forehead, her lips, her throat, each touch a vow. She clung to him, her fingers digging into his coat, her voice breaking, "I knew you'd find me."

They sank to the planks of the Jolly Roger's deck, the enchanted oak cool beneath them, its faint runes pulsing with a silvery glow as if echoing their urgency. Her body arched into his, her curves pressing against the hard lines of his chest, their kisses hungry and unrelenting, tasting of salt, rum, and the wild tang of a storm's edge. Her hands, tugged at his shirt, the fabric parting to reveal the scarred map of his battles etched across his skin. His hook, gleaming like a crescent moon, caught the frayed edge of her tattered shirt, unhooking it with a deft twist, the worn cotton tearing softly as it fell open, exposing the blue glow of her cursed mark pulsing beneath her sleeve, its rhythm matching the thunder rumbling in the distance.

They moved with a shared urgency, their breaths ragged, the air thick with the scent of brine and tar, the ship's timbers creaking as waves slapped the hull, stirred by Desylva's restless magic. Her fingers found the waistband of his trousers, the black leather worn smooth from countless voyages. She tugged at the laces, her movements swift but deliberate, her storm-gray eyes locking on his, a spark of mischief and desire in their depths. "Off with these, Captain," she murmured, her voice a husky growl, a faint gust swirling around them, rustling the sails above. His lips curved into a roguish grin, his blue eyes darkening as he helped her, his hand and hook working in tandem to loosen the laces, the leather sliding down his hips with a soft rustle, pooling at his boots on the deck, revealing the taut lines of his legs, muscles honed by years at sea. He kicked the trousers aside, the motion fluid, his gaze never leaving hers, the lantern light casting shadows across his form, a pirate laid bare but unyielding.

Her hands moved to her own pants, the coarse fabric patched, salt-stained and clinging to her curves. She unfastened the belt with a quick flick, the buckle clinking softly, her fingers trembling with anticipation as she pushed the fabric down, the pants catching briefly on her thighs before sliding to the planks, her cursed mark flaring brighter as a gust swept the deck, flickering the lanterns. The cool air kissed her skin, raising goosebumps as she stood before him, her body a blend of strength and vulnerability, the mark's blue glow illuminating the faint scars, each a testament to their shared battles. "Better," she whispered, her voice thick with desire, her lips brushing his jaw, tasting the salt of his skin as she pressed closer, the deck's runes pulsing beneath them, mending a splinter from their fervor.

He entered her fiercely, a deep, deliberate thrust that drew a moan from her lips, the sound echoing with the thunder rolling over the harbor, her magic surging as the ship rocked wildly, the enchanted oak groaning in rhythm with their bodies. Their movements were desperate, yet synchronized, her hips rising to meet his, her nails digging into his shoulders, leaving faint trails that faded under her touch. Her climax built like a storm's peak, her body tensing, her mark blazing a vivid blue, casting electric shadows across the deck, a cry tearing from her throat as waves of pleasure crashed through her, the ship lurching as rain lashed the hull. His release followed, a guttural groan shaking the sails above, his hand gripped her hip, his hook braced against the deck, leaving a faint scratch the runes swiftly healed.

The Jolly Roger swayed, timbers humming with their passion. The storm calming as their breaths slowed, their bodies entwined under the starry sky, a pirate and his tempest bound by love fiercer than any realm's curse. They collapsed together, her head on his chest, his fingers tracing her ring, the sapphire glinting like their shared storm. "We're free, love," he whispered, his breath warm against her ear.

Suddenly the deck's sway faltered, the sea's roar dimming, and a cold dread seized her.

Her eyes snapped open to the tower's gloom, the mirrors mocking her with Killian's distant search. "No!" she cried, her voice raw, tears falling as she gripped the ring, its sapphire a faint pulse. The dream's warmth faded, but his rescue burned in her heart, a fire to fuel her fight until he truly came.

2 years and 6 months into captivity

The tower's black stone walls shuddered, a thunderclap splitting the air as the chamber door appeared and exploded inward, splinters scattering across the rune-etched floor. Killian stormed through, his black coat billowing, his hook gleaming with lethal intent, his blue eyes blazing with a fury that could shatter realms. "Des" he roared, his voice a beacon cutting through the tower's gloom, his cutlass flashing as he slashed through shadow-thorns, their writhing forms dissolving under his steel. The sapphire on her driftwood ring flared like a captured star.

She strained against the enchanted gold links, her gray eyes locking with his, her heart racing as he fought toward her, his hook tearing through a phantom vine that lunged from the shadows. "Killian, you found me!" she cried, her voice raw with hope.

The center mirror flickered, reflecting his fierce grin, his boots pounding the stone as he closed the distance.

He reached her, his hand cupping her face, his thumb brushing her cheek as he kissed her fiercely, his lips hot and desperate, tasting of salt and defiance. "My tempest, I'd tear the stars down to get to you," he growled, his hook slicing through her chains, the runes sparking as they shattered.

She fell into his arms, her fingers clutching his coat, her body trembling with relief as the tower groaned, Rumpelstiltskin's laughter echoing distantly, a fading threat.

The sea's roar echoed through the chamber, the Jolly Roger waiting beyond, sails snapping in the wind.

They ran hand in hand through the collapsing halls, her storm magic flaring to blast open a stone door, lightning illuminating their path as gears clattered and traps sprang uselessly behind them. His arm encircled her waist, pulling her close as they leapt through a portal.

They landed on the Jolly Roger's deck, the ship rocking under a stormy sky, rain lashing the sails as the crew cheered, Smee's shout, Billy's lute strumming a triumphant note. "You're home, lass," Killian murmured, his lips brushing her forehead, his hook resting gently on her hip.

In the cabin, they collapsed onto the bed, as she kissed him deeply, her hands caressing his chest, his scars a map of their shared battles. "I knew you'd come," she whispered, her legs entwining with his, their bodies pressed close as the ship swayed, her magic calming the storm outside to a gentle rain, the waves lapping the hull in rhythm with their racing hearts. His hand traced her ring, his voice soft, "Always, Des, through every hell." The lantern's glow bathed them in warmth, the ship their haven, her freedom a vow sealed in his embrace.

Desylva jolted awake, the stone pressing against her back, the sapphire's glow dim in the Crystal's eerie light. Her breath hitched, a sob catching in her throat as Killian's fierce grin dissolved into the dark, the echo of his voice swallowed by the tower's silence. "Just a dream," she rasped, her fingers clutching the driftwood ring, its rough edge grounding her as tears fell. The center mirror showed him sailing on, his hope fraying, but her resolve burned brighter. She'd fight to make this dream real, to feel his arms again.

3 years into captivity

Time ground on, testing her Veyran resilience. Her fingers bled as she pried at the chains, nails breaking, their edges cutting her palms until crimson stained the stone, a map of her fight. Her lips, cracked and dry, whispered, "Not yet, pirate. I'm still here," a mantra to keep Killian's face alive as the mirrors taunted her with his fading hope, Rumpelstiltskin's laughter droned. His spinning wheel a metronome to her suffering, its creak mingling with dripping water. Her spirit remained a storm he couldn't tame, her gray eyes tracing the obsidian where Killian's gaunt figure sailed into tempests, his hook slashing shadows, rage twisting him into the Captain Hook she'd once helped him escape.

The center mirror showed Killian's eyes dark with fury, his voice a snarl as he sailed the Jolly Roger into perilous waters, his crew cowering as his hook gleamed with violence, the man who'd proposed slowly slipping away. Yet her heart clung to the driftwood ring, its sapphire a beacon of their love, a tempest caged but alive. She pressed her forehead to the obsidian, breath fogging it as she watched him, whispering his name, "*Killian. My love,"* into the night, a vow to save them both.

One storm-wracked evening, Desylva lifted her head, her voice rising through the pain, urging Killian to resist his rage.

Desylva
Somewhere out there, where the dark seas rage,
Don't let the Hook lock your heart in a cage,
I'm here, my love, through this endless fight,
Oh, Killian, stay, keep your soul in sight.
This ring still glows, it calls to you still,
Hold back the fury, I live by my will!

And though this tower steals my breath,
I'll defy the dark, I'll cheat death,
My love runs deep, my spirit's strong,
Stay true, my pirate, I'm not gone.

The shadows tempt, the anger grows,
But don't let rage be all you know,
Your sapphire heart, it beats with mine,
Oh, hear my song, our fates entwine.
The man I love, he's more than steel,
Fight for us, love, let your heart heal!

And though this tower steals my breath,
I'll defy the dark, I'll cheat death,
My love runs deep, my spirit's strong,
Stay true, my pirate, I'm not gone.

The mirrors trembled, visions blurring, piercing the darkness. She tried to summon a beacon to anchor him, but the inhibitor cuffs held firm, her magic still chained. Her will defied the tower's grip.

3 years and 6 months into captivity

The tower's black stone walls quaked as a gust shattered the obsidian window, shards glinting like dark stars in the storm-lashed night. Killian surged through on a magic carpet, its frayed edges stitched with glowing runes, wind snapping his black coat as he leaned forward, hook gleaming, blue eyes ablaze with relentless determination. "Des, I'm here, love!" he roared, his voice piercing the tower's oppressive drone, the carpet diving low as he hacked through shadow-thorns with his cutlass, their writhing forms bursting into sparks. Her storm magic flared, a hot gust rattling her enchanted chains, the sapphire on her driftwood ring flaring like a beacon, her gray eyes locking onto him, heart hammering with hope.

She strained against the glowing gold links. "Killian!" she cried, a laugh breaking through her desperation as he leapt from the carpet, boots slamming the stone. He ripped through her chains with his hook, runes sparking as they shattered, his hand yanking her free, crushing her against his chest. "No imp steals you from me, love," he growled, kissing her fiercely, lips hot and defiant, her fingers gripping his coat, the scent of salt and leather anchoring her. The tower shuddered, Rumpelstiltskin's distant cackle fading as the carpet hovered, poised for escape.

They scrambled aboard, her arms circling his waist, the carpet soaring through the broken window into the tempest, rain stinging their faces as her magic surged, lightning flashing over the sea below where the Jolly Roger waited, sails taut in the gale. They swooped to the deck, the crew exploding in cheers, Smee's whoop ringing, Billy striking a triumphant chord on his lute, One-Eyed Jack's rough laugh booming, Black Tom's nod warm and steady. "Back where ye belong, lass!" Smee hollered, rum tankard aloft, as Desylva clung to Killian, her grin fierce, the ship pitching under her storm's pulse, waves crashing in exultation.

Killian pulled her to their cabin, the door crashing shut, the lantern casting a savage glow over the enchanted desk. He kicked off his boots, then they tore their clothes away in a frenzy. "Gods, Des, how I've burned for you," he

rasped, his lips bruising hers, her nails clawing his back as they stumbled to the bed. The ship rocked, her magic lashing the wind outside, rain pounding the deck as their hunger consumed them.

He laid her on the linens, entering her with a deep, urgent thrust, her moan sharp and raw, her warmth seizing him like a riptide. “Killian, I love you,” she gasped, legs hooking his hips, urging him deeper, fingers knotting in his hair as his pace turned relentless, his hand gripping her thigh, his hook braced on the bed, its runes flaring to mend a splinter. “I love you too, lass,” he growled, lips grazing her throat, thrusts fierce and steady.

The sea roared, her thunder echoing their rhythm, her cursed mark blazing blue, bathing them in light. Their climax hit like a squall, her cry ringing as she shuddered, her magic bursting in a lightning flash, his groan tearing free as he spilled into her, collapsing atop her, bodies entwined.

They snuggled close, her head on his chest, his hand caressing her hip, his hook resting beside her, the storm outside softening to a drizzle, the sea lapping gently. “We can get married in the mornin’, lass,” he murmured, kissing her brow, voice rough with longing. “We’ve waited so long. I want to marry you as soon as possible, make you mine forever.” She smiled, her ring’s sapphire glinting, and whispered, “Aye, love, forever.”

Desylva’s eyes snapped open, the stone slab biting her spine, chains heavy. A sob tore free, Killian’s warmth, the carpet’s flight, his vow dissolving into gloom. “My pirate,” she rasped, clutching the ring, its edge a lifeline, her resolve steeling to fight for their love, her storm unbroken in the dark.

4 years into captivity

The tower’s oppressive gloom faded, replaced by the familiar creak of the Jolly Roger’s timbers as Desylva found herself on the deck, the night sky above a tapestry of stars mirrored by the azure sea below. The ship rocked gently in a secluded cove, its lanterns casting a warm, golden glow across the salt-worn planks, the air thick with wildflowers and the briny tang of freedom. She stood alone with Killian, his black coat swaying in the breeze, his blue eyes glinting with a roguish warmth that made her heart ache. His hand reached for hers, fingers intertwining with a tenderness that belied his pirate’s edge, while his hook rested lightly at her hip, cool and grounding against her tattered shirt.

They danced under the starlight, her bare feet gliding across the deck as he spun her, her driftwood ring catching the lantern light, its sapphire heart sparkling like a captured tempest. “My tempest,” he murmured, his voice a low, velvet rasp, pulling her close until her head rested against his chest, his heartbeat a steady drum beneath her ear. “I’ve missed this. Us. Here. The sea our own.” Her storm magic stirred, a soft breeze swirling around them, rustling his coat and teasing her dark hair as she laughed, the sound bright against the waves’ gentle lap. “You’re my sea, Killian,” she whispered, her gray eyes shining as she tilted her face to kiss him, their lips meeting in a slow, soulful dance, his tongue tracing hers with a reverence that warmed her to her core.

The deck faded to their cabin, the enchanted oak desk glowing faintly as they shed their clothes, her fingers tugging at his shirt, his hand caressing her side, fondling the curve of her waist. He lifted her onto the bed, his hook braced against the frame, its runes shimmering to mend a faint scratch as he entered her with a gentle thrust, her gasp mingling with his groan. “Des, you’re my everything,” he breathed, his lips caressing her throat, his pace tender yet deep, each movement a vow. Her storm magic flared, a warm gust rattling the window, rain tapping the deck above as waves rocked the ship in time with their rhythm, her moans soft and pleading, “Don’t let me go, love.”

Their bodies moved as one, her legs wrapping around his hips, her nails grazing his shoulders as she arched into him, the air electric with her magic, lightning flickering beyond the window. His hand cupped her face, thumb tracing her cheek, while his hook rested beside her, a silent promise of protection. “I’d sail through hell for you, lass,” he vowed, his thrusts quickening, coaxing her higher until their climax washed over them like a gentle tide, her cry of his name mingling with his ragged groan, the storm outside calming as her magic sighed, rain easing to a drizzle.

They lay entwined, her head on his chest, his fingers fondling her hair, the ship’s creaks a lullaby. “We’ll marry here, love, under these stars,” he whispered, kissing her forehead, his hook tracing idle patterns on her hip. She smiled, her ring glinting as she nestled closer, “Forever, pirate.” The cabin glowed with their warmth, the sea a serene mirror of their love, her storm magic a soft hum binding them together, the night eternal in their embrace.

A cold jolt shattered the dream, the stone slab biting into her back as Desylva's eyes snapped open, chains clinking in the gloom. Her breath hitched, a sob choking her throat as the sapphire on her ring caught the orb's sickly glow, the warmth of Killian's touch fading like mist. "No… just a dream," she rasped, her voice raw, her bloodied fingers clutching the ring, its driftwood rough against her skin. The center mirror flickered, showing Killian's gaunt figure on a stormy deck, and she whispered, "I'm still here, love," her heart aching but resolute, the dream a cruel reminder of the freedom she'd fight to reclaim.

6 years into captivity

The Jolly Roger rocked gently in a starlit cove, timbers creaking a soft lullaby as moonlight spilled across the deck, silvering the sails, and glinting off the azure sea. The air was thick with salt and the faint perfume of wildflowers drifting from a distant shore, a quiet sanctuary untouched by Rumpelstiltskin's malice.

Desylva stood by the helm, her bare feet cool against the planks, her tattered shirt and driftwood ring her only anchors to the life she'd lost. The ship felt alive, the enchanted oak humming with warmth, as if welcoming her home. Killian emerged from the shadows, his black coat swaying, his blue eyes soft with a love that stole her breath. "Des, my love," he murmured, his voice a low caress, crossing the deck in three strides to pull her into his arms. His hand cupped her face, thumb tracing her cheek, while his hook rested gently at her hip, the cool metal a familiar comfort. She leaned into him. Her hands sliding up his chest, fingers tangling in his shirt as she inhaled his scent, leather, rum, and the sea. "Killian," she whispered, her gray eyes searching his, "is this real?" He smiled, that roguish grin she'd missed, and kissed her deeply, his lips warm and hungry, tasting of salt and promises.

They swayed together, no music but the waves' soft lap and the wind's sigh, her storm magic stirring a gentle breeze that ruffled his hair. His lips trailed to her jaw, murmuring, "I've dreamed of you, love, every night you were gone." She laughed, a soft, broken sound, and tugged his coat off, her hands caressing his scarred shoulders, fondling the muscle beneath. "I need you, pirate," she purred, guiding him to the deck, their bodies sinking onto a pile of coiled ropes.

Her fingers unbuttoned his shirt, nails grazing his skin, while his hook deftly removed her pants. He entered her with a slow thrust, her moan mingling with the sea's whisper, her warmth enveloping him as the ship rocked in time with their rhythm. "You're the harbor my anchor needs," he groaned, his hand caressing her thigh, lifting her closer, his hook braced against the deck, its runes glowing faintly to mend a splinter. Her storm magic flared, a warm gust swirling around them, raindrops pattering softly above as her pleasure built. "Harder, love," she gasped, her nails digging into his back, her legs wrapping tighter. Their climax came like a gentle tide, her cry soft against his chest, his groan muffled in her hair, the rain easing as her magic calmed.

They lay tangled together, her head on his chest, his fingers fondling her hair, tracing the ring on her finger. "I'll find you, Des," he whispered, his voice fierce with vow. She smiled, kissing his jaw, "I'm waiting, pirate." The stars above blurred, the deck's warmth fading, and a cold jolt ripped through her.

Her eyes snapped open to the tower's black stone, the enchanted chains biting, the orb pulsing above. Her breath hitched, a sob choking her as she clutched the ring, its sapphire dim. "A dream," she rasped, tears streaking her face, the tower's gloom swallowing her hope, yet Killian's touch lingered, urging her to endure.

8 years into captivity

The Jolly Roger rocked gently in a starlit cove, timbers creaking a soft lullaby as moonlight spilled across the deck, silvering the sails. Desylva stood alone with Killian by the helm, the air warm with salt and the faint scent of wildflowers, her storm magic a quiet hum stirring the breeze. His black coat swayed as he stepped closer, his blue eyes glinting with that roguish charm she loved, his hook gleaming faintly as it rested on the wheel. "Missed me, love?" he murmured, his voice a velvet rumble, pulling her into his arms with a tenderness that melted the ache of her captivity.

Her fingers traced his jaw, feeling the familiar stubble, her gray eyes searching his as she pressed against him, her leather cloak falling open to reveal her shirt and pants, the driftwood ring on her finger catching the moonlight. "Every heartbeat, pirate," she whispered, her lips brushing his in a soft, searching kiss, his warmth grounding her as the ship swayed beneath them. His hand caressed her back, fingers splaying across her spine, while his hook

grazed her hip, a gentle anchor. The sea lapped the hull, waves kissing the wood in rhythm with their slow dance, her magic weaving a delicate drizzle that misted the air, mirroring her quiet longing.

They moved to the cabin, the door shutting softly behind them, the lantern casting a golden glow over the enchanted desk. She guided him to the bed, their clothes slipping away like shadows, her hands caressing his chest, lingering on scars she'd kissed a thousand times. "You're my sea, Killian," she murmured, straddling his lap, her thighs framing his hips as she lowered herself onto him, a soft gasp escaping her lips at the warmth of their connection. His rhythm was tender, his hand cupping her face, his hook resting beside her, the ship rocking gently as rain tapped the deck above, her magic a warm pulse matching their unhurried pace.

Their connection deepened, his lips tracing her throat, his voice a rough whisper, "My heart, my storm, you're all I need." Her moans filled the cabin, soft and sweet, her fingers threading through his hair as the sea swelled lightly, waves cresting in time with their dance. The air grew heavy, charged with their union, her body trembling as his thrusts coaxed her higher, the rain outside pulsing with her heartbeat, lightning flickering faintly beyond the window. She clung to him, her legs tightening around his hips, her cursed mark glowing softly, a blue tide between them, the ship swaying like a lover's sigh.

Their climax washed over them like a gentle wave, her cry muffled against his shoulder as she shuddered in his arms, his groan low and ragged as he pressed himself closer, their breaths mingling in the afterglow. The storm outside eased to a drizzle, the sea calming with her sated breath, her magic a contented hum. He kissed her temple, his hand caressing her cheek, his hook still beside her. "Never lettin' you go, Des," he murmured, his warmth lulling her into peace, the Jolly Roger their sanctuary, timbers humming with their love.

Desylva stirred, her eyes fluttering open to the cold, unyielding stone of Rumpelstiltskin's tower, the sapphire on her driftwood ring dull in the gloom. A ragged breath escaped her, the warmth of Killian's touch fading like mist, the bed's softness replaced by the slab's chill. "A dream," she whispered, her voice cracking, tears stinging her eyes as the mirrors taunted her with his distant search. She pressed her ringed hand to her chest, the memory of his kiss a spark in the dark, her resolve hardening to fight for the reality of their love.

10 years into captivity

The Jolly Roger gleamed under a twilight sky, its deck adorned with lanterns casting a golden glow, their flames dancing in the warm sea breeze. Desylva stood at the bow, her wedding dress, a creation of salvaged silk she'd stitched herself, shimmering like moonlight on water, its flowing train embroidered with delicate seaweed patterns, clinging softly to her curves. The driftwood ring on her finger, its sapphire heart glinting, caught the light as she turned to see Killian striding toward her, his black coat polished, his blue eyes alight with love and mischief. The crew lined the deck, Smee beaming, Billy strumming a soft lute melody, One-Eyed Jack grinning, and Black Tom nodding solemnly, their presence a family forged by storms.

Killian took her hands, his hand warm and steady, his hook resting gently against her wrist, its cool metal a familiar comfort. "My tempest, you're a vision," he murmured, his voice rough with devotion, leaning in to kiss her forehead as the sea lapped the hull, her storm magic stirring a gentle drizzle that misted the air, sparkling like diamonds in the lantern light. Smee, acting as officiant, cleared his throat, his round face flushed with pride. "Do ye, Killian Jones, take Desylva to be yer wedded wife, through seas and storms, till the fates part ye?" Killian's grin widened, his eyes never leaving hers. "Aye, I do, with all my heart." Desylva's voice was soft but sure, "And I take you, my pirate, forever." They exchanged vows, her magic humming, the ship rocking as if blessing their union, the crew cheering as they kissed, deep and fierce, sealing their bond under the stars.

The reception unfolded on the deck, a short, joyous affair under the lanterns' glow. Billy's lute led a lively jig, the crew stomping and clapping as Desylva and Killian danced, her silk dress swirling, his coat flaring as he spun her. Smee passed rum tankards, his laughter booming, while One-Eyed Jack told bawdy tales, his eye twinkling. Black Tom presented a carved driftwood ship, sails etched with their initials, a gift placed on a crate beside a fire pit's golden flames. Desylva leaned into Killian, her head on his chest, murmuring, "This is ours, love, forever." He kissed her hair, his hook on her hip, whispering, "Aye, lass, forever." The sea swayed with them, her magic a warm breeze, the night alive with laughter and song.

As the crew's cheers faded, Killian swept Desylva into his arms, her dress trailing like a comet's tail as he carried her to the companionway.

The cabin door shut softly behind them. The lantern casting a warm glow, the bed inviting with fresh linens. He set her down gently, her silk dress pooling around her as she pulled him close, her lips finding his in a hungry kiss. “My husband,” she purred, her fingers unbuttoning his shirt, caressing his scarred chest. His hand traced her waist, his hook deftly unlacing her dress, letting it slip to the floor, revealing her storm-marked skin. “My wife,” he growled, his voice thick with desire, lifting her onto the bed, their bodies entwining as the ship rocked, waves lapping in rhythm with their need.

Her hands roamed his back, nails grazing his skin as he entered her, a slow, deep thrust that drew a moan from her lips, her warmth enveloping him, tight and pulsing. The air grew heavy, charged with their passion, her storm magic flaring, a gust rattling the lantern, rain drumming the deck above as their rhythm quickened.

“Killian, love, you’re everything,” she gasped, her legs wrapping around his hips, her cursed mark glowing blue, illuminating their joined forms. His lips bruised her throat, his hand cupping her breast, his hook braced against the bed, its runes glowing to mend a faint scratch. The sea swelled, mirroring their urgency, her moans a symphony as they moved together, building to a crescendo, the ship their sanctuary, her magic a tempest of love.

Desylva’s eyes fluttered open mid-climax, the stone slab pressing against her back. A choked sob escaped her, the warmth of Killian’s touch, the silk of her wedding dress, the joy of their vows dissolving into the dark.

“No… my pirate,” she whispered, her voice raw, tears streaming as the mirrors taunted her with his distant, hollow-eyed search. Her fingers clutched the driftwood ring, its rough edge a lifeline, her heart aching with the dream’s vivid promise. She pressed her hand to her chest, vowing to fight for their wedding, her storm unbroken, her love a beacon in the tower’s gloom.

12 years into captivity

The pier jutted into a mist-shrouded bay, its weathered planks creaking under the weight of a pirate’s wedding, lit by flickering torches jammed into barrels, their flames spitting sparks into the briny night. At the altar, a rough-hewn crate draped with tattered sails, Killian stood, his black leather coat patched but gleaming, his hook polished to a wicked shine, his blue eyes burning with roguish devotion. Desylva descended the Roger’s gangplank, her arm looped through Billy’s, the young pirate’s freckled face proud as he steadied her. Her wedding dress, stitched from scavenged silk, shimmered like a siren’s lure, its seaweed-embroidered hem trailing like sea foam, clinging to her curves as the sea breeze teased it. The driftwood ring on her finger, its sapphire glinting like a stolen star, flashed with each step, her storm magic stirring a restless gust that rattled the pier’s ropes.

Billy, in a patched vest, gave her hand to Killian with a grin, then joined One-Eyed Jack, and Black Tom lounging against crates, their cutlasses glinting, tankards raised, eyes glinting with bawdy cheer. Killian’s hand clasped hers, his hook resting lightly on her wrist, a pirate’s vow in its cool touch. “My tempest, you’re a bloody marvel,” he growled, his voice thick with love, leaning to kiss her knuckles as the sea churned below, her magic sparking a drizzle that hissed on the torches. Smee, rum-soaked and jolly, slurred, “Do ye take this lass to plunder life’s seas together, till Davy Jones claims ye?” Killian’s smirk was fierce. “Aye, till hell itself spits us out.” Desylva’s gray eyes danced, her voice steady, “And I take you, my pirate, to raid the stars.” They kissed, hard and hungry, the crew whooping, swords clashing in salute, the pier shaking as her thunder rumbled, sealing their bond.

The reception was a raucous, pirate’s spree on the pier, short and wild. Billy’s lute wailed a salty jig, the crew stomping, their boots splintering planks as Desylva and Killian spun, her silk dress flaring, his coat snapping like a Jolly Roger flag. Smee sloshed rum, splashing half on his boots, roaring toasts to “the captain and his storm!” One-Eyed Jack belched a crude tale of cursed brides, his laugh a cannon’s boom, while Black Tom tossed a carved shark-tooth pendant to Desylva, its edges sharp as his nod. She leaned into Killian, her lips brushing his ear, “Our crew, our chaos, ours forever.” He nipped her jaw, hook on her hip, growling, “Aye, lass, you’re my treasure.” The sea roared approval, her magic whipping the wind, torches flaring as the night pulsed with their revelry.

As the crew’s bawdy cheers echoed, Killian scooped Desylva into his arms, her dress trailing like a battle flag as he carried her up the gangplank, the Jolly Roger’s deck swaying under a stormy sky.

He kicked open the cabin door, the oak slamming against enchanted timbers, the lantern casting a feral glow over the desk. He set her down, her fingers tearing at his coat as she bared his scarred chest, her silk dress unlaced by

his hook with a pirate's deftness, pooling like spilled rum on the floor. "Gods, you're mine, Des," he rasped, his lips claiming hers, rough and greedy, her hands clawing his back, nails marking him as hers.

Killian lifted her, laying her on the bed's linens, her hair fanning across the pillow, her storm-marked skin glowing under the lantern's flicker. He entered her with a deep, deliberate thrust, her moan sharp and raw, her warmth gripping him like a riptide, the ship rocking as waves slammed the hull, her magic unleashing a gale outside. "Killian," she gasped, her legs hooking his hips, urging him deeper. Her fingers tangling in his hair as his pace grew fierce, his hand gripping her thigh, his hook braced on the bunk, its runes sparking to mend a gouge. The air crackled, rain pounding the deck, her thunder echoing their rhythm, her cursed mark flaring blue, a beacon of their fire.

Their climax hit like a squall, another cry, "Killian!" ringing as she arched beneath him, her body shuddering, her magic bursting in a lightning flash that shook the cabin. He followed, a guttural groan ripping free as he spilled into her, his heat pulsing, collapsing atop her, their breaths ragged. They snuggled close, her head on his chest, his hand caressing her hip, his hook resting beside her, the sea calming to a gentle lap, her drizzle soft outside. "My wife," he murmured, kissing her brow, her ring's sapphire glinting as she smiled, sated and safe.

Desylva's eyes fluttered open, the stone slab biting her spine, chains heavy. A sob tore free, the bed's warmth, Killian's arms, their wedding's joy dissolving into gloom. "Killian," she whispered, clutching the ring, its edge grounding her, her resolve steeling to fight for their vows, her storm unyielding in the dark.

Rumpelstiltskin's Attic

15 years into captivity: Dark Curse cast

One bleak day, as the shadows of her confinement pressed heavier against her spirit, Desylva felt a subtle yet seismic shift ripple through her. A stillness where once there had been life, a hollowing silence that seeped into her bones, accompanied by a deep, groaning shudder in the foundation beneath her feet. The tower's damp stone walls, once her unyielding captors, warped and stretched with a low, mournful creak, their slick surfaces giving way to polished wood and peeling plaster, the air shifting to the dry, dusty scent of an attic as the space morphed into a sprawling mansion around her.

Her cell was now a slanted-ceilinged room high in the eaves, its single barred window casting a sliver of muted gray light across warped floorboards, her chains clinking faintly as she steadied herself, her breath hitching in confusion.

The obsidian pedestal remained, but the space behind it warped and expanded, bending and reforming until a small kitchenette materialized—an old fridge humming faintly, a chipped porcelain sink, and two narrow cupboards hanging crookedly on the wall. The pitcher still sat on the pedestal, but now it belonged to a room that pretended to be domestic.

The bucket vanished. In its place stood a narrow alcove partitioned by a half-wall. A standing shower with rust-flecked fixtures and a small toilet bolted to the floor. Water dripped from the showerhead in slow, rhythmic taps, the sound echoing through the attic like a heartbeat. Running water. Real plumbing. A mockery of comfort.

The thin blanket she had slept on for years did not vanish—it changed. Its Neverland weave dulled, threads thickening into a worn, faded quilt patterned with muted florals, frayed at the edges as though it had lain in this attic for decades. The small pillow transformed with it, its once-soft fabric becoming a flattened, dusty cushion that sagged against the floorboards. Both items looked as though they belonged here, relics of a forgotten home rather than gifts from a monster. Desylva stared at them, unsettled by the way her meager comforts had been folded into this new prison.

The mirrors went dark, no images taunting her. Across the room, a clock's hands stood frozen at 8:15, its silent face staring in the dim stillness.

She didn't know what had happened, only felt the world lurch, the foundation trembling as if unmoored, a disorienting twist that left her gray eyes narrowing, searching the unfamiliar shadows. Her cursed mark, etched beneath the frayed sleeve of her tattered tunic, ceased its familiar pulse. Its faint blue glow, once a living ember of her storm-born power, faded to a dull, lifeless scar against her skin, the intricate lines now stark and inert. Her storm magic,

the tempest that had roared through her veins, slipped away like a tide retreating from a jagged shore, leaving her chest tight and breathless. Her fingers trembling as they brushed the mark's cold outline, her essence drained, she stood in the dim attic.

The attic's beams groaned faintly as they settled into their new form, a prison dressed in the trappings of a forgotten home. Her fingers brushed the mark instinctively, tracing its cold, inert edges as a shiver ran through her. The unfamiliar creak of floorboards underfoot replaced the tower's hollow echo.

The attic door swung open with a sharp creak, its groan reverberating through the mansion's unyielding walls, heralding Rumpelstiltskin's arrival. He stepped into the flickering torchlight of the cramped attic, transformed. No longer the crocodile-skinned imp with glittering scales and a manic grin, but a man clad in a tailored suit of deep charcoal, its crisp lines accentuating a smooth yet sharp face, his dark eyes gleaming with a colder, more human malice that cut deeper than his former theatrics. His right leg bore a subtle limp, the uneven rhythm of his steps marked by the faint tap of a polished mahogany cane, its silver handle etched with intricate runes that caught the torchlight's glow. Each click of the cane against the worn floorboards echoed like a metronome of menace, the scent of polished leather and the musty tang of old books clinging to him as he approached, his presence a shadow of triumph draped in civility. His hair was neatly combed, streaked with silver that hinted at his centuries of scheming, and his thin lips curled into a calculated smile, sharp as a blade's edge. The attic's oppressive weight seemed to bow to him, its dusty beams and cobwebbed corners shrinking under the intensity of his gaze.

"Regina's done it, tempest," he said, his voice low and measured, stripped of its usual cackle, each word deliberate as it sliced through the silence. "She cast the Dark Curse. Time's frozen now. And magic's dead in this wretched little world until the Savior comes and breaks it." His gaze flicked to the quilt and pillow, a faint curl of amusement touching his lips. "Even your little comforts adapt. This world likes its illusions tidy. … The Neverland enchantments will still hold as Neverland magic exists outside normal magic. You will feel time pass and you will remember all of what was. But you are nothing but a shadow here."

He tapped the fridge with his cane. "This is stocked with food. Cupboards too. I'll bring more every so often." His eyes gleamed with cold amusement. "But I'm very busy, dearie. So don't eat everything right away." He paused, his lips curling into a thin, mocking smile as he tilted his head, his hair catching the torchlight. "And your pirate lover? … Not here, dearie. … Killian's still there, back in that other realm, stranded in Neverland. And, since the curse seals the borders, there's no travel between the realms now. … He can't get here, and you can't get back there. … You'll never see him again."

Desylva's breath hitched, her gray eyes narrowing as she straightened against the attic's slanted wall, the chains clinking faintly against the wood. "You don't know that," she rasped, fierce despite the tremor in her voice. "He'll find a way. We'll be together again."

Rumpelstiltskin's laugh was a sharp, bitter sound, devoid of mirth, echoing off the plaster walls and rattling the dust motes in the dim light like shattering glass. "He thinks you're dead, dearie, has for years. He's not even looking," he sneered, his polished facade cracking briefly to reveal the imp's old venom.

Her jaw tightened, her fists clenched, nails digging into her palms as she shot back, her tone fierce despite the tremor beneath it, "True love always wins. We…" He cut her off, with a dismissive flick of his cane, his smirk widening as he stepped closer, his shadow looming over her in the cramped space, his voice dripping with disdain as he leaned in, the scent of leather sharp in her nostrils. "True love is for fairy tales, and we're no longer bound by those rules in this cursed place."

With that, he turned, the suit's fabric rustling faintly, his exit marked by the attic door clanging shut behind him, its heavy thud reverberating through the mansion's oppressive silence, swallowed by the creaking beams and peeling walls that seemed to close in tighter around her, the air thick with the weight of his words.

Desylva stood motionless, her gray eyes tracing the attic's warped contours, the splintered beams overhead streaked with cobwebs, the faded wallpaper curling at the edges, its floral pattern a mocking echo of a life she'd never know. Her mind racing beneath her weakened frame, thoughts tumbling like storm clouds she could no longer summon. His words sank into her like stones into deep, dark water, each one a weight against her smoldering hope. Her powers gone, stripped by the curse's suffocating grip, her storm silenced, and Killian, her anchor through fifteen years of chaos, lost to a realm she couldn't reach, stranded in Neverland's timeless snare.

The cold of the attic seeped into her bones, the air heavy with dust and despair, yet her Veyran spirit flickered still, an ember buried deep within her chest, waiting for a wind she could no longer call to stir it back to flame. She sank to the floor, her back pressing against the rough, splintered wall. The quilt pooled beneath her, its faded pattern a quiet reminder of the life she'd lost. Her fingers brushing the scar where her mark once glowed, then drifting to the ring on her finger, carved by Killian, its sapphire centerpiece, dulled but resolute, a testament to the proposal that bound them. Her breath steadied as she whispered to the shadows, "He'll find me… he has to," though a sliver of doubt crept in, sharp and unbidden, piercing the edges of her resolve.

Was Rumpelstiltskin lying? His taunts were barbed with truth, but his deceit was a blade he wielded too well. Fifteen years was a long time to hold onto hope, even for a pirate as stubborn as Killian. Had he truly given her up for dead? She clung to the memory of his blue eyes, fierce and unyielding, the way he'd torn through realms to find her, his hook flashing as he carved paths through danger, his hand pulling her close under a tempest's roar. She remembered the salt on his lips as he kissed her, rain lashing their skin, the way he'd made love to her, wild and alive amidst their world's chaos, his breath hot against her neck, his voice a growl of defiance as they defied every fate that sought to tear them apart. Her fingers brushed the ring again, tracing the sapphire's edges, its silence a wound beside her lifeless mark, but her lips pressed into a thin line. True love had defied curses and storms in their past; could it falter now, even under this dark spell? She sank deeper against the wall, the cold wood seeping through her tattered shirt, her breath misting in the chill as she wondered, her hope a fragile thread stretched taut against the attic's gloom.

The attic's stillness pressed against her, the faint creak of settling beams and the distant howl of wind beyond the barred window her only companions, yet her gaze hardened, fixed on that sliver of gray sky peeking through the iron bars high above. The muted light was a faint promise, a whisper of the world beyond this cursed prison, and she gripped that ember, the vivid recollection of their bond, the driftwood ring a talisman of their vowed defiance, refusing to let the mansion's silence snuff it out. Her mind replayed his proposal, the twilight's last flicker painting his face in gold as he knelt, the sapphire glinting as he offered his soul, their shared storms a testament to a love that had burned through hell itself.

Fifteen years apart couldn't erase that. Her resolve became a quiet thunder rumbling in the stillness, a vow to hold on, to believe he'd come, that they'd burn bright again if she could endure this hollow, cursed world. She tilted her head back, the chains clinking softly as she stared at the window, the gray sky a distant echo of the storms they'd conquered, her whisper fierce against the attic's gloom, "You're out there, pirate. I know you are."

43 years into captivity: Trapped in the curse (28 years)

The days blurred into weeks, the weeks stretched into months, and the months piled into an endless grind of twenty-eight years within the mansion's unchanging gloom, its attic prison a warped cocoon of peeling plaster and splintered beams, the air thick with the musty reek of dust, the stale decay of trapped time, and the faint metallic tang of her blood-streaked chains, which clinked faintly against the warped floorboards with every restless twitch of her frail frame.

Time melted into a haze, marked only by the rasp of her breath clawing against the dry stillness, the slow ache of the curse's unyielding grip and the creak of the slanted ceiling sagging under decades' weight, a mournful groan echoing the life Regina's Dark Curse had ripped from her grasp.

The barred window, high and unyielding, framed a sliver of gray sky that never shifted, neither sun nor storm, just an eternal, muted veil, its dim light seeping through cobwebs to cast faint, shifting shadows across the walls, a bitter taunt of the tempests she could no longer wield, her storm-mark a lifeless scar etched into her sunken chest.

Yet within this suffocating mire, her cunning sharpened with each dragging hour, her gray eyes glinting with a predator's patience as she watched and waited, her mind a blade forged by captivity, mapping the attic's every flaw, the scuff of Rumpelstiltskin's polished shoes on his rare, mocking visits, the groan of the floorboards under his slight frame, the way the shadows leaped when torchlight flickered through the cracked door, a fleeting warmth she couldn't touch.

Now, in the oppressive silence, she rose to defy it, her voice and body stirring with a shanty to keep her ember alive. She pushed herself up from the wall, her back scraping the splintered planks, the rough wood biting into her

shoulders as she steadied herself. Her chains rattled softly. Her gray gaze fixed on the window's gray sliver, her lips parting to sing the shanty she was planning to sing to him on their wedding day. A day that had been stolen from her.

Her voice was a whisper of defiance as she acted out her love's memory in the attic's gloom.

Desylva
I met a rogue with a grin so wide,

She swayed faintly, her arms lifting as if to mimic his swagger, picturing Killian's roguish grin on the Roger's deck.

Desylva
A pirate bold on the ocean's tide,

She stepped forward, a trembling shuffle across the dusty floor, her bare feet scuffing the boards as if pacing a ship's helm, the sea's rhythm a ghost in her veins.

Desylva
With a hook of steel and a heart so free,

Her hand mimed his hook, fingers curling stiffly, the driftwood ring on her left glinting as she pressed it to her chest.

Desylva
He stole my soul, oh, Killian be!

She clutched her tattered shirt, pulling it tight as if embracing him, her gray eyes misting with the memory of his fierce kiss, salt and rain on her lips.

Desylva
Through squall and gale, he's the Cap'n true,

She thrust her arms out, as if battling a storm, his steady hand in her mind.

Desylva
His blue eyes spark like the mornin' dew,

Her gaze lifted to the window, her fingers brushing her face as if tracing his eyes, the sapphire in her ring catching the dim light, a dull spark of hope.

Desylva
So raise a cheer for the man I see,

She lifted her hands high, mimicking a toast, the attic's stillness swallowing the sound of an absent crew.

Desylva
The wildest pirate, my Killian be!

She tried to spin, a frail pirouette, and stumbled against the wall, her breath ragged but defiant.

Desylva
Killian! Killian!

She pounded a fist against the planks, the thud echoing as she sang his name, a rallying cry trapped in her throat.

Desylva
He's the storm in my heart, oh, Killian!

Her hand pressed to her storm-mark, now lifeless, gray eyes blazing with the tempest she once wielded beside him.

Desylva
With a swagger so grand, he's the sea's own man,

She straightened, swaying her hips faintly, mimicking his strut, her chains a cruel anchor to her captivity.

Desylva
Killian! My Killian!

She clapped her hands, the sound muffled, her voice a plea into the void, her love unbowed.

Desylva
Through the thunder's roar, he's the one I adore,

She tilted her head back, as if hearing thunder, her fingers flexing as if summoning lost lightning, the attic mocking her silence.

Desylva
Killian! Oh, Killian!

Her voice rose, a strained shout, her arms shaking as she reached for the window, Killian's name her lifeline.

Desylva
With his hook held high, he's my pirate sky,

She thrust her right arm up, fingers curled like his hook, her left hand clutching the ring.

Desylva
Killian! My Killian!

She sank to her knees, her voice softening, a tender vow as she pressed the ring to her lips, her breath hitching. The attic's heavy air pressed in, the scent of aged wood and lost power choking the space, but she pushed on, shivering, her Veyran spirit flared as she sang, her movements a shadowed dance of memory.

Desylva
He sails the Roger with a devil's flair,

She staggered to her feet, swaying as if on a rolling deck, arms mimicking his command.

Desylva
A cutlass flash in the salty air,

Her hand slashed the air, trembling as if wielding a blade, the ghost of steel in her grip.

Desylva
One-Eyed Jack steers with a gruff old growl,

She growled low, her voice rasping like One-Eyed Jack's, head tilting as if barking an order, a faint smile cracking her lips.

Desylva
While Black Tom's 'poon makes the foes howl!

She thrust her arm forward, mimicking a spear's jab, her body lurching with the effort, Black Tom's silent strength in her mind.

Desylva
The winds I whip when his lips I meet,

She leaned forward, lips pursed as if kissing Killian, hands rising as if conjuring wind, storm-mark aching with loss.

Desylva
A tempest dance where our hearts do beat,

She swayed side to side, a weak waltz, her feet shuffling dust, her chest tight with their remembered rhythm. Her arms lifted again, as if calling to the stars, her voice a whisper of longing.

Desylva
So sing his name ‘neath the starry sea,
The rogue I love, oh, Killian be!

She hugged herself, rocking slightly, her gray eyes glistening, Killian’s love a warmth against the cold.

Desylva
Killian! Killian!

She stomped a foot, the board creaking, her voice a defiant pulse in the stillness, summoning him in song.

Desylva
He’s the storm in my heart, oh, Killian!

Her hand clutched her chest again, fingers digging into her skin, her heart pounding with his memory.

Desylva
With a swagger so grand, he’s the sea’s own man,

She strutted a step, mimicked his stride, her hips rolling faintly.

Desylva
Killian! My Killian!

She clapped once, the sound sharp, her voice a cracked cheer, her spirit flaring briefly.

Desylva
Through the thunder’s roar,
he’s the one I adore,

Her head tilted back again, her arms outstretched, as if embracing a storm, the attic’s silence a cruel jest.

Desylva
Killian! Oh, Killian!

She shouted, her voice breaking, her hands shaking as she reached upward, desperate for him.

Desylva
With his hook held high, he’s my pirate sky,

Her right arm thrust up once more, fingers curled, her left clutching the ring, her gaze piercing the gloom.

Desylva
Killian! My Killian!

She sank back against the wall, her voice softening, a tender echo as she pressed her hands to her face. Her body trembled with the toll of her performance, her breath shallow in the attic’s dry chill, yet she sang on, her spirit a coiled storm.

Desylva
Billy sings with a torch so bright,

She raised her left hand, fingers splayed as if holding a torch, swaying as if dancing to Billy's tune, her voice lifting.

Desylva
Smee's shaky laugh cuts the dark o' night,

She chuckled, her shoulders shaking, mimicking Smee's nervous giggle, a flicker of warmth in her eyes.

Desylva
But Killian's hook, it's my guiding star,

Her hand curled again, raised high, her left tracing the ring, its sapphire her anchor in the dark.

Desylva
Through cannon's boom, he's my near and far!

She clapped her hands together, her body jolting as if rocked by cannon fire, his presence vivid.

Desylva
I'll storm the waves with a lightning's gleam,

She thrust both arms out, her gray eyes flashing as if summoning lost power, her vow fierce.

Desylva
For him I'll fight, for him I'll dream,

She clenched her fists, her voice rising, her body trembling with the promise of their reunion.

Desylva
So hoist the rum for the man I see,

She mimed lifting a jug, her lips parting as if tasting rum, a toast to him.

Desylva
The pirate king, oh, Killian be!

She tried to spin again, collapsing against the wall with a thud, her breath a ragged hymn.

Desylva
Killian! Killian!

She pounded the planks again, her fist resolute, his name a battle cry in her chest. Her hand pressed to her storm-mark, her voice a strained growl, her love a tempest trapped within.

Desylva
He's the storm in my heart, oh, Killian!
With a swagger so grand, he's the sea's own man,

She swayed her hips once more, a ghost of her old grace, the chains dragging her back.

Desylva
Killian! My Killian!

She clapped, her voice a cheer, her spirit flickering against the curse's weight.

Desylva
Through the thunder's roar, he's the one I adore,

Her head tilted back, arms outstretched, her gray eyes glinting with unshed tears, thunder a memory.

Desylva
Killian! Oh, Killian!

She shouted, her voice breaking, her hands reaching for the window, a desperate plea.

Desylva
With his hook held high, he's my pirate sky,

Her right arm thrust upward, fingers curled like his hook, her left clutching the ring, her sky lost.

Desylva
Killian! My Killian!

She sank to the floor, her voice a whisper, her hands cradling her face, his name her shield.

Desylva
Oh, Killian bold, you've claimed my soul,

She rocked gently, her voice soft, her fingers tracing the ring's scratched edges, his proposal a lifeline.

Desylva
Through stormy seas, you've made me whole,

She hugged herself, her gray eyes fixed on the window, his love her strength. She lifted her chin, her voice a tender vow, her storm-mark a dull ache as she sang to the void.

Desylva
With every gale, I'll sing your name,
My pirate love, forever the same!

She leaned back, her body slumping, her spirit unbowed, the attic's gloom no match for her song.

Desylva
Killian! Oh, Killian!

Her final note trembled, a whisper fading into the dust, her hands falling to her lap, the ring glinting faintly. She slumped fully against the wall, her Veyran spirit burned on, an ember stoked by the shanty, memories of Killian's blue eyes, his warm hand, his kiss fierce with salt and rain fueling her patience.

Her gray gaze traced the attic's shadows anew… Rumpelstiltskin's next step, the door's creak, a chance… her cunning a blade, her resolve an unbreakable vow. She'd endure, she'd sing, until the fates bent to their will once more, her love for Killian a storm against the curse's endless night.

A soft tick stirred the attic's silence, the clock's hands, frozen for ages, now trembling with newfound life. Time began to weave its threads once more, a fragile promise of release.

44 years into captivity: Curse Broken

Then, one fateful day… a relentless span of forty-four years since she'd last seen Killian's blue eyes blaze with love… she sensed another shift, a faint prickling beneath her skin, a whisper of something awakening, like the first gust of wind after an endless calm.

A low vibration trembled through the attic, subtle at first, then rising into a sharp, crystalline hum. Desylva's breath caught. Across the room, half-buried in dust and warped floorboards, the Storm Crystal began to glow.

Its surface flickered with a faint blue spark. Then another. Lightning threaded through its core like veins remembering their purpose after years of silence. The air tightened, charged with the familiar pulse of her storm magic.

Desylva stared, heart pounding. "After all this time…"

The crystal shrieked.

A jagged bolt of lightning erupted from within, splitting the attic with blinding light. The Storm Crystal exploded, shards bursting outward in a violent spray of blue-white fire. The blast struck her restraints first—magic meeting magic—sending a shockwave through the iron.

Her wrist cuffs snapped apart, the enchanted gold splitting cleanly down the center with a sharp, ringing crack. The broken pieces clattered to the floor, smoking faintly, their runes extinguished. Desylva staggered, staring at her bare wrists, the skin beneath pale and trembling, free for the first time in decades.

The explosion's echo rolled through the attic like thunder.

Her cursed mark flared briefly, a weak spark of blue igniting along its jagged lines, a fleeting echo of her old storm magic stirring within her veins after decades of silence, sending a jolt through her frame as her heart thudded against her ribs. Magic was seeping back into this world, slow and tentative, like raindrops heralding a coming tempest, piercing the suffocating veil that had bound her since the mansion took shape around her. She pressed her scarred fingers to the mark, her lips parting in a silent gasp as hope flickered in her chest, a fragile flame rekindled after years of ash, its warmth a stark contrast to the cold emptiness that had defined her since Regina's spell had stolen magic and her pirate.

Outside, beyond the attic's barred window, the sky growled, a storm brewing in the distance, its deep rumble vibrating through the mansion's wooden bones, a call to her Veyran blood that sang of freedom, of the tempest she'd been when Killian had knelt on the Jolly Roger's deck, his driftwood ring glinting in twilight's last light.

The storm broke with a vengeance that night, its fury rattling the mansion's aged timbers, the attic shuddering as wind howled through cracks in the slanted ceiling, tearing at the peeling wallpaper and sending dust swirling in frantic eddies around her like ghosts of her lost years. Lightning split the sky, a jagged bolt searing through the darkness to strike the orb that hung above her suspended from the attic's rafters by a thin chain, its surface pulsing faintly with the storm magic it had hoarded.

The bolt shattered it with a deafening crack, shards of glowing glass raining down like fallen stars, their edges glinting as they sliced through the air, embedding into the warped floorboards with sharp, splintering thuds. One fragment severed a link in her ankle chain, the metal snapping with a sharp ping that cut through the chaos, a clarion note of release after decades of bondage.

The storm-magic the orb had hoarded did not scatter. It surged. Freed from its prison, the energy coiled in the air like a living tempest, threads of blue-white lightning spiraling toward her in hungry arcs. It recognized her—its true vessel—and rushed to her storm-mark with a crackling roar, drawn as if by gravity. The magic struck her like a wave, flooding through her skin, her veins, her bones, igniting every hollow place Rumpel had carved out over the years. Her mark blazed, the sigil flaring bright enough to paint the attic walls in electric light as the stolen power poured back inside her, piece by piece, breath by breath, until she felt whole again for the first time in decades.

The force of it drove her to her knees, her breath shuddering as the last tendrils of lightning sank into her, settling deep in her core like a storm reborn.

Desylva seized the moment. She pried at the loosened bond, her nails—brittle and splintered from years of clawing at her prison—breaking against the iron until it gave way, blood trickling from her fingers to stain the wood beneath her, a crimson offering to her defiance. She ignored the pain, her gray eyes blazing with a fierce determination sharpened by the magic now thrumming through her, burning through the haze of age and exhaustion as she

wrenched herself free, the chains clattering to the floor in a discordant heap. She staggered to her feet, driven by a will that time couldn't break.

Rumpelstiltskin, distracted by the storm's chaos or his own arrogance, didn't notice her absence until she'd slipped through the attic's shattered defenses. The orb's destruction had been a blinding flare that masked her escape, the storm's roar swallowing the creak of her movements against the dusty floorboards. The mansion's labyrinthine halls blurred past her as she ran, her bare feet pounding against the cold, polished floors, each step a jolt through her aching bones. Her breath came ragged but resolute, burning in her lungs, yet the storm-magic inside her steadied her stride. Confinement had not dulled her spirit.

The walls, lined with faded portraits and cracked mirrors, seemed to twist and shift in the flickering torchlight, their shadows stretching like memories of her earlier prison, but she pressed on, driven by the ember of her rekindled power. The ring on her finger clung to her like a lifeline amidst the chaos, a tether to the pirate who'd vowed his soul to her.

The storm outside raged in tandem with her flight. Rain hammered the mansion's roof like a war drum, lightning illuminating her path through dust-choked stairwells and past moth-eaten curtains that billowed in the wind. A tempest reborn in her blood urged her forward. She didn't stop, her gray eyes fixed on the promise of freedom beyond the mansion's oppressive embrace, her every heartbeat a vow to reclaim the life—and the love—that had been stolen from her.

Storybrooke's Forest

She burst through the mansion's warped back door into the woods beyond. The air thick with the scent of pine and rain-soaked earth, a sharp, living contrast to the attic's dry decay. Her heart pounded as she fled into Storybrooke's dense forest, the storm's fading fury at her back.

She ran as fast as her legs could carry her. Her bare feet slapped against the mud, slipping on wet roots as branches clawed at her tattered shirt and tore thin lines across her skin leaving thin trails of blood that mingled with the rain dripping from the canopy above. Her newly freed wrists throbbed with every movement, the skin raw and tender where the cuffs had snapped away. She cradled them briefly against her chest as she ran, breath ragged, her lungs burning with each gasping breath as the cold air seared her throat.

Her storm magic flickered faintly beneath her skin, a ghost of the tempest she once commanded. It spurred her onward, a thin crackle in the air as she stumbled through the undergrowth, roots snagging at her feet, mud squelching between her toes.

Free at last but lost in a world she didn't recognize, its trees towering and unfamiliar under a sky she hadn't seen in forty-four years.

Her wild hair whipped against her face as the wind howled through the pines, a distant echo of her own power. Gusts tore at her shirt and stung her eyes with rain and pine needles. She clutched the driftwood ring as she ran, her gray eyes scanning the shadowed woods, their depths veiled by towering trunks and the storm's waning light, searching for a sign, a path, anything to guide her through this strange realm.

Her legs faltered, her strength waning after decades of confinement. She stumbled against a gnarled trunk, its bark rough against her scarred hands as she caught herself. Her wrists screamed as she caught herself, the tender skin burning with the effort. She pressed her forehead to the tree, chest heaving with ragged breaths that misted in the chill night air.

A sliver of moonlight pierced the clouds, catching the sapphire's gleam a quiet promise of Killian, the pirate who'd carved it, who'd fought beside her through hell itself, who'd never stop searching, she had to believe, even after Rumpelstiltskin's taunts of his despair. Her voice rasped into the night.

"Killian…" she whispered, voice trembling. She closed her eyes, letting the forest's cold settle around her, letting the memory of his blue eyes blaze through the darkness. His voice, rough with devotion. His hand gripping hers as they faced down storms. His vow on the Jolly Roger's deck. *Marry me, love, and let's defy the fates together*.

Her fingers tightened around the ring. “I’m comin’, love. … I’ll find you,” she breathed, the words rising from a place deeper than pain, deeper than fear, carved from the depths of her soul. “Wherever you are. Whatever realm holds you. I’ll find you.” The vow left her lips like a spark in the night, a quiet thunder rolling through the forest’s heart,

She pressed her forehead to the tree once more, the scent of resin grounding her, the wind’s mournful wail a mirror to her longing.

She pushed onward, her bare feet sinking into the muddy earth, each step a defiance of the years that had tried to break her. Her body a map of scars and resilience etched by captivity’s cruel hand.

The forest loomed dense and wild around her, its shadows shifting with every rustle of leaves, every snap of a twig underfoot. Yet she moved with purpose, driven by the bond that had sustained her through the long, dark years. The memory of Killian’s fierce devotion burned like a lantern in her chest.

Her storm magic flickered again, still weak, but present. A spark beneath her skin, a promise of the tempest she’d reclaim. It was enough to keep her going, a diminished force guiding her through Storybrooke’s wilds.

She paused once more, breath a ragged hymn to survival, her gray eyes lifting to the canopy where stars began to pierce the storm’s retreat. A tempest unbroken, lost but alive. Her vow to find him. Thunder rumbled through the forest’s heart, her ring a beacon in the night.

She staggered forward, one step closer to the pirate who held her soul.

Storybrooke

Storybrooke nestled snugly between dense pine forests and a restless sea, a quaint coastal haven where the air wove a sensory tapestry of sharp salt tang and earthy musk from damp pine needles, binding the town to its wild edges and briny heart. Its heartbeat pulsed through winding cobblestone streets, twisting past clapboard houses with pitched roofs. At dusk, streetlamps flickered to life with a soft hum, their wrought-iron frames casting pools of golden light that danced against the stones, softening shadows creeping from the forest's embrace, while windows glowed warmly from homes and shops, their radiance a bulwark against the gathering dark, framing scenes of families at supper or shopkeepers tallying earnings behind glass. Locals bustled along the sidewalks as they carried baskets brimming with crisp apples—red as Regina's vengeance—or crusty loaves from Mr. Clark's bakery, its yeasty aroma wafting through the air, mingling with the scent of coffee sipped from steaming mugs outside steamed windows, tendrils of vapor curling upward like whispers, their chatter a quiet hum beneath the distant crash of waves against the harbor. Beyond the town, the forest loomed, its towering pines whispering secrets of curses and lost realms, while the sea churned restlessly against the docks, a restless echo of the magic that had birthed this hidden refuge.

This was Storybrooke, its surface a veneer of normalcy over a simmering magic, a place where the past lingered in every shadow and the future beckoned with each step, for it cradled a profound secret. Its residents were no ordinary folk, but fairytale characters plucked from their enchanted realms, bound here by a curse that cloaked their pasts in mundane disguises under a Dark Curse that held time still for 28 years, awakened when Emma broke the curse, its pulse now quickening as past and future intertwined.

Landmarks/Locations

Granny's Diner *stood as the heart of Storybrooke's quiet bustle. Its neon sign flickering faintly above the door. A warm beacon where the scent of sizzling bacon, cinnamon rolls, and strong coffee wafted out into the evening, luring dockworkers and dreamers through its welcoming threshold. Inside, red vinyl booths hugged the walls, their cushions creased from years of whispered secrets and hearty meals, while the checkered linoleum floor gleamed beneath the hum of conversation and the jukebox crooning classic tunes of love and rebellion, a nostalgic pulse that tethered the diner to simpler times. Its walls, adorned with faded photos of Ruby and Granny's past, stood as silent witnesses to first dates, late-night confessions, and the slow unraveling of the Dark Curse, the space a living hub where the town's rhythm found its steady echo. That rhythm quickened with Ruby's wolfish grin flashing across the counter and Granny's sharp orders cutting through the clatter of plates, a symphony of life shaped by Widow Lucas's unyielding grit. Born from her resolve, the diner had served as a steadfast refuge during the curse's timeless haze, its plastered photos a testament to a family rebuilt from fragments, anchoring a community that forgot itself until Emma's arrival stirred its dormant magic awake.*

The Clock Tower *loomed over Main Street. It now ticked steadily, its hands marking time in a place where magic simmered beneath the surface. Its Roman numerals stark against the weathered face. For 28 years under Regina's Dark Curse, the hands had stood frozen at 8:15. A silent towering sentinel of stone and glass, a timeless prison, until Emma's arrival set its gears groaning back to life. Each tick a heartbeat of hope reborn. Its shadow stretched across the cobblestones, a reminder of the curse's fall, its chimes now a soft toll through the crisp air, resonating with the town's awakening.*

The Town Hall *was located at the street's end. Its white facade and arched windows gleaming with an austere elegance, a seat of power where Regina Mills held court as Mayor. Polished wood-paneled halls echoed with the click of her heels, a sound as commanding as her magic once was. Her office a throne room of dark oak desks and leather chairs, its air thick with the scent of old paper and her lingering magic. Its corridors a labyrinth of secrets and second chances.*

The Library *hid beneath the Clock Tower's shadow, a quiet sanctuary of towering shelves, groaning with dusty tomes and forgotten scrolls, their leather spines cracked with neglect. Its arched windows spilling slants of light across worn oak floors. Its entrance a heavy oak door carved with faint runes. Once sealed during the curse, Belle French had claimed it post-awakening. Her gentle hands restoring tomes of fairytale lore and forgotten histories. A haven where she sought solace from Rumpelstiltskin's chaos, its stillness broken only by the rustle of pages and the echo of her soft footsteps, a place of knowledge reborn from a town's lost years.*

The Pawnshop *crouched at Main Street's edge. Its cluttered windows glinting with treasures under muted light. An emporium of fairytale relics cloaked in shadow, chipped teacups, spinning wheels, and cursed trinkets whispering of the Enchanted Forest, each a bargain waiting to snare the unwary. The air inside hung heavy with old leather, wax and dust, shelves bowing under relics of deals struck in shadows. Its glass counter gleamed, A lair where Rumpelstiltskin wove his schemes, its dim glow a trap for the unwary, a nexus of power that predated the curse and thrived beyond, a labyrinth of past promises and dark magic woven into Storybrooke's fabric.*

Archie's Office *perched above the pharmacy, a cramped refuge. It's worn couch sagging beneath visitors, it's bookshelves groaning, stuffed with psychology texts and faded, dusty, journals stacked haphazardly, its hearth crackling softly where Pongo slept. The room's peeling wallpaper and cluttered desk bore the weight of countless confessions, a lifeline for a town wrestling with its fairytale scars. Archie's umbrella hung by the door, a nod to his cricket days, its windows fogged by the harbor's breath, framing a view of the restless sea. Its walls absorbing the town's fears and hopes, a quiet corner where conscience found a human voice after years as a chirping guide.*

The Sheriff's Station *stood apart. A squat brick building with barred windows and a flickering sign. Its holding cells echoing with the clank of keys and its radio crackling with static. A nerve center where the first Sheriff, Graham, Regina's huntsman from the Enchanted Forest, once patrolled until his heart was crushed by her vengeful hand when he fell for Emma, sparking the Savior's white magic to flare within its walls, a silent witness to her reluctant heroism.*

The Rabbit Hole*, tucked off Main Street, hummed as a dimly lit dive bar. Its pulse alive with the clink of glasses and the low murmur of locals seeking refuge in its smoky haze and sticky floors. A gritty haven for Storybrooke's rougher souls. The wooden bar, scarred from years of hard use, stood beneath faintly buzzing neon beer signs, while Happy, ever the cheerful dwarf, poured drinks with a brightness that pierced the gloom, a stark contrast to the bar's shadowed corners. Once a retreat for cursed hearts numbing their endless monotony, it now buzzed with life—pool tables hosting late-night bets and hushed secrets, where Leroy grumbled into his ale and townsfolk peeled off their daytime facades. Its jukebox thrummed with tunes grittier than Granny's, echoing the raucous taverns of the Enchanted Forest, the haze of smoke and bursts of laughter serving as a raw, unpolished release for the town's simmering tensions.*

Storybrooke General Hospital *loomed at the town's outskirts. Its sterile white walls and antiseptic tang cutting sharply against the wild forest beyond, an austere counterpoint to the bar's chaos. Once prowled by Dr. Whale, Frankenstein in his cursed past, its corridors now echoed with Doc's steady hands stitching wounds in the ER, its beds cradling the fallout of magical battles, a modern shell encasing a fairytale core where life and death wove into the town's fate. From cursed comas, Snow rousing David from his endless sleep, to miraculous healings like Henry's revival, it held Storybrooke's fragile lives under its fluorescent glow, the basement morgue a somber testament to losses endured, its presence a quiet anchor amid the town's enchanted tumult.*

The Toll Bridge *(once known as The Troll Bridge) arched over a creek beyond the woods. Its warped planks and rusted railings a relic of Regina's early traps—where Snow once fell, cursed to forget Charming, and where magic lingered in the air. A quiet landmark, it marked the boundary between town and wilderness, its shadow a whisper of the Enchanted Forest's reach, its creaks a song of secrets buried beneath.*

The Cannery *stretched along the docks. Its rusted tin roof and salt-crusted walls hulking over the harbor, the rhythmic thud of fish being gutted mingling with the sea's restless slap. A workplace for Leroy and Bashful. Its conveyor belts hummed with the legacy of cursed labor. Once a facade for Regina's control, now a lifeline for a town tethered to the ocean, its briny air thick with the ghosts of a past unmoored.*

Some of the Residents

Storybrooke's residents, a tapestry of fairytale souls woven into a modern world, carried the echoes of their enchanted origins beneath the surface of their daily lives. Once torn from the Enchanted Forest by Regina's Dark Curse, they'd lived in a fog of forgotten identities for 28 years, their true selves locked away until Emma shattered the spell. Now, with memories restored and realms reconnected, they balanced the mundane—jobs, homes, and routines—with the magic that simmered in their blood, a quiet pulse binding them to a town where every street corner hid a story. From the harbor's salty breeze to the diner's warm hum, they forged new paths, their pasts a shadow and their futures a fragile hope, each soul a thread in the fabric of a community shaped by curses, courage, and the unyielding pull of family.

Mary Margaret Blanchard and David Nolan—*once Snow White and Prince Charming—brought a beacon of hope from their cozy loft, a sanctuary perched in Storybrooke's heart. The wooden beams crisscrossing the ceiling were strung with delicate fairy lights, casting a soft, golden glow that softened the edges of their modest home. The kitchen hummed with warmth, fragrant with cinnamon and nutmeg from Mary Margaret's fresh-baked pies, their crusts golden and flaky, a ritual born of her innate kindness and a longing to nurture. Once a bandit princess and a shepherd-turned-prince, their love had defied curses and dark magic in the Enchanted Forest, a steady glow that now warmed the town's edges. Mary Margaret, with her pixie-cut dark hair and gentle eyes, carried a quiet strength, her cardigans and soft smiles masking the archer's precision she'd once wielded. David, broad-shouldered and steadfast, his flannel shirts a nod to his pastoral roots, exuded a protective calm, his eyes crinkling with an optimism tempered by years of fighting for their family. Together, they were Storybrooke's moral compass, their bond a testament to resilience, forged through separations, memory loss, and the birth of their daughter, Emma, whom they'd sent through a wardrobe to escape the Dark Curse.*

Ruby Lucas—*Red Riding Hood in her former life—stood tall and lean behind the counter at Granny's Diner. Her dark hair streaked with bold red highlights that caught the fluorescent light as she poured coffee with a wolfish grin, her leather boots tapping a restless rhythm on the checkered linoleum. Her eyes glinted with a wildness tempered by a warmth that drew patrons into easy banter, her quick laugh a ripple through the diner's hum. In the Enchanted Forest, she'd roamed as the wolf under a red cloak, unknowingly cursed by her lineage to transform each full moon, a secret that cost her love, Peter, his life, and drove her to protect Snow during her bandit days. Now, her loyalty ran deep, fierce, channeled into small kindnesses—extra fries for a weary dockworker, a wink for a shy kid. Her werewolf strength hidden beneath a waitress's apron, her senses sharp as she navigated Storybrooke's quieter chaos.*

Widow Lucas (Granny)—*Ruby's grandmother—ruled the diner with a sharp eye and sharper tongue, her gray hair pulled into a tight bun streaked with flour from dawn baking sessions, her apron dusted with the day's work. Perched on a stool near the grill, she wielded a crossbow as easily as a spatula, its bolts a relic of her Enchanted Forest days fending off wolves and worse. Once a fierce matriarch who'd raised Ruby after her parents' deaths, she'd hidden the truth of their family curse, cloaking her guilt in gruff affection. Her diner was Storybrooke's heartbeat, her hands, calloused from years of kneading dough and drawing bowstrings. She stirred soup with a practiced rhythm, her grumbles about late deliveries masking a heart that fed the town, body and soul.*

Leroy—*once Grumpy of the seven dwarves—slouched at the bar, stocky and bearded, his flannel shirt stained with grease from a day hauling nets at the docks, his heavy boots scuffing the floor as he settled in. His pickaxe leaned against the counter, its blade dulled but unbowed, a relic of mines long left behind in the Enchanted Forest where he'd toiled with his brothers, hatched from eggs by magic's whim. When he hatched he was given the name Dreamy. His name later changed to Grumpy after a broken heart—his love, Nova, a fairy he'd lost to duty's call, made him lose all hope. His gruff exterior masked a steadfast heart forged in brotherhood. His rough hands steady as he nursed a mug of bitter coffee. His grumbles about the cold or the brew's strength were a familiar growl, yet his loyalty to Snow and the town shone through, a dwarf's resilience tempered by loss and a flicker of hope he'd never admit.*

The other dwarves—Doc, Happy, Sleepy, Sneezy, Bashful, and Dopey—scattered through Storybrooke, their brotherhood a quieter echo of their mining days. Doc, bespectacled and fussing, worked as a medic, his nervous hands stitching wounds at the hospital, his leadership born of necessity among the seven. Happy, round-faced and beaming, tended bar at the Rabbit Hole, his infectious cheer lifting spirits, a stark contrast to their cursed years as dour shells. Sleepy, perpetually yawning, drove the night shift tow truck, his drooping eyes belying a steady hand, once dozing through their forest quests. Sneezy, allergic and sniffling, ran the general store, his sneezes rattling shelves, a reminder of their dusty tunnels. Bashful, shy and stammering, lingered at the docks with Leroy, his quiet courage surfacing in crises, his blush a constant from fairy scorn. Dopey, silent and wide-eyed, pruned trees at the nursery, his mute presence a comfort, his axe swapped for shears. Together, they anchored the town with dwarf-born grit, their unity a lifeline through curse and chaos.

Archie Hopper—*Jiminy Cricket reborn—offered counsel from a cramped office above the pharmacy, Pongo, his loyal Dalmatian, curled by the hearth, tail thumping softly against the rug, a steadfast companion from his days as a cricket in Geppetto's ear. Once a conscience to Pinocchio's maker in the Enchanted Forest, he'd shed his insect form for a human one. His quiet wisdom delivered in a gentle voice serving as a lifeline through the town's emotional storms. His tweed jackets and spectacles glinted as he listened with a cricket's patience. His past as a pickpocket's*

son, trapped by his parents' thievery until he wished for freedom, lending empathy to every tale. His umbrella a nod to the night he'd gained his wings, now a tool to weather Storybrooke's rain.

Regina Mills—*once the formidable Evil Queen—reigned as the self-appointed Mayor of Storybrooke. Her authority etched into every corner of the town she'd shaped. Years ago, in a fit of vengeance against Snow White for a childhood betrayal, she'd cast the Dark Curse, ripping everyone from the Enchanted Forest into this mundane world, trapping them in a timeless haze to spite her stepdaughter. Her office in the town hall gleamed with polished wood and sharp edges, a throne of sorts, where she wielded power with a calculated grace, her tailored suits and dark lipstick a stark contrast to the vulnerability she buried deep. She'd adopted Henry to fill the void left by her own lost love … Daniel, murdered by her mother, Cora … a choice that softened her edges over time, though her regal bearing never faltered. Her mansion at 108 Mifflin Street stood as a monument to her control, its pristine white siding and dark shutters masking a fractured past, its halls echoing with the ghosts of her former cruelty. Regina's dark eyes flickered with a mix of pride and pain. Her sharp wit and magical prowess, honed under Rumpelstiltskin's tutelage, still a force, though her heart now wrestled with redemption, driven by her love for Henry and a fragile truce with the family she'd once sought to destroy.*

Mr. Gold—*Rumpelstiltskin cloaked in a pawnbroker's guise—presided over a cluttered shop that crouched at the edge of Main Street, its windows glinting with treasures under muted light. An emporium of relics from a fairytale past. The air inside was thick with the scent of old leather and dust, shelves groaning under the weight of trinkets… chipped teacups, spinning wheels, and cursed artifacts, each a thread in the tapestry of his deals. Once a cowardly spinner in the Enchanted Forest, he'd seized the Dark One's dagger and its boundless power. Dressed in tailored suits that belied his impish origins. His graying hair slicked back. He spun deals with a smile that never reached his cold, calculating eyes. A mask for the centuries of manipulation that had cost him his son, Baelfire, and left him chasing redemption through labyrinthine schemes. Henry, his grandson through Baelfire's union with Emma Swan, tethered him to a family he'd nearly lost forever, a fragile thread of hope amid his dark legacy. Once a master of dark magic, he now balanced his love for Belle with the pull of his darker nature, his voice a silken thread laced with menace, every word a bargain waiting to ensnare.*

Henry Mills—*biological son of Emma Swan and Neal Cassidy (Baelfire, Rumpelstiltskin's son)—had been adopted by Regina. His life a bridge between fractured legacies. He lived in the grand house with Regina, a home both pristine and shadowed by the weight of his dual heritage. A child of heroes and villains, caught in the curse's wake. His room was a chaos of books, maps, and sketches, their pages spilling over a cluttered desk; his bed piled high with blankets where he pored over his storybook by lamplight, its leather cover worn from countless readings, its tales the key to unlocking Storybrooke's secrets. His eyes burned with a dreamer's resolve, his tousled hair often falling over his forehead as he scribbled notes in margins, driven by a fierce determination to mend the broken endings of those he loved. At ten, he'd tracked down Emma in Boston, sparking the curse's unraveling with his Operation Cobra, his young voice carrying a weight beyond his years. A thread of hope stitching through the scars left by Regina's spell, his belief in happy endings an unshakable light.*

Belle French—*once Beauty from Beauty and the Beast—worked in the Storybrooke library, a haven of towering shelves and quiet corners she'd claimed after the curse broke. Her auburn hair fell in soft waves, her eyes bright with curiosity and kindness, a stark contrast to the dusty tomes she tended. In the Enchanted Forest, she'd traded her freedom to save her village from ogres, falling for Rumpelstiltskin—the Beast—whose heart she'd softened despite his darkness. Still entwined with Mr. Gold, their love was a tapestry of trust and turmoil, her gentle resolve clashing with his shadowed impulses. Her cardigans and sensible shoes belied the courage that had faced down wolves and witches, her hands often stained with ink from restoring old volumes, her voice a lilting melody that carried tales of heroism and redemption. The library's arched windows let in slants of light, illuminating her sanctuary where she sought to understand the man she loved, her belief in his goodness a quiet defiance against the chaos he wrought.*

Emma Swan—*biological daughter of Snow White and Prince Charming—arrived in Storybrooke when Henry, the son she'd given up at birth, tracked her down in Boston, seeking her help to break the curse that held his world captive. Born on the eve of the Dark Curse, she'd been sent through a magical wardrobe as an infant, growing up alone in the real world. A foster kid with a rap sheet. Her blonde hair often tied back. Her red leather jacket a shield against the past. Her eyes, sharp with skepticism, hid a longing for belonging she rarely admitted. Her boots scuffing the pavement as she rolled into town in her yellow Bug. A bail bondsperson by trade, she wielded a knack for finding people, a skill honed by years of chasing fugitives—until Henry's knock on her door flipped her life upside down. Named the Savior in his storybook, she'd shattered Regina's curse with true love's kiss for her son, her magic*

awakening late but fierce, a white-hot spark that lit her path. Her arrival drew her into a family she'd never known, her prickly exterior softening as she fought for Henry and the town, her heart a battleground of duty and the echoes of a lonely childhood.

Killian

Killian Jones—*once Captain Hook—had arrived in Storybrooke shortly after the Dark Curse shattered, when the fragile threads between realms unraveled, opening paths long sealed. A man tempered by loss and time, his once-roguish spirit had dulled to a half-life, a shadow of the pirate who'd danced with danger across endless seas.*

Days found him at the harbor, his boots scuffing the weathered planks of the dock as he gazed at the Jolly Roger, a steadfast relic of that past, moored among the humble fishing boats like a dark queen amidst peasants. Her sails, furled tight against the mast, had once propelled her through realms uncharted. Gulls wheeled overhead, their sharp cries slicing through the rhythmic crash of waves against the dock.

The harbor stretched around her, a quiet expanse of gray water, its surface rippling under the breath of a cool breeze, dotted with bobbing boats whose nets draped over rails like spiderwebs glistening with morning mist. Her hull gleamed faintly under the overcast sky, a relic of their wild voyages, the pier's metal gangway—a sturdy, iron-wrought span alongside, its rivets glinting like stars—extending from dock to deck, a steadfast bridge unyielding to the harbor's restless tides. Her deck creaked under the weight of battles and storms, each groan a whisper of the past—oak planks worn smooth by years at sea, polished by the boots of a crew long scattered and the tempests they'd braved together. The figurehead, a fierce mermaid carved with defiant grace, stared out over the harbor, her paint chipped but her gaze unyielding, as if searching the horizon for something lost. Upon arriving in Storybrooke, he'd adapted her to this strange land, installing a clever mechanism to automate the anchor's lowering and raising—a switch at the helm, its brass lever gleaming under his palm, a nod to the ticking clocks and machines of this world, allowing him to command the anchor's heavy chain with a single flick, its clank echoing like a heartbeat when set in motion. Yet no innovation could fill the void she'd left.

Killian's eyes often lingered there, tracing the ship's lines with a quiet reverence. Each part a map of their shared history. Battles won, storms defied, nights spent under starlit skies with Desylva's laughter echoing across the waves. His fingers twitched at his side, itching to grip the helm once more, to feel the Roger's pulse beneath his palm as he had in those wild days. Some nights, as the fog rolled in thick and heavy, cloaking the harbor in a ghostly shroud, it felt like the Jolly Roger missed her as well. Missed Desylva, the tempest who'd once danced upon the decks, her storm magic weaving thunder into the timbers and lightning into the sails. The Jolly Roger was more than wood and sail; she was a living heart bound to Desylva, aching in her absence as keenly as Killian did.

On quiet evenings, when the tide murmured low and the gulls fell silent, the Roger's creaks took on a mournful cadence, as if the planks themselves sighed for the storm-wrought lass who'd once stood at the helm, her gray eyes fierce and her voice a melody that tamed the wildest seas. The sails, though still, seemed to strain against their lashings, yearning for the gusts she'd summoned with a flick of her wrist. Gusts that had billowed them full and sent the ship slicing through waves like a blade through silk. The air around her grew heavy, charged with an unspoken longing, as if the very wood recalled the hum of her magic, the way it had crackled through the rigging when she'd laughed or fought or loved. The portholes, fogged with mist, reflected nothing but the empty harbor, yet Killian swore he could feel her presence lingering in their clouded glass. A ghost of the woman who'd once leaned against them, her breath fogging the panes as she whispered plans for their next adventure. The helm stood silent, its wheel unmoving, but on the stillest nights, it seemed to tremble faintly under his touch, as if echoing the rhythm of her storms, pleading for the hands that had once steadied it beside his own.

Some nights, when the moon hung low and silvered the water, the Jolly Roger's timbers groaned louder, a plaintive sound that cut through the harbor's stillness. A lament for the years she'd been moored here, far from the chaos and glory of their shared voyages. It was as if the ship knew she'd been incomplete without Desylva, her decks too quiet without the clatter of her boots, her sails too slack without the winds she'd called forth. Killian felt it too, a hollow ache mirrored in the Roger's stillness. An emptiness that stretched across 46 years, a void born the day she'd been torn from them both. The ship had weathered storms and battles aplenty, but this, the absence of Desylva's tempest heart, had left her adrift in a way no sea could rival, tethered to a harbor that offered no solace, waiting for the storm that would make her whole again.

Certain evenings drew him to Granny's, nursing whiskey in a corner booth, his black coat patched at the elbows, its leather creased from years of wear, his hook gleaming faintly under the diner's warm lights, casting a soft sheen across the worn tabletop. His steps along the docks grew heavier, each thud of his boots against the planks a burden he carried silently. His blue eyes shadowed by a quiet ache he rarely voiced, a pain etched into the lines of his face, deepened by the weight of memory. He'd settled into this strange land of cars, cell phones, and ticking clocks, a world so unlike the wild seas he'd once ruled, his heart a locked chest he seldom opened, its key lost somewhere in the past. Yet in his pocket, the Tears of the Moon lingered, cold against his fingers, a tether to ***her*** *memory, a silent reminder of promises unfulfilled. Its soft glow pulsed faintly through the fabric, a whisper of the storm-touched love he couldn't bury, each gleam a flicker of her gray eyes, her voice calling across the years.*

Emma had become his anchor in this new world, her fierce heart a steady pulse beside his faltering one. Their bond had been forged through battles as they fought side by side. Through quiet nights at the sheriff's station, hunched over coffee-stained desks littered with maps and reports, steam rising from chipped mugs as they pieced together Storybrooke's mysteries, and through rare moments of vulnerability when she'd let him past her walls, her blonde hair pulled back in a loose ponytail, her leather jacket creaking as she paced, her eyes sharp yet softening when they met his blue ones, a silent understanding passing between them. Somewhere along the way, he'd fallen for her. Her strength and stubborn hope weaving into the cracks of his battered soul, a light piercing the gloom that had settled over him since Desylva's loss. Her apartment above the station was a clutter of Henry's sketches pinned to the walls, dragons and heroes scrawled in bold strokes, and old case files stacked haphazardly on the table, a lived-in chaos that mirrored their tangled lives. Yet it was there, amid the mess, that Killian found a fragile peace, his hook resting on her shoulder as they faced Storybrooke's secrets together, her presence a balm to the restlessness that gnawed at him. The town's fairytale heart pulsed beneath its surface, a quiet magic that bound them all, and though Desylva's absence haunted him still—her laughter a ghost in the Roger's creaks, her storm a shadow in the Tears of the Moon—Emma's presence offered a lifeline, a new chapter unfolding where the old one had frayed, a tentative hope that he might yet find a harbor for his weary soul.

Day 1

A thick fog wove its way through the streets, draping the town in a gauzy veil that softened the edges of the world and muffled the distant crash of waves against the docks. Killian, his boots crunching faintly on damp cobblestones, stepped into Granny's Diner alongside Emma.

Granny's Diner

The diner hummed with its usual rhythm that overcast afternoon, the air thick with the mingled scents of brewed coffee, fried eggs, and the faint tang of grease clinging to the griddle. The jukebox hummed a soft tune, "Only You", its nostalgic notes weaving through the clatter of plates and the low buzz of conversation.

Widow Lucas, Granny to all who crossed her threshold, bustled behind the counter. Her gray hair swept into a tight bun streaked with flour from rolling dough earlier, her apron a patchwork of stains—ketchup smears, coffee splashes, a dusting of powdered sugar. Her sharp eyes darted over the room as she barked orders with a voice that carried the weight of authority softened by affection, "Ruby, move those legs. Table six's hashbrowns ain't gonna serve themselves!" Her spatula clattered against the griddle, flipping a sizzling patty with a practiced flick, the sound a steady heartbeat in the diner's chaos.

Ruby darted through the maze of tables. Her tray balanced with the ease of a tightrope walker, piled high with steaming plates of hashbrowns and eggs. Her red-streaked hair caught the overhead lights like a flare, a vivid slash against her black-and-white uniform, her wolfish grin flashing as she delivered meals, bantering with a group of fishermen. "Extra bacon, Joe, don't say I never spoil ya." Her laughter rang out, a bright trill cutting through the din as she spun on her heel, skirt swishing.

At the counter Grumpy slouched over a half-drunk beer, his beard flecked with foam that glistened faintly under the fluorescent glow. His gravelly mutterings about the dock's latest haul, a paltry catch of undersized cod, barely rose above the chatter. His hands wrapped around the mug as if it were an anchor in his perpetual storm of complaints.

Emma perched on a stool at the end of the counter, her red leather jacket creaking as she leaned forward, elbows resting on the worn counter, its surface scratched and stained from years of use. Her hair spilled over her shoulders,

catching the light in soft waves as she cradled a mug of coffee between her hands, the steam rising in delicate tendrils that brushed her face.

Killian settled beside her, his black coat shrugged off and draped carelessly over the stool's back, the fabric pooling like a shadow on the floor. His hook rested lightly on the counter, its curve glinting under the harsh fluorescent glow, a quiet testament to his pirate past etched in every scratch and dent.

Emma tilted her head toward Killian, a playful glint dancing in her eyes as she teased, "What's next, Captain? Gonna call this coffee 'grog' and demand a barrel of rum to go with it?" Her smile broke through her usual guarded demeanor, a rare warmth that softened the lines of her face and sparked something deep in his chest, a flicker of light against the shadows he carried. He smirked, faint but genuine, his blue eyes crinkling at the corners. He lifted his mug, its dark brew swirled with a bitter edge, mirroring the sea he once ruled. "Only if it's strong enough to wake a dead man, lass," he quipped, his voice low and rough with a lilt that carried the echo of crashing waves, taking a slow sip as the steam curled around his stubbled jaw like a fleeting mist, his gaze lingering on her with an ease that softened the edges of his guarded soul.

Ruby paused mid-stride, balancing her tray with a practiced tilt as she shot them a knowing wink over her shoulder, "You two are hopeless. Might as well hang a 'smitten' sign above your heads," she teased, her laughter a bright ripple before she spun away to refill a fisherman's coffee, the pot gurgling as she poured.

The door opened, the bell's chime a gentle echo slicing through the bustle. Archie Hopper stepped inside, brushing fog-damp curls from his forehead, his umbrella dripping a small puddle onto the linoleum as he hung it by the coat rack near the entrance, "Looks like a storm's brewing out there," he said with a quiet nod to the room, his voice calm but tinged with a therapist's knowing tone that hinted at more than weather. He slid into a booth near the window, its vinyl seat creaking faintly under his weight. Pongo, his loyal Dalmatian, trotted behind, his black-and-white fur damp from the mist, curling beneath the table with a contented huff as Archie ordered a steaming cup of chamomile tea from Ruby, its floral scent rising faintly above the diner's savory haze, a soothing contrast to the tension simmering outside.

The diner's rhythm flowed on. Granny's spatula clattered, the jukebox shifted to a softer chord, locals' voices rose and fell like the tide. Suddenly, a deafening clap of thunder rattled the windows, its rumble rolling through the walls like a beast stirring from slumber, shaking the hanging lights so they swayed faintly. A blinding flash of lightning followed, searing the fog outside into a stark white glow that spilled through the glass, casting jagged shadows across the checkered floor and worn tabletops. The chatter faltered, heads turning as the air tightened with an unspoken tension, forks pausing mid-bite, mugs stilled in midair.

The bell above the door sang out again, its chime sharper this time, slicing through the fading bustle like a blade through silence. The sound drew every eye as the noise dwindled to a hush, the diner holding its breath. Desylva stepped through, her boots thudding against the floor, leaving faint smears of dirt from some distant realm. Her worn leather jacket, patched at the elbows and glistening with mist, dark hair tumbling wild over her shoulders like ink spilled across parchment, catching the diner's amber light in chaotic waves. Her storm-gray eyes swept the room with a quiet intensity, faint sparks of lightning dancing at her fingertips. Her cursed mark pulsed beneath her sleeve, a dull blue glow flickering against her skin, a remnant of the magic Rumpelstiltskin had tried to steal.

Killian's mug clinked softly against the counter, forgotten, coffee splashing in a dark arc as his posture stiffened. His breath snagged in his throat, a jagged catch that burned his lungs as his blue eyes snapped to her, widening with a mix of disbelief and longing, "Desylva?" His voice cracked, raw and jagged, spilling decades of loss into the single word as he rose, his boots scuffing the wood.

Emma tensed, her stool creaking faintly as her instincts flared, her eyes flicking to his face, sharp and searching, "Hook? What's wrong?" Her voice cut through the diner's hum, steady yet threaded with a quiet ache that betrayed the lifeline she'd found in his love—through battles, curses, and those rare, soft nights when his presence anchored her chaos. Her hand hovered near her gun, fingers twitching as her heart clenched, sensing the tremor beneath their bond. She followed his gaze, her breath catching as she traced it to the woman framed in the doorway, a stranger who carried the weight of a storm.

Desylva stood frozen at the threshold, her grip tightening on the doorframe. Her leather jacket gleamed faintly under the diner's amber lights, her storm-gray eyes locking on Killian as if he might dissolve into the fog behind her,

“Killian.” Her voice trembled, roughened by decades of captivity yet carrying the fierce strength he’d once clung to, tears shimmered in her eyes as she stepped forward, hesitant yet resolute, her hands clenched at her sides, dirt smearing the floor beneath her boots.

He crossed the room in three swift strides. His boots thudding against the hardwood, his hand shaking as it rose to cup her face, his fingers brushed her skin, warm and real, shattering the decades he’d mourned her, “They told me you were dead,” he choked out, his voice breaking on the edge of a sob, “Rumpelstiltskin…” She finished for him, “Lied.” Tears brimmed, glistening as they caught the light, “He locked me away, drained my magic, Veyra’s gift, bit by bit. I escaped when the curse broke, but I thought…” Her gaze flicked to Emma, uncertainty shadowing her gray eye, “I thought you’d moved on.” He raised his eyebrow, “Moved on?” his laugh was soft, bitter, laced with disbelief. He pulled her into his arms, his hand sliding to her back, “You’re my compass, love. I searched. Tore the realms apart. Every shore, every shadow. I’ve been lost without you.”

Her fingers brushed his chest, tracing the edge of his shirt, then slid around him. Her arms tightened as he buried his face in her hair, breathing in the scent of wildflowers and sea salt, the driftwood ring on her finger pressing against his chest like a vow reclaimed, its sapphire glinting like the stars they’d once sworn under aboard the Jolly Roger.

He kissed her, a fierce, desperate press of lips, hunger born of countless realms crossed and battles fought, tasting her tears, her warmth flooding through the dam of his grief. Her hands tangled in his hair, pulling him closer as she molded herself against him. Her breath hitched as their kiss deepened, slow and aching, a dance of longing that hushed the diner, plates stilled, forks hung midair, the air thick with the weight of their reunion.

The instant their lips touched, a surge of light erupted from their lips, the unmistakable ripple of true love’s kiss radiating outward. A shimmering wave of warmth and magic pulsed through the diner, rattling plates on tables, skipping the jukebox’s needle before it resumed, bathing the room in a soft, ethereal glow.

Granny dropped her spatula with a loud clang, the metal bouncing off the counter. “Well, I’ll be damned,” she barked, her gray bun bobbing as she stared, hands on her hips; Grumpy slammed his beer mug down, foam sloshing over the edge, “What in the blazes?” he roared, his gruff voice cutting through the hush; Ruby’s tray wobbled, coffee spilling as she gasped, “True love,” her wide eyes reflecting the glow, her wolfish grin faltering into awe; Archie’s teacup trembled in his hands, Pongo whining softly as he lifted his head, “Remarkable,” Archie murmured, his glasses glinting as he adjusted them, a therapist’s curiosity flickering in his calm gaze.

The ripple stretched beyond the diner’s walls. Out on the harbor, waves stilled for a heartbeat, leaves quivered on trees lining Main Street, a faint hum vibrated through the air, felt by every soul in Storybrooke as a whisper of something ancient and unbreakable reawakening.

Killian pulled back just enough to rest his forehead against hers, his breath ragged, “You’re real,” he rasped, tracing the sapphire ring on her finger, a symbol of their realm-spanning vows, the sapphire catching the diner’s fluorescent glow. She looked at him, “Aye, pirate. That I am.” He looked her in the eye, “I never stopped loving you,” he murmured, his voice raw, cracking with the past, his breath warm against her skin, his hand gripping her shoulders as if she might slip away. Her fingers dug into his shirt, “Nor I you,” she whispered, her lips finding his again, slower this time, savoring him, tears wetting his cheeks as their kiss lingered, the diner fading to a distant hum around them.

Silence blanketed the room. Ruby froze mid-pour at the counter, coffee overflowing a mug as she stared, wide-eyed. “Holy hell,” she muttered under her breath, her tray tilting forgotten in her hand. Grumpy’s beer sat untouched, his gruff exterior softening as he leaned forward. “What…” he breathed, shock lacing his tone. Patrons turned, their chatter dying as they watched the pair rekindle a flame long thought extinguished.

Emma’s expression flickered, unreadable for a moment, then softened. “Wait. Rumpelstiltskin? Why?” her voice steady but edged with urgency, her sheriff’s instincts kicking in as she slid off her stool, boots landing with a soft thud on the checkered floor, her leather jacket pulling taut across her shoulders.

The diner’s door opened with a brisk swirl of fog, ushering in Regina, her black coat billowing like a brewing storm cloud as she crossed the threshold, just in time to catch Emma’s question. “Because he’s a manipulative bastard,” she quipped. The words lingered like a thrown dagger, still vibrating in the space she stepped into.

Regina'd come to Granny's drawn by the undeniable ripple of a true love's kiss she'd seen and felt shudder through Storybrooke, a sensation too potent to ignore. Her eyes narrowed, honing in on Desylva with a predator's precision. She'd long thought Desylva dead, but here she stood, alive, a faint pulse of magic clinging to her like a whisper of defiance, stirring a tumult of questions about what had truly transpired.

Regina masked her recognition, keeping her features schooled into cool suspicion, giving no hint she knew Desylva's name or past. Her gaze fell to Desylva's hand, and the cursed mark etched into her skin—a mark Regina knew too well, now flickering faintly with renewed life. Killian, she realized with a silent jolt, was sparking her magic awake again, the pirate's influence threading through this anomaly like a needle through torn fabric.

Her tone cut sharp as she spoke, suspicion veiling her deeper awareness, "What's this about?" The question was aimed at Emma but weighted with the unspoken riddle of Desylva's presence.

Desylva's head snapped toward Regina's voice, a blade-sharp recognition flaring in her storm-gray eyes as the past roared back. Her fingers twitched, sparks crackling at her fingertips as her cursed mark pulsed fiercely, her body coiling like a storm about to unleash, her jaw set with a fury that threatened to flood the diner. Killian sensed her shift, his hand swiftly closing over hers, his grip firm yet gentle, grounding her. "Easy, love, she's not our fight tonight," he whispered into her ear, his voice low and urgent. She turned to him, his blue eyes steady as they met hers, urging calm. Desylva's gaze flickered, her breath hitching as his words pierced her tempest, her shoulders easing just enough to still her magic. Her eyes returned to Regina with a promise of reckoning unvoiced. Killian whispered something else into her ear, too quiet to be heard. Emma and Regina didn't notice the moment between Killian and Desylva as they were in their own conversation.

Emma filled in Regina, "Apparently he kept her locked up, tried to drain her power." Regina's smirk faded, her expression darkening, "If he's after her magic, it's a bigger game. We need answers." Emma pointed to a booth tucked in the corner, her sheriff's instinct steering the group through the hushed diner. Killian lingered a moment, his eyes locked on Desylva. She squeezed his hand indicating she was okay. He grabbed his black coat from the stool and pulled it on smoothly, the leather's soft rustle echoing his steady strides as they headed to the booth together.

Killian sank onto the vinyl bench seat first, Desylva sitting close beside him, his hand finding hers instinctively, fingers brushing the driftwood ring. Regina, her eyes sharp, slid in next to Emma on the other side.

The diner's bell jingled again as Snow and David stepped inside, frost clinging to their coats and boots scuffing the checkered linoleum. Their breaths still clouded from the cold they'd braved while walking home, until the unmistakable ripple of a true love's kiss had shivered through Storybrooke, narrowing their focus to Granny's as they hastened to uncover its source. Snow's dark hair peeked from beneath a knit cap, her cream coat buttoned tight against the chill, while David's flannel layered beneath his leather jacket, the faint glint of his sword hilt at his hip a reminder of their fairytale roots. They paused just inside, brows knitting as the diner's air thrummed with a charged hum, patrons murmured over half-eaten meals, their eyes darting between bites and the couple in the booth, the afterglow of magic still palpable.

Snow's eyes sharpened as they landed on Killian and the unfamiliar woman beside him, her hand grazing David's arm, "We were right; it started here. Who could've sparked it?" she whispered, her voice a mix of wonder and suspicion. David nodded, his jaw firming as he scanned the room, his gaze settling on the stranger with Killian, sensing the invisible thread binding them. They moved toward the counter where Ruby lounged, wiping her hands on her apron, red streaks in her hair catching the diner's warm light. "Ruby," David said, his tone low yet steady, "who's that with Hook?" Her sly grin flashed as she leaned in, "Desylva, old flame, decades-old, from his pirate days. Their true love's kiss just set off fireworks you couldn't miss."

Snow's breath hitched, her grip tightening on David's arm, "We felt it ripple through town on our way home; we had to see who caused it," she said, her gaze flicking to Desylva's wild hair and Killian's softened stare, a quiet disbelief coloring her words as she murmured, "True love? Hook?" Ruby popped a piece of gum, nodding, "They've got history." David exchanged a glance with Snow, his eyes shadowing with concern as her lips pressed thin, a silent question lingering between them. They grabbed mugs of coffee from Ruby's swift pour and approached the booth.

Snow slid in first, her mug clinking softly against the table, her voice warm yet laced with curiosity, “Seems we’ve got some catching up to do.” David settled beside her, clapping Killian’s shoulder with a firm, friendly grip, “Felt that true love wave hit us outside,” he said, his tone easy but probing, “Heard you caused it?” he added a faint smile tugging at his mouth. Killian’s hand rested on Desylva’s, his hook idle beside his untouched coffee, “Aye, didn’t see it coming myself. She’s back, and it’s like the world’s steady again,” he admitted, his voice rough with unguarded emotion. Desylva met Snow’s gaze, her gray eyes unwavering, “He’s my anchor. Always has been,” she said, her words heavy with the echo of shared battles, her storm-wrought presence a quiet, undeniable force in the diner’s glow.

The bell jangled once more. Henry burst inside, his sneakers squeaking against the polished hardwood floor, his storybook clutched tight under his arm. His navy jacket flapped open, chestnut hair tousled from a frantic sprint through the fog. His eyes blazed with awe and desperate hope as he skidded to a stop, spotting Desylva. “Wait, you’re her? The Tempest? You’re back!” His voice trembled with excitement, breath puffing out in quick, misty bursts as he rushed toward her, nearly tripping over a chair. He thrust the book onto the table, slid in beside Regina and flipped it open with shaky hands to a sketch of Desylva and Killian aboard the Jolly Roger. Desylva’s cloak billowing like a storm cloud, the driftwood ring stark against the page. “A gust of wind hit my room last night, opened it right here! This wasn’t in it before. I swear!”

Emma squinted at the drawing, her brow furrowing, “I’ve read this thing a hundred times. He’s right. It wasn’t there,” she muttered, unease threading through her voice like a taut wire. Henry’s gaze snapped to Killian, “You know what this means, right? You’re in the book. True love!” His faith shone unshakable, a beacon in his wide eyes.

Ruby, wiping down a nearby table with a flick of her cloth, tossed a grin over her shoulder, “Kid’s always had a nose for stories; never misses a beat.” Regina’s sharp edges softened as she watched Henry’s excitement spill over, his animated chatter chipping away at her usual stern mask to reveal a rare glimmer of pride in her eyes.

The bell chimed softly as Belle slipped in, her chestnut curls damp from the mist, her gaze darting toward the booth where Killian sat with the stranger. She’d been with Rumpel when the true love’s kiss wave pulsed through Storybrooke, catching the shadow of concern that tightened his face, a look that hinted he knew far more than he’d let on. She’d felt the weight of his unease, his muttered words about a gem, a curse, and a storm-witch slipping out under his breath, too faint to fully grasp but enough to stir her suspicion that something deep troubled the Dark One; it had driven her here to Granny’s, seeking answers from anyone who might know what it meant. Her eyes settled on Desylva, then flicked to Henry’s open storybook as she stepped closer, her voice hushed but firm, “Rumpel’s on edge.”

Desylva tensed, her mark pulsing at the mention of Rumpelstiltskin’s name. Killian sensed her tension, grabbed her hand, and softly whispered something into her ear. She relaxed. No-one seemed to notice the silent exchange between them.

Belle continued, “He’s muttering about a gem, and a curse, something’s got him rattled.” She pointed to the illustrated page, and added, “and I think it’s tied to this.” Henry jabbed a finger at the same page, his voice bright with discovery, and looked to Killian and Desylva. “Gold’s scared of you two together. Look, it’s right here!”

Belle’s gaze lifted to Desylva, her brow furrowing as she asked, “Are you the storm-witch he’s mumbling about?” Before Desylva could respond, Henry bounced in his seat, cutting in with unrestrained glee, “That’s Desylva! She’s Killian’s true love from way back. Pirates, storms, epic adventures! I can’t believe I’m watching another true love story happen right in front of me!” His excitement crackling through the diner as he beamed, eyes wide with the thrill of witnessing history unfold anew. Belle’s gaze flickered between the page and Desylva, sensing the threads of a larger tale tightening around them.

Emma leaned forward, her elbows resting on the worn wooden table, the faint hum of the jukebox weaving through the air as she fixed her gaze on Desylva. “Start from the beginning,” she said, her voice steady but laced with the quiet urgency of someone who’d seen too many fairy-tale threads unravel.

Henry, perched on the edge of the booth’s cracked red vinyl seat, clutched his storybook like a lifeline. His eyes wide with anticipation. Belle slid in beside Henry, her delicate frame almost swallowed by the booth’s shadow, a napkin spread before her as she scribbled notes with a fountain pen, ink smudging faintly on her fingertips. The

diner's warm glow caught the steam rising from coffee mugs, the scent of fried onions and cinnamon lingering as the group leaned in, a makeshift council bound by fate and flickering hope.

Desylva drew a slow breath, her gray eyes, stormy as the seas she'd once ruled, steadying as she found her voice, its timbre low and resonant, carrying the weight of years lost and battles won. "It started before our wedding. Rumpelstiltskin appeared in our cabin," she began, her fingers brushing the driftwood ring on her left hand, its sapphire glinting like a captured wave under the diner's fluorescent lights, "and dragged me through a portal. Locked me in a tower of black stone, its walls slick with damp and echoing with his laughter. For decades he siphoned my storm magic. I fought, but the chains were enchanted, cold iron biting my wrists. It seemed like I'd be trapped forever in the endless cycle. Until you," she looked across the table to Emma, her gaze softening with gratitude, "broke the Dark Curse. Magic flooded back like a tide, snapping his spells. I escaped and hid in the woods, healing in shadows. I never took this off," she said, lifting her hand higher, the ring's grain a quiet vow etched in wood and memory, its sapphire a beacon of the love she'd clung to through the dark.

Killian's grip tightened on the edge of the table, his knuckles whitening beneath the strain, his black leather coat creaking faintly as he shifted, guilt flickered across his rugged features, etching lines deeper into his brow, his blue eyes shadowed with a storm of their own. "I tore realms apart searching for you, love. Sailed the Roger through hell itself, from Neverland's jungles to the Fireglass Sea, chasing whispers, gutted by every dead end," he rasped, his voice rough with the ache. "Thought you were gone forever, lost to me like…" He faltered, Milah's name unspoken but heavy in the air.

Desylva reached for him, her hand resting on his arm, fingers brushing the leather sleeve, grounding him with a touch as steady as a lighthouse in fog. "You didn't know, Killian," she murmured, her tone soft but firm, a quiet absolution that eased the tension in his shoulders as their eyes locked, a tether forged across time and torment.

Emma's resolve sharpened, her eyes narrowing as she leaned closer, hair slipping over her shoulder. "Gold's still pulling strings. He's not done with this," she said, her voice cutting through the diner's hum like a blade. "He wanted to hurt Hook, always has, and you, Desylva, you're a threat to him, a wild card he can't control."

Regina, lounging against the booth's backrest with a predator's grace, smirked, her dark hair gleaming under the lights, her fingers tracing the rim of her coffee mug. "Ruining love stories is his specialty, ripping hearts apart, literally or not, it's how he plays the game," she drawled, her tone dry but edged with a bitter knowingness born of her own scars.

Henry piped up, his youthful voice breaking the tension like a sunbeam through clouds, "But the book says you outsmart him! Look. The *Tears of the Moon*!" He turned the page in the storybook, its pages rustling as he jabbed a finger at an illustration. *Killian and Desylva silhouetted against a crescent moon, a gem glowing between them*.

Killian's hand dipped into his coat pocket, pulling out the *Tears of the Moon*—a pearlescent gem the size of a dove's egg, its surface swirling with blues and silvers, pulsing with a faint, otherworldly glow that cast soft light across the table. "Kept it for you," he told Desylva, his voice low and thick with emotion as he slid it toward her, then glanced at Emma with a flicker of gratitude. "Saved us more than once, broke curses that'd've sunk us."

Emma skimmed the open page, her fingers brushing the worn paper as she read aloud, her voice steady but tinged with unease, "*The Tempest and Pirate fought as one, a love unbroken 'til the Dark One stole her… she returned, but fate had a twist.*" Her heart sank, a cold weight settling in her chest as she looked up, her brow furrowing. "A twist? What's the twist?" she asked, her eyes darting between Killian and Desylva, the question hanging like a storm cloud over the booth.

Grumpy, slouched in the corner with a mug of beer cradled in his stubby hands, muttered into the foam, "More fairy-tale nonsense, always a damn catch with you lot." His gravelly voice carried a familiar cynicism, but his sidelong glance at Desylva held a reluctant edge, as if her presence stirred something beneath his gruff exterior.

Killian's chest tightened, the ring on Desylva's finger pressing like a searing ember against his own scars. He turned to her, blue eyes softening with a raw, aching hope, "My world's been hollow without you, love; even the Roger's creaked with your absence, and I've needed you more than the sea itself," he murmured, his voice thick with longing, then flicked his gaze to Emma.

Emma met his look with unwavering resolve, “We’ll sort this out. Together. No matter what Gold’s scheming.” Regina’s smirk sharpened, a spark of amusement glinting in her eyes, “Oh, he’s playing you against each other, classic Gold, straight from his tired old playbook. Divide and conquer.” Henry’s grin flared bright, his boundless optimism cutting through the tension, “Operation Tempest! We’ll outsmart him. We’ve got the perfect crew for it!” His infectious energy rippled through the booth, a defiant light against the gathering shadows.

Ruby paused behind the counter, red streaks in her hair glinting as she leaned over with a wolfish grin, damp rag dangling from her hand, “She’s got guts. I’m sold already. Bet she’d leave Gold scrambling for his precious coins.” Grumpy snorted into his beer, foam flecking his beard, “More drama, just what this town needs,” he muttered, though his lingering glance at Desylva softened his scowl, a grudging respect flickering for the woman whose storm-hardened spirit echoed his own stubborn grit.

Snow leaned in, her eyes warm with empathy as she offered Desylva a knowing smile, “You’ve battled storms, real and otherwise. We recognize that strength, and it belongs here.” Her voice soothed like a balm, her hand grazing Killian’s shoulder in a gentle, grounding touch. David nodded, his broad frame exuding calm, his voice a low rumble of certainty, “You’ve both got a place here. Storybrooke’s weathered darker tricks than Gold’s games.”

Belle glanced up from her napkin, pen stilling as she spoke softly, “Rumpel’s rattled by her return. It’s gnawing at him, chipping away his control.” Her words landed with a librarian’s precision, delicate yet piercing. Ruby’s smirk widened, elbows planting on the table’s edge, eyes dancing with mischief, “Let him squirm. She’d mop the floor with him, storm magic or not,” her tone playful yet fierce, a nod to the wild kinship she sensed in Desylva. Grumpy took a slow swig, mug clinking as he set it down, “‘Til Gold screws us again. Just watch,” he growled, but his gaze held on Desylva, a crack in his scowl betraying admiration for her storm-forged resilience.

The diner hummed around them, clatter of plates and murmurs weaving a rich backdrop to their unfolding tale, a tapestry of loss, love, and defiance binding them tight. Killian’s hand slipped beneath the table to find Desylva’s, fingers threading through hers, pirate grit meeting storm-born strength, the ring a quiet oath as the gem’s faint glow pulsed on the table. Emma watched. Her jaw set with resolve. Gold’s shadow loomed, but the circle around her, Henry’s hope, Regina’s cunning, Snow and David’s warmth, Belle’s insight, Ruby’s fire, even Grumpy’s reluctant trust, wove a bond stronger than any curse. The jukebox clicked to a new tune, its melody threading through the air as the booth turned into a crucible of determination. Their voices rising like a swell, a storm and a pirate reunited, backed by a family forged in Storybrooke’s heart, ready to face whatever fate dangled next.

Jolly Roger (Dusk)

As dusk settled over Storybrooke, the group gathered beside the Jolly Roger, her hull rising from the fog that curled around the docks like tendrils of smoke. Lanterns swayed faintly in the breeze, their amber glow casting flickering shadows across the planks. Killian stood at the heart of it, flanked by Desylva and Emma, two women who’d shaped his soul in different realms, different times. His black coat swaying as the sea wind tugged at its edges. In his pocket, the Tears pulsed faintly, a relic of battles fought beside Emma; on Desylva’s finger, the driftwood ring glinted, a vow from a past he’d never let go.

Regina paced near the gangplank, her heels clicking sharply against the metal, eyes glinting with a strategist’s precision as she fixed her gaze on Desylva, “You didn’t escape. He let you go, a calculated move to unsettle us. Me, Emma, you, all of us. He’s banking on our collapse under this pressure.” Emma crossed her arms, her leather jacket creaking softly, eyes unwavering, “He doesn’t get it; we’re tougher as a unit.” She turned to Desylva, locking onto her storm-gray stare, a silent pact flickering to life between them, forged in the crucible of their shared resolve, “You’re in this with us now,” she said, her voice blending firmness with a quiet warmth, a bridge spanning the tension.

Henry beamed from his perch on a barrel, storybook splayed across his lap, pencil dancing over the pages. “Operation Tempest!” he proclaimed, his tone alight with unshakable belief. Then, with a child’s innocence and a fairytale flourish, he blurted, “Hook proposes again, Desylva says yes, and Gold’s leverage crumbles!” His buoyant words cut through the fog, a radiant spark of hope that left the group momentarily pensive.

Belle, standing nearby, shifted the mood, her brown curls glistening with mist as she frowned gently, “Rumpel’s tormenting himself,” she murmured, her voice tinged with sorrow, “using her to replay his regrets with me and Bae, he’s chained to what he’s lost.”

Desylva held Emma's gaze a beat longer, a quiet kinship passing between two storm-weathered souls, "He misjudged me," she said, her tone resolute, laced with defiance, "and you."

Killian stood at the crossroads of their strength, his heart a tangle of past and present. Emma, his lifeline in this bewildering world of machines and fleeting time, her quiet grit a beacon through his shadows; Desylva, the wild tempest he'd loved with every ounce of his soul and still did, her fierce spirit carved into his very marrow. A rare laugh slipped from Desylva's lips, bright and fleeting, like a ray breaking through a gale. Killian's blue eyes softened as he turned to her, his hand seeking hers, the ring glinting in the lantern's glow, "The ship feels like home again, love; I love you, say you're still mine," he said, his voice a deep, tender current.

Her breath caught, gray eyes flaring with emotion before a smile broke free, fierce yet soft, "Aye, love, I've always been yours," she whispered, leaning in to kiss him deeply, sure and unhurried, her hands cupping his face, their vow rekindled under the starlit sky as the lanterns dimmed into memory.

Emma gave Killian's hand a quick, solid squeeze, a gesture sealing their truce. Then nodded at Henry, "Let's move, kid," her boots scuffed the dock as she stepped back, hair shimmering in the fog's embrace. Regina's smirk flashed as she quipped, "How noble," her coat swirling as she followed Emma. Belle trailed behind, satchel gripped tight, her resolve firming to face Rumpel, while Archie lingered briefly, umbrella tapping the planks, then slipped away with a subtle nod, Pongo's wagging tail fading into the mist, leaving Killian and Desylva to their reclaimed moment.

Alone now, Killian led Desylva up the gangplank and across the deck. The wood creaked beneath their boots, groaning with memories as if the ship herself sensed her presence. His hand lingered on hers, warm and steady, guiding her to side of the companionway hood. There, carved into the oak, their initials stood defiant. *KJ + D,* etched deep by his hook, and deepened by Smee's old knife, the marks worn but enduring, a testament to storms they'd weathered together. "She kept this here for you, love, for us," he said, his voice soft, carrying a reverence that echoed their shared past. He pulled her into his arms. Their foreheads touching as the sea breeze carried her scent, salt and wildflowers, a balm to his scarred soul. She traced the carving with trembling fingers, her storm-cloud eyes shimmering. "This ring kept me alive, every day in that tower, it was you, my anchor," she whispered, her voice breaking as tears spilled. Her palm pressed to his chest, feeling his heartbeat sync with hers, her leather jacket creaked as she leaned into him, her boots scuffing the deck.

Their kiss came slow, deep, a storm rekindled. His lips pressed against hers with a quiet hunger, tasting the salt of her tears, the wildness of her spirit. Her hands slid to his shoulders, gripping his coat as she melted into him. The deck swayed gently beneath them, the Jolly Roger rocking with the tide as if welcoming her home. The sea's murmur wove through the air, a soft counterpoint to their breaths. His arms tightened around her, holding her close as they gazed up at the stars piercing the fog. Her voice steadied as she spoke, unraveling the years, "A gilded cage, mirrors and chains. … I fought to find you… every step through those woods… every whisper of your name across the realms."

Killian reached into his pocket, pulling out the Tears, its faint glow pulsed in his palm, "I kept it for you," he murmured, "Always hoped." His kiss followed, soft at first, then fierce, the decades melting away as his lips claimed hers, his hand cupping her face, her fingers tangled in his hair, pulling him closer. The ship creaked beside them, a silent witness to their reunion. Desylva kissed him back, her touch tender yet wild under the starlight, "I don't expect you to choose," she murmured against his lips, "But I'm not leaving you again," her gray eyes locked with his, resolute. His smile curved, raw and real, "Nor I you, love." His arms wrapped around her, holding her as the night deepened.

The Jolly Roger their sanctuary, timbers humming with the weight of their love reclaimed.

Day 3

Desylva wandered alone through the quiet streets, the sun sinking low, painting the sky in hues of amber and violet as it cast long, jagged shadows across the pavement. Her leather boots scuffed against the cracked asphalt, each step kicking up a faint dusting of fallen leaves, their brittle edges crunching like dry bones underfoot, their earthy scent mingling with the crisp bite of the air. Her dark hair hung loose, cascading over her shoulders in wild waves, swaying as a cool breeze tugged at its strands. The wind carried the faint tang of salt from the nearby harbor, a whisper of the sea that stirred her blood, a reminder of Veyra's cliffs and the storms that had birthed her. Her cursed mark pulsed faintly on her wrist, a dull blue glow flickering beneath the worn cuff of her leather sleeve. Each throb

was a visceral echo of Myrra's chains, the searing glyph branded into her flesh, and the countless battles she'd fought beside Killian across realms of shadow, fire, and storm, her skin prickling with the memory of lightning in her veins.

Town Square

Desylva paused in the heart of the town square, her breath escaping in faint, silvery wisps that curled upward into the crisp air, dissipating beneath the looming shadow of the clock tower. She tilted her head back, her storm-gray eyes sharp and lit with an untamed flicker, fixing on the tower's face, where black hands stood out like iron bones against the faded cream backdrop, their steady tick echoing through the stillness. The sound pulsed like a mechanical heartbeat, a relentless rhythm anchoring this strange, grounded world, a place where the wild seas and jagged cliffs of her past felt both a lifetime away and achingly close, tugging at the edges of her soul. The square stretched around her, silent and bare under the overcast sky. Empty benches lined the cobblestone paths, their wood splintered and damp, while wilted flower beds huddled nearby, petals curling inward as if shielding themselves from the creeping chill.

Her gaze swept the desolate scene, lingering on the frost-dusted petals and the faint mist clinging to the ground, her senses attuned to the quiet unease that seemed to ripple beneath the town's surface. Her fingers twitched instinctively, brushing the leather-wrapped hilt of the dagger sheathed at her hip, a reflex born of years dodging danger on Veyra's rocky shores. She missed her old blade, lost to time, its familiar weight a ghost in her palm; this new one, scavenged from the tangled undergrowth of Storybrooke's woods, had taken time to claim. She'd found it half-buried under moss and roots, its steel dulled but sturdy, hours of sharpening and grip-wrapping had molded it to her hand, its heft now a steady comfort against the coiled tension in her gut. Here, in this tame place of picket fences and paved streets, it was a tether to the feral strength she carried within, a quiet promise that the storm-touched girl who'd once speared fish under a gray dawn still lived beneath her skin.

A rustle of leaves snapped her from her thoughts. Regina emerged from a side street, her heels clicking with deliberate purpose against the pavement, the sound sharp and measured, cutting through the square's hush like a blade through silk. Her black coat was tailored and crisp against the graying day, its hem brushing the ground like a shadow trailing her steps, the fabric catching the fading light in subtle glints. She wore it like armor, though the lines of her posture betrayed a tension beneath the polish. Her dark hair was pulled back into a tight bun, strands sleek and disciplined, accentuating the softened contours of her face. No longer the Evil Queen's imperious glare, her eyes flickered with something raw, a vulnerability that clashed with the memory of her past cruelty, her lips pressed into a thin line as she approached.

She stopped a few paces away, her stance rigid but her hands clasped tightly before her, knuckles whitening as her fingers dug into her palms, bracing for rejection or worse. "Desylva," she began, her voice steady yet threaded with an unfamiliar weight, a tremor lurking beneath its polished surface like a crack in stone, "I need you to hear me. I'm not who I was back then. Those curses I cast, the chaos I unleashed in those realms. … I'm sorry for what it cost you, for the pain I carved into your life with every spell, every trap."

Desylva's stance stiffened, her shoulders squaring as a sudden gust of wind whipped through the square. Leaves spiraled upward in a chaotic vortex, their rustling a chorus to the storm brewing in her chest. Memories crashed over her like a tidal surge. … Killian's chest seared by venom, his grunts of pain as he staggered, her hands slick with his blood as she fought to save him.

Regina took a cautious step closer, her boots crunching a brittle leaf underfoot, the sound a stark punctuation to her words. She pressed on, her voice lowering to a raw, ragged edge, each syllable heavy with a burden she'd carried too long. "I was lost, Desylva, drowning in a pain I couldn't bury. Daniel's heart ripped out before my eyes, still beating in Cora's hand as he fell in that stable, the blood soaking into the hay. My mother's schemes twisting me into something I didn't recognize, a puppet of her ambition until I cut the strings and became worse. I let that rage spill over, into you, into him, into every realm we crossed. It's no excuse, I know that, but it's the truth of who I was."

Desylva's gray eyes narrowed to slits, her hand snapping to the dagger's hilt with a predator's speed. She drew it in a fluid arc, the blade glinting coldly as she leveled it toward Regina, its tip hovering inches from her chest, steady despite the tremor in her arm. "You tore through us, Regina," she growled, her voice low and edged with thunder, the air crackling faintly around her as static danced along her skin. Her cursed mark flared brighter, blue light pulsing in frantic rhythm with her racing pulse, casting eerie shadows across her face. "Your despair drowned me more than

once, left me choking on grief I'd buried deep. … All of it rushing back until I couldn't breathe. Your venom burned Killian's flesh. I held him as he bled, his cries in my ears because of you. Sorry doesn't erase that. It doesn't bring back what I lost, what you stole." A low rumble rolled through the sky, the clouds above darkening to a bruised purple as her storm stirred. Her hair whipped wildly in the gusts she couldn't fully leash, strands lashing her cheeks like dark tendrils, her boots scuffing the pavement as she shifted her weight, ready to strike.

Regina didn't flinch. Her eyes locked with Desylva's, steady and unyielding despite the blade's gleaming threat, though her clasped hands tightened further, her nails biting into her palms until faint beads of blood welled beneath them, staining her skin with tiny red crescents. "I know," she said, her voice cracking like splintering wood, her gaze dropping to the pavement for a heartbeat. Her shoulders sagged briefly, a flicker of the woman beneath the queen, before she lifted her eyes again, resolute, "I know it doesn't undo the past, doesn't stitch up the wounds I left. I've spent years here facing what I did. Every night waking to Daniel's face, every day seeing the scars I carved into this town. Killian's given me a second chance, shown me redemption's not just a fairy tale. He's fought beside me, trusted me when I didn't deserve it, when I was still clawing out of that darkness. I'm asking you to do the same, to let the past stay buried where it belongs, even if it's under a mountain of ash."

Desylva's grip on the dagger faltered, the blade dipping as her storm wavered, a jagged flicker of lightning split the clouds, its white-hot arc illuminating the square in stark relief, casting their shadows long and sharp before fading into a heavy, oppressive silence. She sheathed the weapon with a sharp clack, the sound echoing off the surrounding buildings. Her fingers trembled as she crossed her arms over her chest. Her gray eyes boring into Regina's with a ferocity tempered by exhaustion. Memories of Killian's quiet words in the diner surfaced, his belief in second chances, his hand warm and steady on hers as he spoke of moving forward, his blue eyes soft with a faith she couldn't yet mirror. "He sees something in you," she muttered, her voice rough as gravel, scraping against the silence, "something I don't. … Yet."

Regina exhaled, a faint plume of breath curling in the cooling air, her shoulders easing slightly as she unclenched her hand, red crescents marked her palms where her nails had bitten deep, a faint smear of blood glistening in the dimming light as she flexed her fingers, wincing at the sting. "Trust takes more than words. I get that," she said, her tone softening to a near-plea, the polished edge of her voice giving way to something rawer, more human, "I'm trying to earn it, one day at a time, one choice at a time. Every step I take here, every fight I don't start. I don't expect you to forget. Just to give me the chance to prove I've changed, that I'm not her anymore."

Desylva stood silent, her boots rooted to the pavement as the wind died to a whisper, leaves settling in a scattered halo around her. Her cursed mark dimmed, its blue glow retreating beneath her sleeve like a tide pulling back, though her pulse still thudded with the echo of old wounds, a drumbeat of loss and fury she couldn't silence. She tilted her head, studying Regina, the woman's faint, bittersweet smile, the vulnerability in her stance, the way her coat hung heavy as if bearing the weight of her past, and felt a flicker of something stir, not trust, not yet, but a crack in the fortress she'd built around her heart, a sliver of light piercing the storm clouds.

"Fine," she said at last, her voice a grudging rumble as she exhaled. A gust stirred the leaves once more, swirling them briefly before they fell still, "The past stays buried. For now. But I'm watching you, Regina. Every step, every shadow, every breath you take. One slip, one hint of that queen I fought in those realms, and my storm won't hesitate. I'll bury you in it, deep enough you'll never claw out."

Regina nodded, a slow, deliberate motion, her smile tightening with a mix of relief and resignation. Her eyes held a glint of understanding, perhaps even a grudging respect, as she met Desylva's gaze one last time. "Fair enough," she said, her voice steady again, though it carried a faint tremor of acceptance. She turned, her coat flaring slightly as she walked away, the fabric catching the last rays of the sinking sun in a shimmer of black. Her heels clicked a retreating rhythm against the pavement, each step a fading echo swallowed by the hum of the town waking around them. Shop lights flickered on, casting golden pools across the street, and a distant laugh drifted from Granny's as the evening crowd gathered.

Desylva remained in the square, her arms still crossed, her gray eyes tracking Regina until she vanished around a corner near the pawn shop. The clock tower ticked on above, its hands inching forward with relentless precision, a single leaf fluttering down to rest at her feet, its edges curling inward like a hand closing over a secret. Her trust was a fragile thread, not yet woven into anything solid. Her heart stayed wary, a storm coiled beneath her skin, ready to unleash at the slightest provocation, but a sliver of possibility lingered, sparked by Killian's faith and Regina's halting words, a chance she'd weigh with every glance, every move, in the days stretching ahead.

The Jolly Roger (A few hours later)

Desylva sought Killian aboard the Jolly Roger, the ship swaying gently at the dock. Lanterns hung from the rigging, casting a warm, amber glow across the deck, their flickering flames dancing on the polished wood and glinting off the brass fittings.

Killian leaned against the helm, his black coat unbuttoned, its tails fluttering faintly in the breeze. His hook tapped idly against the wheel's spokes, a soft metallic clink blending with the rhythmic slap of waves against the hull, his dark hair tousled by the salt air. She climbed aboard, her boots thudding softly on the planks as she crossed the deck. Her dark hair still bore the day's wildness, strands clinging to her cheeks, and her leather jacket creaked as she moved, the scent of ozone and sea clinging to her like a second skin.

She paused near the starboard railing, leaning against it with one hip, her gray eyes catching his as the sea's murmur filled the space between them. Lantern light played across her face, highlighting the sharp lines of her jaw and the storm-lit intensity in her gaze. "Ran into Regina earlier in the square," she said, her voice low, a faint edge lingering as she crossed her arms again, her fingers brushing the edge of her sleeve where the cursed mark hid, "She apologized, said she's not the queen we fought all those years ago. Asked me to bury the past, like you have."

Killian straightened, his blue eyes narrowing slightly as he pushed off the helm, his hook glinting in the lantern light like a crescent moon. He stepped toward her, his boots scuffing the deck with a familiar rhythm, stopping close enough for her to feel the warmth radiating from him, his scent of leather, rum, and salt a steady anchor in the shifting air. "Aye, she did the same with me a while back," he replied, his tone steady but warm, roughened by years at sea yet softened by the weight of her presence. His gaze searched hers, tracing the storm in her eyes as he tilted his head slightly, a lock of hair falling across his brow. "Took me by surprise too, love. Didn't expect it from her, not after all the blood between us. But I've seen her try, really try, to change here in Storybrooke. She's fought with us, not against us. Put herself in the line of fire when she didn't have to. Saved me, once, risked her own magic to do it, cost her a day's strength and a hell of a lot of grit." He reached for her hand, his fingers lacing through hers with a gentle firmness, his hook rested lightly on her waist, its cool curve pressing through her jacket as he pulled her closer, his breath mingling with hers in the cool night air.

Desylva's jaw tightened, her free hand drifting to the dagger at her hip. Her fingers brushed its hilt as she turned her head to look out at the water, its surface rippling under the evening breeze, reflecting the lanterns in fractured golden shards. "Trying's one thing, Killian," she said, her voice a low growl, rough with the weight of memory, "I felt her despair in my bones in that temple. Torin's blood, Lysara's ash, all crashing back until I couldn't breathe. Saw her venom scar you, your chest torn open, blood soaking my hands as I held you up. Sorry doesn't wipe that clean." A faint gust swirled around them, lifting the edges of his coat, and tugging at her hair, her cursed mark pulsed again, a soft blue flicker beneath her sleeve, its hum a quiet echo of her unease.

Killian nodded, his grip tightened on her hand, his thumb brushed her knuckles, a steady rhythm against her skin as he stepped closer still, his hook sliding to her lower back, anchoring her against the storm she carried. "I know, my tempest, it doesn't erase the blood, the pain, not a damn bit of it," he said, his voice dropping to a rough murmur, his blue eyes steady and unflinching, "Took me some time to look past it myself. It cut deeper than this hook ever could. But she's not the same, she's not spinning curses in shadows anymore, not here. She's facing what she did, bleeds for it, loses for it, fights for it. I've watched her stumble, pick herself up, and keep going. Doesn't mean I trust her blind, love. Hook's always ready, aye? But I believe she's clawing her way to something better, something worth a chance."

Desylva's gray eyes flicked back to his, the storm in them softening at the edges as his words sank in. Her shoulders eased slightly, the tension bleeding out as she leaned into his touch, her cursed mark's glow dimming to a faint shimmer beneath her sleeve, its pulse slowing with her breath. She squeezed his hand, her fingers tightening around his as a small gust swirled around them, lifting his hair, and rustling the sails overhead.

The air carried a hint of rain, a whisper of her magic threading through the moment. "If you see it, if you've watched her bleed for it, maybe there's something there," she murmured, her voice softer now but still laced with a guarded edge, a storm held in check, "I'll give her that chance, for you, Killian, for the faith you've got in her that I can't find yet. But my storm's still mine. I'm not letting go of it, not dropping my guard until I see it myself."

Killian's lips curved into a faint, knowing smile, the lines around his eyes crinkling as he tilted his head closer, his thumb brushed her knuckles again, a gentle sweep as he held her gaze, his blue eyes warm with a quiet pride. "Nor should you, love. Keep that fire, that wildness. It's what I love most about you," he said, his voice a low rumble, rough with affection, "Just know I've got your back, always, through every storm, every shadow. We'll watch her together, aye?"

He pulled her into a brief, fierce kiss, his lips pressed hard against hers, tasting of salt and rum, her storm calming against his steady warmth as she melted into him, her free hand sliding up to grip his coat collar, anchoring herself to him. When they parted, her breath misted between them, her trust in Regina still a flicker, a fragile spark steadied by his faith and their unbreakable bond, her storm simmering but held at bay, for now.

Day 4

The late afternoon sun dipped low, painting the sky in streaks of amber and violet, its fading light glinted off the small building's windows, casting golden reflections onto the cracked sidewalk. A cool breeze that carried the crisp, earthy scent of fallen leaves and the distant tang of sea salt from the harbor. Desylva's leather boots crunched against the gravel sidewalk as she approached, each step kicking up tiny pebbles that skittered away. Her dark hair hung loose and wild, cascading over her shoulders in untamed waves, catching the wind in swirling tendrils that danced around her face like storm clouds. Her gray eyes, sharp and storm-lit, flickered with a volatile mix of determination and uncertainty, their depths churning like the skies she'd once commanded. Her cursed mark pulsed faintly beneath the sleeve of her weathered leather jacket, a dull blue glow throbbing in time with her quickening pulse, its eerie light seeping through the frayed cuff.

She paused outside a door, the text read, "Dr. Archibald Hopper, Psychiatrist." Her breath misted in the chill air. Her hand hovered over the brass knob, fingers trembling slightly as they brushed the dagger sheathed at her hip, a reflex born of instinct. With an exhale that sent a sudden gust rustling the nearby bushes, scattering leaves in a brief whirlwind, she opened the door, stepped inside, and headed up the staircase.

Inside Archie's Office

The office was a cozy haven, its walls lined with bookshelves sagging under the weight of leather-bound volumes. The air carried the mingled scents of aged paper, chamomile tea brewing in a kettle by the window, and the faint smokiness of a small fire crackling in the stone hearth, its amber glow dancing across the hardwood floor. Archie sat behind his desk, his red hair catching the firelight in soft glints, his glasses perched low on his nose as he scribbled notes in a worn journal. His tweed jacket hung loosely over his shoulders, a green scarf draped over the chair's back. Pongo snoozed at his feet, his black-and-white fur rising and falling with gentle snores, his paws twitching in some dream chase.

Desylva knocked and opened the door, the warmth of the room enveloping her like a balm. "Dr. Hopper?" her voice sliced through the stillness, low and edged with the rumble of distant thunder. She crossed the room in a few purposeful strides, her boots thudding softly against the polished wood, and sank into the armchair across from him, its faded green upholstery creaking under her weight. Her posture was rigid yet restless, her spine straight but her hands clasping briefly before settling on her knees. Her leather jacket creaked as she shifted, a faint whiff of ozone clinging to her like a second skin.

Archie looked up, blinking in surprise behind his lenses, then set his pen down with a soft clack on the desk. His journal slid slightly, nudging a stack of papers as he adjusted his glasses, offering a warm, cautious smile that crinkled the corners of his eyes. "Desylva. You've made quite the entrance back in town. Stirred up more than a few whispers. What brings you here today?"

She tilted her head, her gray eyes narrowing slightly as she studied him, assessing the small man with his kind face and quiet demeanor. Her fingers flexed, a faint gust stirring the papers on his desk, lifting their edges in a brief flutter before they settled again, the fire flaring momentarily as if in response.

"I need advice. About Killian," she said, her voice steady but laced with a raw, almost desperate urgency. "We've got a history, him and me, carved across realms you've only read about in that cursed book. He's my pirate, my anchor through all of it. His love sealed with a sapphire from a dragon's hoard that he embedded into this ring." She

lifted her hand, the sapphire ring glinting in the firelight, its deep blue facets catching the glow like a captured star. “He carved it himself from a piece of driftwood from Veyra’s shore. … I want him back, Archie. He’s mine, my everything, the one who pulled me from cursed tides when I’d have drowned. His touch calms me, his kiss gives me strength. But… I see it in his eyes, the way he looks at Emma. He’s got feelings for her, ones that cut me like a blade, and I don’t know what to do with that. Maybe, maybe we could share him, her and me. It’s not unheard of where I’m from. Realms wilder than this tidy little town, where love bends and twists beyond your rules.” Her voice wavered, a crack in her storm-hardened resolve. Her fingers brushed the dagger’s hilt again, grounding herself as her gaze bore into him.

Archie leaned back in his chair, the leather creaking softly under his slight frame as he steepled his fingers, his brow furrowing behind his glasses. Pongo stirred, lifting his head with a quiet whine, his dark eyes blinking sleepily before he flopped back down, the fire popping as a log shifted, sending a shower of sparks up the chimney. He studied her for a long moment, his eyes thoughtful behind the lenses, then cleared his throat, his voice gentle but firm, carrying the weight of years spent unraveling Storybrooke’s tangled hearts.

“That’s… a bold and unconventional idea, Desylva, and it’s brave of you to voice it, to face that complexity head-on. But let me tell you about the Killian I met when he first washed up here. Captain Hook, through and through, swaggering off that ship with a glint in his eye and a hook sharp enough to carve his revenge into anyone who dared cross him. He was all sharp edges, bitter, reckless, drowning in rum and rage over all that Rumpelstiltskin had taken from him—Milah’s heart crushed in his hand, Bae slipping through portals, and a loss he never spoke of, a loss I can only assume now was you. The centuries of loss piling up like ballast in his soul. I saw him then, in sessions he’d scoff at but still stumble into, pacing this very room, hook tapping the desk like a metronome of fury, his coat reeking of the sea and spirits, talking of nothing but vendettas and the waves that carried him. A man lost to his past, to the pirate he’d forged himself into after every blow.”

Archie paused, glancing at a small, framed photo on his desk—Henry and Emma laughing at the docks, Killian’s arm around the boy’s shoulders—before meeting her gaze again, his tone softening with a quiet awe, “And then Emma came into his life. She changed him, Desylva, not in a flash, but steady, like waves wearing down a cliff’s jagged face. She pulled him back from that darkness, she anchored him here, gave him a reason to stay beyond his ghosts. I’ve seen him with her, teaching Henry to fence with a grin instead of a snarl, sitting quietly at Granny’s with coffee instead of rum, his hook resting easy on the table instead of itching for a fight. She’s softened him, given him a home he didn’t know he could have after losing so much.”

Desylva’s jaw tightened, her fingers curling into her palms until her knuckles whitened. A faint rumble echoed outside, the window rattling as storm clouds gathered in her gray eyes, their depths swirling with a tempest of longing and defiance. She leaned forward, her elbows digging into her thighs as her voice dropped to a fierce, husky whisper, “I softened him too, once. Decades ago, when we fought side by side, when I pulled him from wyvern claws with blood on my hands, when he dragged me from cursed tides with his hook snagged in my belt. We were each other’s home, Archie, across realms you can’t fathom, wild, jagged places where love wasn’t tame or tidy, where it roared like my storms. I see him now, with her, and it’s different, aye, but he’s still my Killian, the one who swore forever under that moon with salt in his hair and fire in his eyes. Emma’s changed him, I don’t deny it. But can’t he have both? Can’t we find a way to weave this mess into something whole?”

Her cursed mark flared brighter, a blue pulse illuminating the dim room, casting fleeting shadows across the bookshelves. Her hair shifted as a sudden gust swirled around her, lifting the edges of Archie’s notes, and sending a pencil rolling across the desk before the wind died, her breath coming sharp and uneven, her chest rising and falling as she searched his face, her storm-touched soul laid bare. Archie adjusted his glasses with a deliberate motion, exhaling slowly through his nose as he leaned forward, resting his elbows on the desk, his tweed sleeves brushed the wood, his voice remaining calm and measured, though his eyes held a flicker of sympathy and a trace of concern behind their steady gaze.

“I hear you, Desylva. Your history with him, it’s powerful, visceral, written in battles and vows I can only glimpse through the edges of that book and the stories filtering through this town. You’re right. Love can take wild, untamed forms, especially in the realms you’ve walked, places where rules bend like reeds in a gale. But what Killian’s found with Emma… It’s not just change, its growth. A tether to something he’d lost long before he met her, something he’d buried under that pirate’s swagger. When he first came here, he was a man adrift, a ship without a port. Emma gave him a harbor, a family, a son in Henry he’d never thought to reclaim after Bae slipped away. Sharing him? It’s a noble thought, a generous one even, but it’s not my place to say if it’d work, not really. That’s his heart to navigate,

and yours and Emma's to wrestle with, to storm through together or apart. He's not just the Hook you knew, not entirely. He's more now, because of her, because of this town and the roots he's put down here."

He paused, glancing at Pongo, who thumped his tail once against the floor, a soft thud in the quiet, then back to her. "Talk to him, Desylva, lay it out, all of it, the storms and the sharing and the love you still carry. But know he's not just your pirate anymore, he's theirs too, part of this messy, living tapestry, and that's a storm you'll all have to weather, one way or another."

The fire crackled louder, a log collapsing into a burst of embers that flared briefly. Desylva sat back, her hands unclenching as the wind outside stilled, her gray eyes distant, flickering with unresolved longing, a trace of doubt, and a spark of resolve as she nodded once, sharply, her jaw set like stone. She rose, her boots echoing a slow, deliberate rhythm as she crossed to the door. Her shadow stretching long across the floor, pausing with her hand on the knob, she glanced back, her voice a low murmur, "Thanks, Doc, for listening, at least." She opened the door and exited into the hall, the door clicking shut behind her, leaving Archie to exhale into the quiet, the fire's glow dimming as Pongo whined softly at his feet.

Street

Desylva exited the building and walked off into the fading day, her hands n her pockets.

Day 5

Snow and David sat together in their cozy loft, the morning sun filtering through the lace-curtained windows, casting delicate, shifting patterns across the polished wooden floor. Its golden glow caught the faint grain of the oak, warming the room against the crisp autumn chill seeping through the panes. Steam curled lazily from two ceramic mugs of chamomile tea on the round table between them, their floral scent mingling with the rich, yeasty aroma of freshly baked bread cooling on the counter.

Snow had kneaded the dough that morning, her hands seeking the comfort of routine amidst the unease Desylva's return had stirred. She perched on the edge of a cushioned chair. Her petite frame wrapped in a soft cream sweater. Her dark hair swept into a loose braid that trailed over her shoulder, strands escaped to frame her face, catching the light. She clutched the storybook tightly in her lap, its leather cover worn smooth from years of anxious turning, its edges curling slightly from the press of her fingers.

David stood by the window, his broad frame silhouetted against the glass. One hand resting on the hilt of his sheathed sword propped against the wall, its blade gleamed faintly, a relic of battles past, while his other hand pressed against the cool frame, his knuckles whitening briefly as he gazed out at the quiet street below, where crimson and amber leaves skittered across the pavement in a gentle, restless breeze, their rustling a faint whisper through the cracked window.

Snow opened the storybook with a soft creak of its spine, her fingers trembling slightly as she flipped to a page near the end. Illustrations of Killian and Desylva leaped from the parchment in bold, sweeping strokes of ink… their fierce clash with a wyvern, her storm magic crackling in wild arcs around his raised hook, scales glinting in the chaos; their vow under a moonlit sky, the sapphire ring glinting on her finger as he knelt, her storm-tossed hair framing a fierce smile; their battles across realms, a tempest and a pirate bound by fate, their silhouettes etched against tempests and cannon smoke.

"The book says it clear as day, David," she said, her voice soft but resolute, tinged with the unshakable conviction of someone who'd lived a fairy tale and seen its magic triumph, "Hook and Desylva are true love. It's written here, in every line, every sketch, all those realms we never saw but feel in our bones. We've always believed in true love's power. It woke me from that coffin, broke the first curse with your kiss, saved us time and again through every dark forest and dragon's lair. How can we deny that now when it's staring us in the face?"

She traced the edge of an illustration with her fingertip. The moment Killian handed Desylva the Phoenix Feather, their hands brushing. Her brow furrowing as she pictured his fierce grin in the diner, his hand clasped with Desylva's, her storm-born gusts swirling napkins across the table like a quiet hymn to the bond the book immortalized, a love forged in fire, thunder, and years of defiance.

David turned from the window, his boots thudding softly against the floorboards as he crossed to her side. His leather jacket creaked faintly as he knelt beside her chair, resting a warm hand on her knee, his fingers pressing gently through the denim of her jeans as he met her gaze, his jaw tightening with the weight of a father's instinct warring against fairy-tale faith. "I don't deny what the book says, Snow. I've seen true love's magic too, felt it when I found you in that glass coffin, your breath on my lips as the curse shattered," he said, his voice low and steady, though a thread of anguish wove through it like a crack in stone. "But Emma's our daughter, our little bandit who grew up too fast, too alone. We've watched her and Hook these past few months. How he's stood by her, how she's pulled him from revenge's brink. The way they look at each other. it's not just ink on a page, it's real, it's here in this town. I've seen her smile with him, Snow. That rare, unguarded smile she hides behind her walls, the one she flashed when he taught Henry to tie a sailor's knot on the docks."

He glanced at the storybook, its open pages a silent challenge to his heart, then back to her, his eyes darkened with conflict, his hand tightening on her knee as if grounding himself in their shared history, his thumb brushing absently against the fabric in a restless rhythm.

Snow's fingers stilled on the storybook, her eyes glistening with the threat of tears as she leaned forward, her braid slipped fully over her shoulder, brushing the table's edge, and the sleeve of her sweater slid up slightly, revealing a faint scar from an old arrow wound, a reminder of battles fought for love. Her voice dropped to a near-whisper, laced with the ache of a mother torn between destiny's script and her child's fragile heart. "I know, David. I've seen it too, every moment of it," she admitted, her gaze drifting to the corner of the loft where Emma's red leather jacket hung on a hook beside Henry's backpack, its vibrant hue a quiet symbol of their daughter's strength and the family they'd built. "It's love. Messy and fierce and theirs, carved out of pain and trust right here in Storybrooke. But what if Desylva's return changes that? The book doesn't lie. True love's pull is stronger than anything, a tide we can't fight. If we support her, if we stand by what it says, what does that do to Emma? Does it break her heart all over again, after losing Neal, and Graham. After all the pieces she's stitched back together with Hook at her side?" She closed the book with a soft, decisive thud, her hands pressing flat against its leather cover as if sealing away the answers she couldn't bear to face.

A sudden gust rattled the windowpane, a faint echo of Desylva's storm magic drifting through town, and Snow's breath caught, her mind flooding with visions of Emma alone, her daughter's walls rising higher, her guarded smile fading into shadow.

David rose abruptly, pacing a tight circle before the table. His boots scuffed the floor with each step, leaving faint marks on the wood, his hand raking through his short blond hair until it stood in disarray, his broad shoulders hunching slightly as he wrestled with the dilemma, his voice rising with a mix of frustration and raw, protective fear. "And if we don't support Desylva… if we push against the book, against true love… what does that do to Hook? To Emma, even?" he countered, turning sharply to face her, his eyes blazing with the intensity of a man who'd faced down dragons for his family. "He's torn, Snow. You saw him in the diner, the way he looked at Desylva like she was his past and present crashing together, his hook tracing that ring like it's a lifeline from those realms. If we fight that, if we try to keep him with Emma, are we asking him to deny his own heart? To live a lie for our daughter's sake? And Emma… she'd see it, she'd know we're choosing her over what's written, over what he might feel deep down. She'd hate us for it, or worse, she'd blame herself if he stays and suffers. And carry that guilt like she did with Neal, thinking she's not enough."

He stopped, leaning heavily against the table's edge, his hands braced on its surface, the tea mugs trembled faintly from the pressure, their steam curling upward in thin wisps as he exhaled a shaky breath, his gaze locking with hers in a shared, helpless plea. "What will it do to her if we support Desylva. If we let true love win like we always have, like we did for each other? Will she lose him, lose that light she's found in him, and resent us for standing by the story instead of her happiness?"

Snow reached for his hand, her fingers curling around his with a quiet, desperate strength. Her eyes shimmered with unshed tears, her voice trembling as she spoke, the weight of their debate pressing down like a storm cloud over the loft, thick and suffocating.

"I don't know, David. I don't know what's right anymore," she confessed, her grip tightening as she pulled him closer, her braid brushing his arm as she leaned into him. "We've always trusted the book, trusted love to find a way. Our love did, against every curse. But this…? It's Emma, our little girl who slept in that wardrobe, who grew up without

us and still found her way back. Hook's part of her now, part of us. Those nights at the station, the way he taught Henry to fence in the backyard. If we back Desylva, we're honoring what we believe, what saved us, but we might shatter Emma in the process, push her back into that loneliness we fought so hard to pull her from, leave her staring out at the sea with nothing but her walls. If we back Emma, we're fighting fate itself, tearing pages from the book we swore by… and what if that breaks them both, leaves them hollow?" She glanced at the closed storybook, its leather cover a silent judge on her lap, then out the window where the town lay quiet under a sky turning gray.

Somewhere beyond, Desylva's storm mingled with his sea, and Emma's heart hung in the balance, a fragile thread stretched taut. David sank into the chair beside her, his hand still clasped in hers. His free hand rubbed at his brow, his shoulders slumping as their silence stretched, heavy with love and doubt, the question of what Desylva's return meant for their daughter unanswered, a rift they couldn't mend as the morning light faded to a muted glow, leaving them to face the coming days with hearts divided and a family on the edge.

As the silence settled, Snow shifted closer, her knee brushing his, her fingers tightened around his hand, her voice softening to a weary resolve as she broke the stillness. "Maybe we don't have to choose, not yet. Let's take it day by day, David. Support them both, Hook and Desylva, Emma too, and see where it leads. We can't take sides when it's tearing us apart like this. The book's true love, Emma's heart, it's too much to weigh in one morning. We'll stand by them all, keep the door open for whatever fate decides, whether it's the story's ending or something new."

David lifted his head, his eyes meeting hers with a flicker of relief. His grip on her hand steadied, his thumb brushing her knuckles as he nodded slowly, his voice rough but firm. "Day by day then. No sides, just us, holding this family together. We'll watch, we'll wait. Let Hook figure his heart, let Emma find her way. Fate has steered us before; it'll show us again." He pulled her hand to his lips, pressing a gentle kiss to her knuckles.

The tea had cooled, the bread sat untouched, but a fragile truce settled over them, their love for Emma and faith in destiny balanced on a knife's edge as they faced the uncertain days ahead, together yet unsure, trusting time to untangle the threads of true love and family.

Day 6-11

Killian & Desylva

Over the days that followed, Killian and Desylva wove their lives back together, threading past and present into a rhythm as natural as the tides lapping the harbor.

Mornings found them strolling the docks, the fog lifting to reveal a sky streaked with pale gold. Her boots scuffed the planks as she recounted Veyra's storms, her voice rising with the memory of thunder splitting cliffs, "The wind roared like it was alive," she said, her storm-gray eyes glinting. His grin flashed as he countered with tales of Storybrooke's battles, "Faced giants right here, love, bloody towering brutes" Her quip came swift, "I'd have stabbed their toes and watched 'em hop" sparking his laugh, deep and warm, rolling over the water like a wave. They'd linger by the harbor's edge, Killian standing behind her, his arms encircling her waist, his coat brushing her back, as she summoned faint gusts with a flicker of her magic, rippling the glassy surface. Boats bobbed gently as fishermen cast their nets, their shouts mingling with the gulls' cries overhead. "My storm still rages," he'd whisper in her ear, his breath warm against her skin. Their fingers brushed over shared coffee mugs as they sank onto a splintered bench, her laughter cutting through the chill that had settled in his bones since her absence, the harbor's briny tang sharp in the air.

Afternoons drew them to the woods beyond town, pine needles crunching underfoot as they sparred beneath towering trees. Her lightning, faint but crackling, grazed his hook in a playful dance of steel and spark. He'd dodge, grinning, until she lunged, pinning him to the mossy ground. "Caught you, pirate," she smirked, her dark hair spilling over her shoulders. His blue eyes danced as he pulled her down, "Always yours," he replied. Their kiss stealing the breath from both, deep and swift, leaves rustling overhead as the forest held its breath. Smee trundled by once, a fishing pole over his shoulder. "Still got it, Cap'n!" he called, his grin flashing before he vanished down the trail.

Evenings stretched into twilight strolls along forest paths, his hand warm in hers. They'd pause beneath an ancient oak, its gnarled branches creaking in the wind. Killian pressed her against the rough bark, his lips finding hers with a hunger that spoke of years apart. "You're my haven," he murmured, his voice rough against her mouth. Her

trembling reply, “And you’re my sea,” her hands clutched his coat, fingers digging into the leather as the scent of pine and salt enveloped them. Henry sketched nearby, perched on a stump, “They’re perfect!” his pencil scratching furiously, capturing their silhouettes against the fading light.

Nights aboard the Jolly Roger became their haven, a quiet escape from the pull of their tangled days. Wrapped in thick woolen blankets, threadbare and steeped in the briny musk of countless voyages. They nestled beneath a sky studded with stars, the deck groaning faintly beneath them as the sea lapped against the hull, its whispers a soothing counterpoint to the world beyond. Desylva rested her head on Killian’s chest, her dark hair spilling across the faded scars etched into his skin, her fingertips brushing their rough edges as she murmured of their realm-hopping rescues. “Every time you saved me,” she said, her voice thick with emotion, “I fell deeper, through every storm, every fight.” His fingers sought the driftwood ring on her hand, its worn grain a steady anchor, and his eyes shimmered as he pressed a gentle kiss to her forehead. “And I’d save you a thousand times more, love,” he replied, his voice raw and resonant, a promise carried on the night’s breath.

Emma

Emma slipped into their lives with a steady presence, a quiet bridge spanning the tangled currents of their hearts. Sometimes she joined Killian and Desylva on their walks along the docks, the sea’s murmur a soft backdrop to their banter, her red leather jacket creaking faintly alongside Desylva’s. Her eyes catching their easy rhythm with a pang she couldn’t quite name, though resolve sharpened her gaze. At Granny’s, she’d cradle a steaming coffee mug, watching them trade quips over blueberry muffins, a smile tugging at her lips even as her chest tightened with unspoken tension.

Killian noticed, his own heart twisting deeper, caught between the storm he’d reclaimed in Desylva, and the anchor Emma had become in this small, strange town. Her presence wove them together, a thread of stability amid the chaos, her silence speaking louder than words as she navigated the pull of their shared history and her own place beside him.

Ruby

Ruby, meanwhile, latched onto Desylva with a fast, fierce friendship, drawn irresistibly to her wild spirit. Over coffee at the diner, she leaned across the table, her red-streaked hair glinting in the morning light, her voice low and earnest, “You’re a survivor. Like me. That wolf side gets you, doesn’t it?” Desylva’s storm-gray eyes softened, a rare warmth breaking through her guarded edges, “I feel it. Your strength’s a storm all its own.” Their bond deepened through late-night runs in the woods beyond Storybrooke, Ruby’s howl rising to the moon, Desylva summoning gusts that rustled the pine needles, their laughter ringing through the trees like a shared anthem. Killian watched from the sidelines, leaning against a trunk, his heart swelling with pride yet aching with the weight of it all.

Day 6: Night – Jolly Roger

Killian sat on the deck, a piece of driftwood in his grasp, his hook steady as he whittled with deliberate care. The sea breeze wove through the rigging, carrying the faint tang of salt and tar as he shaped a tiny ship—the hull a miniature echo of the Jolly Roger, sails mere slivers of wood. His brow creased until he finished, pressing it into her palm with a quiet, “For the voyages we’ll never lose.” She smiled, her storm-gray eyes catching the starlight, and their kiss lingered into the dawn, tender and aching, lips brushing as the sky softened to rose and gold.

The sea’s lullaby hummed alongside the ship’s gentle sway, while across the harbor, the diner’s lights flickered like distant lanterns. Ruby peered out from behind the counter, her red-streaked hair glinting as she wiped it down, grinning wide, “They’re like a damn novel out there, straight out of a fairy tale.”

Day 7: Late Afternoon – Granny’s Diner

The late afternoon sun slanted through Granny’s Diner, casting golden streaks across the checkered floor, the air thick with the aroma of fresh coffee and sizzling burgers, undercut by the faint tang of polish from the counter. Desylva stumbled through the door, her leather jacket scuffed and dusted with dirt from a sparring session with Killian, a vivid purple bruise blooming across her cheek where her storm magic, weakened by years in hiding, had faltered against his deft parry. Her gray eyes sparkled with defiance despite the ache, her mark pulsing faintly as she slid onto a tool, the creak of leather mingling with the diner’s hum of chatter.

Grumpy watched her with a scowl that barely masked the protective shine beneath his gruff exterior, his rough-hewn affection surfacing in quiet, unspoken ways. Without a word, he signalled the man behind the counter for another drink and then slid the frosted beer across the counter, the glass catching the light as it stopped before her, his growl softened by a fleeting warmth in his dark eyes. “You look like you’ve been dragged through a squall, storm girl. Drink up.”

Desylva’s lips curved into a crooked grin, her fingers wrapping around the cool glass, the condensation soothing her palms. She raised it in a mock salute, her voice bright with her characteristic spark, laced with the teasing edge of a woman who’d faced worse than a bruise. “Cheers, dwarf. Didn’t know you had a heart under all that growl.”

The clink of her glass against his echoed sharply, a small defiance against the day’s weariness. Grumpy huffed, but the corner of his mouth twitched upward, betraying a fondness he’d never admit. “Don’t get used to it, lass,” he muttered, his tone gruff but lacking its usual bite, his eyes flicking back to her with a guarded care that spoke louder than his words. Desylva sipped her beer, the bitter tang grounding her, and leaned back, her jacket creaking as she let the diner’s warmth seep into her bones, a rare moment of respite in a life carved by storms.

Day 7: Twilight - Pier

Twilight draped the pier in a silvered hush, the air sharp with the briny sting of the sea, the salt-worn boards creaking under the weight of Killian and Desylva’s boots as they wandered from the harbor’s edge. The moon hung low, its glow casting a shimmering path across the water, the rhythmic pulse of waves against the pilings a quiet song that stirred their restless hearts. Killian, his leather coat swaying with his stride, caught Desylva’s hand, his hook glinting faintly as he tugged her into an impromptu dance, no music but the ocean’s cadence and the beat of their shared pulse. He spun her across the planks, her laughter spilling free, bright, untamed, a storm-witch’s joy that cut through the night like lightning. Their steps faltered, and they tumbled into a breathless heap, limbs entwined, the pier’s rough grain cool against their skin as they lay under the moon’s watchful gaze.

Desylva’s hands found Killian’s face, her thumbs grazing the stubble along his jaw, her storm-gray eyes shimmering with a love as fierce as the tempests she wielded. Killian gazed back, his blue eyes raw with devotion, his voice breaking under the weight of his heart’s truth, a pirate’s vow stripped bare. “You’re my everything, Des.” Her reply came soft, tearful, a whisper heavy with the years they’d fought to reclaim, her fingers trembling against his skin. “And you’re my forever, Killian.” He pulled her close, his breath warm against her ear, his words a low, fervent murmur that carried the sea’s timeless promise. “You’re still my tempest, love, always will be.” She nestled into him, her cheek pressed to the worn leather of his coat, its scent of salt and adventure grounding her as she whispered back, her voice a vow of her own. “And you’re my pirate, now and always.”

Their kiss was gentle, threaded with a longing that spanned realms and trials, lips moving with the slow, tender rhythm of two souls bound by fate and defiance. The pier’s planks groaned beneath them, as if echoing the sea’s approval, the waves’ soft cadence weaving a lullaby around their entwined forms. Killian’s hand cradled her neck, his hook resting lightly on her hip, a silent anchor in the night’s embrace. Desylva’s fingers traced the lines of his coat, her mark pulsing faintly, a quiet reminder of the magic that bound them to the sea and each other.

The night held them close, the stars above bearing witness to a love that had weathered darkness, their hearts beating in time with the ocean’s endless song.

Day 8: Night – Jolly Roger

The Jolly Roger swayed gently in the harbor, timbers creaking under a crisp night sky where stars blazed like scattered diamonds against a velvet expanse, their light dancing on the dark waves below. Killian and Desylva sat nestled on the deck, wrapped in thick woolen blankets drawn tight against the autumn chill, the sea’s briny scent mingling with the faint musk polished oak. The quiet was a balm, a stark contrast to the chaos of their past, and yet the weight of memory hung between them, unspoken but palpable.

Killian shifted, his leather coat rustling as he reached beneath a coil of rope, his fingers brushing the deck’s salt-worn grain to retrieve a small box. Its wood was darkened by decades aboard the ship, a faint azure glow shimmered along its seams, hinting at the enchantment that preserved its contents in pristine condition. He placed it in her hands, his blue eyes steady yet glistening with a tide of memory, his voice a low, reverent murmur. “Open it, love.”

Desylva's breath hitched, her storm-gray eyes tracing the box's worn surface, sensing the magic woven into its grain, a protective charm that had shielded its treasure through time's relentless march. Her fingers hesitated, then lifted the lid with a soft creak, revealing her dagger nestled within on a bed of faded velvet. The blade, forged of Veyra's flint, gleamed with a cold, unyielding edge, its leather-wrapped hilt smooth and unmarred, as pristine as the day she'd first wielded it, the enchantment's power defying the years. It was the dagger she'd dropped in the cabin below, the night Rumpelstiltskin's vines had ensnared her, their thorny tendrils coiling around her wrists, its clatter against the floorboards the last echo before she vanished into his dark magic. She lifted it, her fingers trembling as they traced the hilt's familiar grooves, the weight of that night flooding back, fear, defiance, and the ache of losing Killian. Tears brimmed in her eyes, catching the starlight as she whispered, "I thought it lost forever…"

Killian's gaze softened, his voice rough with the raw edge of grief and love, carrying the cadence of a pirate who'd sailed through hell to keep her memory alive. "I found it on the floor, love, after you were gone," he said, his words heavy with the years of her absence. "Couldn't bear to leave it there, where those cursed vines took you. I placed it in that box and put it on a shelf in the cabin, kept it close, every day, Des, hoping you'd come back to claim it." She met his eyes, her breath catching, the dagger cradled in her hands like a piece of her soul reclaimed. "You kept it," she murmured, her voice breaking, "all this time, through everything." He leaned closer, his hand cupping her face, his thumb gently wiping away a tear that traced her cheek, his touch warm against the night's chill. "Aye, love. Every piece of you. I never let go."

Desylva's fingers tightened around the dagger, but Killian wasn't finished. He reached again, this time drawing a small, rune-etched chest from beneath the same coil of rope, its dark wood carved with glowing sigils that pulsed faintly, mirroring the box's enchantment. "There's more," he said, his voice softer now, almost hesitant.

He opened the chest to reveal her cloak. Her storm-witch's mantle, its fabric unblemished, its seaweed stitching shimmering like sea-foam under the stars, preserved immaculate by the chest's protective runes. "You left this behind that night, too," he said, his eyes searching hers, a flicker of vulnerability in their depths. "I couldn't let it fade, not when it carried your scent, your magic. I kept it safe, love, for you."

Desylva's breath caught again, her hand hovering over the cloak, its fabric a reminder of the storms she'd summoned and the battles they'd fought. She hesitated, her gaze flicking to the dagger, then back to Killian, a faint smile tugging at her lips. "It's beautiful, Killian, as if I never left it," she said, her voice thick with emotion. "But… keep it for me, just a while longer. I'd hate to ruin it." He nodded, a quiet understanding passing between them, and closed the chest, its runes flaring briefly as if sealing their pact.

Their eyes locked, the weight of their shared past and fragile hope binding them closer than the blankets draped over their shoulders. Desylva set the dagger between them, its blade catching the starlight, a symbol of what they'd lost and reclaimed. Killian's hand found hers, their fingers intertwining, his hook resting gently on the deck beside her, a silent sentinel. Their kiss was fierce, a reclaiming of time stolen by Rumpelstiltskin's cruelty, lips moving with a hunger tempered by tenderness, as if they could stitch their wounds with each touch.

The sea murmured its timeless song beyond the hull, its rhythm echoing the pulse of their hearts, while the Jolly Roger rocked gently, the timbers humming with quiet approval, cradling them under the endless sky.

Day 9: Afternoon – Granny's

Ruby cornered Killian, a damp rag in hand as she wiped down a table, her eyes piercing, "She's incredible, Hook, I mean it, but don't break Emma's heart over this. Figure it out, alright?" Her tone cut sharp, but care softened its edges, her loyalty torn between the two women she'd come to cherish.

Day 9: Evening - Docks

Rumpelstiltskin's shadow loomed closer, Grumpy stood at the docks thinking about Desylva, his pickaxe gripped tight, his voice a low rumble, "Gold's not getting her again. Not on my watch." Their connection had grown through late-night talks at the bar. Him recounting tales of lost brothers and cursed mines over a shared bottle, her listening with a steady empathy that smoothed his jagged edges, her storm-gray eyes reflecting the glow of the neon sign as she nodded, understanding his scars in a way few could.

Day 10-11

As days stretched on, Killian felt his heart caught in a relentless tug-of-war, torn between the wild tempest of his past and the steady anchor of his present. At Granny's, he watched Desylva laugh with Ruby, her untamed joy a vivid echo of their realm-spanning adventures, a visceral pull that stirred his soul, rekindling every battle they'd fought side by side. Yet across the room, Emma's calm, a quiet lifeline to the life he'd carved out in Storybrooke.

The clash within him churned like a storm he couldn't tame. Desylva's wildfire a dream resurrected from the ashes of his pirate days, Emma's presence a harbor he'd never thought he'd find. His chest tightened, caught between the woman he'd mourned and the one who'd saved him anew. Ruby caught his conflicted stare and smirked at Grumpy over her coffee, "He's got it bad for both of 'em." Grumpy, nursing his beer, grunted, "Idiot's gonna mess it all up. Mark my words."

Day 12

Jolly Roger - Below Deck

The Jolly Roger's belly creaked with the sea's gentle sway, timbers groaning as lantern light flickered across the low ceiling, casting golden pools over the cluttered deck below, where barrels and ropes lay in haphazard piles, the air thick with the briny scent of salt and old wood.

Henry perched atop a barrel, his storybook splayed open across his lap, pencil tapping a restless rhythm against the page as he leaned toward Smee, his eyes alight with eager curiosity. Smee fussed with a tangled coil of rope, his face flushed from the damp air, beads of sweat glistening on his brow beneath his tattered red hat. "Mr. Smee," Henry began, his voice bright and insistent, cutting through the ship's ambient hum, "What were Killian and Desylva like back then?" Smee paused mid-knot, adjusting his hat, a fond grin spreading across his cheeks as memories sparked a gleam in his eyes, tugging him back to wilder days.

"Oh, lad, they were a sight. Like a squall and a sunrise tangled up together," Smee said, his voice warm with nostalgia as he set the rope aside, leaning forward with a conspiratorial air. "The Cap'n, he'd swagger 'cross the deck, all charm and steel, cutlass flashin' like he owned the sea itself. But when she came aboard, Desylva, with that wild mane o' hair and a storm brewin' in her eyes, he soften'd right up, like the sea calmin' afore dawn breaks. Never seen a man so smitten, nor a lass so fierce." Henry's pencil hovered above the page, his gaze wide and rapt, drinking in every word. "Tell me about her storm magic," he pressed, leaning closer, his voice edged with awe, as if he could already hear the thunder rumbling in Smee's tale.

Smee's grin widened, his hands gesturing grandly as he got swept up in the memory, his usual caution slipping away. "It was awesome, lad. Ye should've seen it! She'd lift her arms, and the wind'd howl like a pack o' wolves, twistin' the sails to her whim. The seas'd rise up at her call, waves crashin' like they were dancin' to her tune. And then—crack!—she'd snap her fingers, and thunder'd boom so loud ye'd feel it in yer bones, lightning splittin' the sky like a jagged blade!" His voice grew louder, eyes gleaming with the thrill of it, hands mimicking the lightning's arc as he forgot, for a moment, he was talking to a kid. Henry sat spellbound, mouth slightly agape, pencil forgotten as he imagined the chaos and power unfurling around the ship.

Smee barreled on, caught in the storm of his own storytelling. "And when the Cap'n'd take her below deck, lad, the wind'd really throw out a storm. Wild and fierce, like the sea itself was jealous! There was one time when they were…" He stopped abruptly, his words catching in his throat as his eyes flicked to Henry's youthful face, realization dawning like a sudden squall. His cheeks flushed redder, and he tugged his hat lower, clearing his throat awkwardly. Henry tilted his head, brow furrowing as he noticed the pause. "Were what?" he asked, his tone curious but tinged with suspicion, pencil tapping again as he studied Smee's flustered expression.

Smee shifted uncomfortably, scratching his neck with a sheepish look, his silence louder than words. Henry's eyes narrowed, then widened as understanding clicked into place. "You were gonna mention sex, right?" he said matter-of-factly, a faint smirk tugging at his lips as Smee's jaw dropped slightly, no answer forthcoming. Henry waved a hand dismissively, unfazed by Smee's embarrassment. "I think I get the picture," he said with a knowing nod, pausing for a beat as he flipped a page in his book, the ship's gentle rock punctuating the moment. Then, his curiosity shifted gears, his voice brightening again. "How did the ship hold up under all those 'stormy' conditions?"

Smee exhaled in relief, seizing the safer topic with a hearty chuckle, his hands resuming their rope-fiddling as he leaned back against a crate. “The Roger could take anything Desylva conjured up, lad. She’s built from enchanted wood. Stronger than any gale, tougher than a dragon’s hide. At times, it seemed the ship was synched with her magic, like they were one and the same. Creakin’ and swayin’ right along with her storms, sails flappin’ like they were cheerin’ her on.” Henry scribbled furiously, his pencil scratching across the page as he grinned, captivated by the image of the ship and Desylva in harmony.

“Did you ever think the ship would break apart?” Henry asked, leaning forward again, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper, as if testing Smee’s faith in the Roger’s resilience. Smee shook his head, his grin softening into something proud and steadfast. “Many times it felt like it, lad. Waves poundin’, timbers groanin’ like they’d snap any second. But the Roger’s a sturdy lass. She’d bend and shudder, but never break. Held us through every storm Desylva whipped up, and then some.” His gaze drifted to the wooden beams above, a wistful sigh escaping him as he patted the deck fondly, the echo of those tempestuous days lingering in his hands.

Henry beamed, his pencil flying across the page as he murmured, “True love,” flipping to a fresh sheet, the words a quiet mantra to himself. The ship rocked gently beneath them, its creaks a soft counterpoint to Smee’s tale, the lantern light dancing over the boy’s eager scribbles and Smee’s nostalgic smile. Smee nodded, his sigh carrying the weight of cannon smoke and stormy vows, their shared history stitched into the Roger’s very bones. A tale of harmony and magic that Henry was determined to preserve, one line at a time.

Quarterdeck

The Jolly Roger's planks glowed beneath a sky painted in gold, amber, and crimson, the setting sun spilling across the deck like molten copper. The sea mirrored the dying light in long ribbons of fire, while the salt breeze tugged at the sails and whispered through the rigging. Far beyond the harbor, the horizon blazed where day kissed the ocean goodbye, promising a clear night once the stars arrived.

A worn table sat near the stern. Cards from previous turns littered the center of the field of play around a growing pot of coins. Beside it sat a small wooden treasure chest overflowing with additional coins, a necessity according to Killian and excessive according to everyone else. Near the lantern rested three weathered card stacks marked with faded symbols. Luck. Curse. Neutral. Beside them sat an ivory twelve-sided die that Archie had already described as "deeply concerning."

Killian lounged in a chair staring at the ten cards that lay face down in a neat row before him, their corners weighted against the sea breeze by a few scattered coins. The polished curve of his hook tapped idly against the tabletop as he studied the field of play with theatrical confidence.

Beside him, David sat with a mug of ale cradled loosely in one hand, his own cards spread before him. His expression was calm, though the spark in his eyes suggested he was enjoying himself far more than he cared to admit. Archie sat beside him, adjusting his glasses every few minutes and frequently rechecking his cards as though they might rearrange themselves into a better hand. Grumpy glowered at everyone equally, one thick arm planted on the table while the other guarded his grog as fiercely as a dragon protecting treasure.

Killian lowered his hand toward the cards before him. He lifted each card slightly with the tip of his hook, studying his options with a captain's calm confidence. After a few moments, he made his choice. With a deft flick of his hook, the card spun across the weathered tabletop, coming to a stop in the center of the table. A king of spades. The pirate leaned back in his chair, clearly pleased with himself. "King claims the Tide," he announced smoothly, his blue eyes glinting in the lantern light.

David immediately pointed his mug at him. "No, it doesn't," he countered, laughter already creeping into his voice. Killian lifted an eyebrow. "No?"

"No," David repeated, tapping the table. "Last week you said a king only claims the Tide when it's anchored by a diamond." Killian answered without missing a beat, as if the point were obvious. “Aye.” David gestured toward the card. "That's not a diamond." Killian glanced down at the king, then back at David. "Different Tide, mate."

Grumpy slammed his mug onto the table. "There are too many bloody Tides!" the dwarf barked. Killian spread his hand in a gesture of innocence. "It's a very straightforward game." Archie looked genuinely alarmed. "How many Tides are there?" Killian considered for a moment. "More than the Current Clauses." Archie looked pained immediately. "I still don't understand Rule Sixty-Eight."

"Nobody asked you to," Killian replied. David smirked into his mug. "Nobody understands Rule Sixty-Eight." Killian's grin widened with insufferable satisfaction. "I do." Archie stared at him. "That doesn't make me feel better." Killian flashed him a grin. "It wasn't meant to."

The comment earned an exaggerated groan from Grumpy. "Oh, come off it!" the dwarf barked, throwing his hands in the air. "You always have exactly the card you need." Killian lifted an eyebrow and casually twirled his hook against the tabletop. "A lifetime of piracy teaches a man many talents." Grumpy snorted into his grog. "It doesn't teach him honesty."

Killian pressed a hand dramatically to his chest, looking scandalized. "Ah, but those are entirely different skills." David chuckled into his mug. "He's got a point." Grumpy pointed an accusing finger between the prince and the pirate. "You're encouragin' him, Charming. That's dangerous."

The table dissolved into laughter.

David stopped laughing, looked at his cards, and played a card. Archie followed. Grumpy tossed one into the pile. Killian answered immediately. David discarded a higher club. Archie checked his hand and frowned before reluctantly adding a lower one. Grumpy studied his hand for a long moment before tossing down a matching rank in diamonds.

Killian immediately pointed with his hook. "Suit change." David frowned. "That's a rule?" Killian spun his hook lazily against the tabletop and nodded as though the answer should have been obvious. "Aye." David gestured toward the growing pile of cards. "How many things in this game are rules?" Killian considered the question for a moment, his gaze drifting thoughtfully across the table. "Most of them." Grumpy barked out a laugh. "That's not reassuring."

The next play came from Killian, who casually tossed a club into the center. David followed with a higher club. Archie checked his hand before reluctantly adding a lower one. Grumpy studied his cards for a moment before throwing one into the pile. Killian nodded approvingly. "Finally learning the game, are we?" Grumpy snorted into his grog and folded his arms. "I'm learning enough to beat you." Killian leaned forward and tapped the table with the tip of his hook, looking entirely too pleased with himself. "Then you've many years ahead of you, mate."

With a practiced flick of his hook, Killian sent another card skimming into the center pile. "Your turn, Charming." David smirked and selected his card. He deliberately took his time, turning it over between his fingers while Killian watched him with growing suspicion. Finally, David tossed it into the center. A queen of clubs. "The Queen counters the Tide," David declared confidently.

Grumpy immediately jabbed a finger across the table. "Challenge." David blinked. "What?" Grumpy narrowed his eyes suspiciously. "You've got a playable card." David spread one hand protectively over his cards. "No, I don't." Grumpy leaned forward. "That's exactly what somebody with a playable card would say." David folded his arms over his hand. "You don't get to look." Killian held up his hook before Grumpy could argue further. "Captain's review." David groaned immediately. "Oh, come on." Killian extended his hand. "The cards, mate." Still muttering, David handed them over.

Killian studied the hand for a moment. Then looked to Grumpy and handed it back. "Sorry, mate. Challenge denied. Play stays." Grumpy threw both hands into the air. "Of course it does."

Killian’s eyes narrowed and the corner of his mouth twitched with amusement as he looked back to David. "But the Queen only counters during Calm Waters." David immediately pointed with his mug. "There are Calm Waters now?" Killian spread his hand in a gesture of innocence. "There have always been Calm Waters." Grumpy groaned loudly and dropped his head into one hand. "He made that one up."

Killian sat a little straighter in his chair, feigning offense. "I did not." David barked out a laugh and pointed at the pirate. "You absolutely did." Killian placed a hand over his heart, looking thoroughly wounded. "Lads, I'm wounded

by your lack of faith." David took a long drink before lowering his mug with a smirk. "One day all this talking is gonna catch up to you." Killian smirked. "It already has," he replied dryly. "Several times."

The group laughed as Archie stared mournfully at the cards in front of him. After several moments of internal debate, he cautiously slid a three of hearts into the center. The card barely made it halfway before he pulled his hand back. "I'm still not entirely sure I understand the strategy," Archie admitted, peering over his glasses. Grumpy snorted so hard ale nearly came out his nose. "The strategy is don't lose." Archie frowned. "Very helpful." Grumpy took another drink. "I've been told I give excellent advice."

Archie opened his mouth, clearly preparing a rebuttal, then thought better of it and adjusted his glasses instead. Killian chuckled. "Actually, that's not entirely wrong." Archie looked hopeful. "It isn't?" Killian leaned back in his chair, raising his mug in a mock toast, looking entirely too pleased with himself. “No." The therapist brightened. Killian took a leisurely sip before setting the mug down. He tapped the three of hearts with his hook. "Unfortunately, that card just started a Mutiny." Archie's hopeful expression vanished instantly. "The normal kind?" Killian paused. "Let's assume so."

Before Archie could demand an explanation, Grumpy seized his turn. The dwarf slapped a card onto the table hard enough to rattle the mugs. An ace of diamonds. Grumpy folded his arms triumphantly. "There." He jerked his chin toward the card. "Now that's a card." Killian gave a low whistle of appreciation and tapped the table with his hook. "Bold play." David laughed and pointed toward the ace. "You've been waiting four turns to play that." Grumpy grinned into his mug. "Damn right." David shook his head, still chuckling. "You could've used it earlier." Grumpy scoffed and spread his hands as though the answer should have been obvious. "And deprive myself of the satisfaction?"

Killian nodded solemnly, stroking his chin as though evaluating a masterful tactical decision. "A valid strategy." David immediately pointed at the pirate. "That's not a strategy." Killian lifted a finger like a professor about to deliver an important lecture. "It's rule forty-two."

David threw up his hands in exasperation. "There aren't forty-two rules." Killian reclined farther in his chair, looking entirely pleased with himself. "There are one hundred and seventeen." He took a leisurely sip of rum as though he'd just announced the weather. Archie nearly dropped his cards. "One hundred and seventeen?" Grumpy pointed angrily at Killian as if presenting evidence to a jury. "See? That's exactly what I've been saying."

Killian looked around the table at their increasingly horrified expressions and, to his credit, managed to keep a straight face for nearly three whole seconds. Then he laughed, sharp and warm, slicing through the night like a blade through fog, his head tipping back as the ship's rigging creaked overhead, a chorus of groans and sighs from the Jolly Roger's bones. He leaned forward and flicked a card into the center with effortless precision. A ten of clubs. The card landed neatly atop the pile.

David groaned immediately. "Oh, no." Archie looked up. "What?" Grumpy winced. "Lucky draw." Archie frowned toward the three weathered stacks beside the lantern. "Wait. Those are actually part of the game?" Killian's grin widened. "Of course they are." The therapist stared. "Why?" Killian gestured toward them with his hook. "Because the game has three event decks." Archie stared at the stacks for a long moment, glasses sliding slightly down his nose. "Of course there are." David pointed accusingly at Killian. "You never mentioned that." Killian looked genuinely surprised. "I assumed you'd read the rules." David barked out a laugh. "We've established nobody's read the rules." Killian placed a hand over his heart. "A tragic indictment of modern education." Archie sputtered. "I literally teach people for a living." Killian agreed, “Aye,” reaching for a small twelve-sided die. "And look how that's working out for you."

David barked out a laugh. Archie slumped lower in his chair. Killian tossed the D12 into the center of the table. It bounced across the weathered wood before settling. Two.

"A lucky draw," Killian announced. Grumpy growled. "Of course it is." Killian plucked a card from the Luck stack and read it aloud. "Shipwreck Treasure." His grin broadened. "Collect five coins from the Treasure Chest."

Before anyone could object, Killian reached for the small wooden chest sitting beside the event decks and withdrew five coins with entirely too much satisfaction.

Archie blinked. "There's a treasure chest?" Killian dropped the coins into his pile with a grin. "Aye." David pointed at the overflowing box. "Why is there a treasure chest?" Killian looked genuinely puzzled by the question. "Because it's a pirate game." Grumpy squinted at the chest. "That's at least five hundred coins." Killian replied immediately, as though the number were perfectly reasonable. "A proper amount of treasure." David shook his head. "Nobody needs that many coins for a card game." Killian nudged the chest protectively with the back of his hook and gave David a look of profound disappointment. "A statement no pirate has ever made."

David pointed. "You smile every time one of those cards benefits you." Killian grinned unapologetically. "Because I'm happy." David pointed at the five coins. "No sane person gets that excited over five coins." Killian lifted one of the coins and held it up to the lantern light as though displaying a priceless treasure. "They're pirate coins." David laughed. "That doesn't explain anything." Killian turned the coin between his fingers before dropping it atop the others with a satisfied clink. "It explains everything."

After a short pause, David slapped down a five of diamonds. "There." He leaned back triumphantly. "My turn." Killian pointed with his hook. "Roll." David sighed. The die bounced once. Twice. Then settled on eleven. Grumpy burst out laughing. "Oh, that's a curse." David glared. "I know it's a curse." Archie leaned forward. "What's the curse?"

David drew a card from the Curse stack and frowned immediately. "No." Killian's grin returned. "What is it?" David read aloud. "'You Sink. Give three coins to every player.'"

The table exploded into laughter. Grumpy wiped tears from the corners of his eyes. "The game finally makes sense." David reluctantly slid coins toward the others. "This game is criminal." Killian tapped the table. "Captain's Folly is a magnificent cultural institution." David pointed accusingly at the pirate. "You made it up." Killian sat a little straighter in his chair and adjusted his coat with mock dignity. "I improved it." Grumpy pointed accusingly. "See? That's evidence."

Archie studied his hand and played a card. Grumpy followed without hesitation. Killian tossed one into the pile. David barely looked before flicking another card into the center. Then Archie accidentally played another five.

The table fell silent. Archie looked down. Then looked up. Then down again. "Oh, dear." David immediately started laughing. Grumpy pointed at the card. "Roll."

Archie rolled. The die bounced across the table before striking a mug and settling. Twelve. Silence. Killian sat upright. David stared. Grumpy frowned. Archie's eyes widened. "Is twelve bad?"

Killian reached slowly for the Neutral stack. "Not bad." His grin returned. "Worse." David groaned. "Oh, no." Killian turned over the card. "Rogue Portal." Grumpy slammed both hands onto the table. "No." Archie blinked. "What does it do?" David pointed at the entire game. "It destroys everything." Killian nodded approvingly. "A remarkably accurate summary." Archie looked confused. "Everything?" Killian nodded, "Everything." Grumpy buried his face in his hands. "I finally understood two of my cards."

Killian began gathering cards. Every card on the table disappeared into a single pile. Archie watched in horror. "I just spent twenty minutes learning my hand."

"Aye." Killian worked the deck. "I know."

By the time the new hands were dealt, even David had stopped trying to understand the game. Grumpy, meanwhile, had reached a state of philosophical resignation. The dwarf stared at his cards. Then at Killian. Then at the cards again. "You know what?" Killian looked up from his cards, one eyebrow lifting. "What?" Grumpy gestured vaguely at the table, the cards, and the decks with equal irritation. "I don't care anymore." The pirate barked out a laugh. "A breakthrough."

"I mean it." Grumpy pointed at the cards. "I don't know what's good." Then pointed toward the Luck of the Sea stacks. "I don't know what those do." He pointed at Killian. "And I'm reasonably sure you're making up rules." Killian leaned closer to Grumpy. "Only some of them." Grumpy pointed accusingly at the pirate. "Nobody else sees the problem here?"

David took a long drink of ale. "I see it." Grumpy brightened immediately. David shrugged. "I'm just not convinced we can stop him." Archie stared at Killian over the top of his glasses. "Some?" Killian took a leisurely sip of rum. Then smiled. "No."

The table erupted into groans. And for the first time in many long years, Killian simply sat back and enjoyed it. The laughter. The arguments. The ridiculous game that nobody understood. The friends gathered around his table.

The Jolly Roger swayed gently beneath them as twilight surrendered to night, moonlight now dancing across the harbor waters below.

As David argued over an impossible rule, Archie attempted to keep notes he suspected would prove useless, and Grumpy launched into another accusation of organized fraud, Killian's gaze drifted once more toward town. Toward Desylva. A faint smile touched his lips.

The cards continued to fly. Captain's Folly continued to make less sense with every passing round.

Eventually, the final cards began to disappear. Grumpy frowned and glanced down at the lone card remaining in his hand. "Don't tell me we're almost done." Archie checked his own cards and sighed. "I only have one left." David looked down at his hand. "So do I."

Killian glanced at the final card resting before him and smiled. "Looks like we've reached Harbor."
Archie frowned as he lowered his glasses. "Nobody won?" Killian nodded toward the cards. "Not this Voyage. Sometimes a Voyage ends before anyone claims Victory at Sea."

David groaned and dropped his head back dramatically. "Of course it does." Killian lifted a finger as though citing an established legal statute. "Rule ninety-one. Return to Harbor." David immediately pointed at him. "There are not one hundred and seventeen rules." Killian reclined in his chair, looking entirely pleased with himself. "There are tonight."

Killian studied his remaining card for a moment before flicking it into the pile. An eight of spades. David frowned immediately. "That does something, doesn't it?" Killian's expression remained suspiciously innocent. "Not currently." David narrowed his eyes suspiciously. "Not currently?" Killian steepled his fingers and nodded as though explaining something profoundly important. "A very important distinction." Grumpy groaned and threw both hands up in exasperation, looking around the table as though searching for an ally. "And somehow I'm the only one concerned by this."

David tossed a seven of clubs into the pile. "There." He leaned back. "Done." Archie followed with a four of diamonds. The therapist looked relieved. "I survived." Grumpy shot him a look, "You endured," he corrected. "There's a difference." and slammed down his last card hard enough to rattle every mug on the table. A jack of diamonds. "There." The dwarf folded his arms triumphantly. "I'm free."

Killian chuckled. "No one's forcing you to play, mate." Grumpy immediately pointed at him. "You're forcing me to play." Killian spread his hand and hook wide in a gesture of innocence. "How exactly?" Grumpy immediately jabbed a finger toward him. "You keep inventing rules." Killian looked deeply offended. "A common misunderstanding." David laughed into his ale. "That's the nicest way I've ever heard someone accuse someone of fraud."

Killian gathered the cards into a single stack. The pot sat gleaming between them, swollen from antes, curses, sinkings, shipwrecks, storms, reefs, rogue portals, mutinies, and enough disputed penalties to finance a small kingdom.

Archie's eyes widened. "That's actually a lot of money." Killian nodded in agreement. "Aye," Grumpy leaned forward suspiciously. "How much ya think is in there?" Killian examined the pile. "Enough." David pointed. "See? That's another thing." Killian glanced up from the pot. “What?" David pointed at him with growing exasperation. "You never answer a question directly." Killian frowned as though genuinely confused by the accusation. "I answered it." David barked out a short laugh. "You absolutely did not."

Archie adjusted his glasses. "So the game's over?" he sighed. "Depends." Killian said as he gestured toward the cards. "We could start another voyage."

Three simultaneous protests answered him. David answered immediately. "No." Grumpy folded his arms. "Absolutely not." Archie pushed his glasses up his nose and looked mildly horrified. "Dear gods, no."

Killian blinked. "What? The night's still young, lads." Grumpy stared at him. "We've been playing for hours." Killian nodded calmly. "Aye." Grumpy threw a hand toward the cards. "And nobody understands the rules." Killian nodded again. "Aye." The dwarf jabbed a finger across the table. "And somehow you're winning." Killian considered this. "Aye." David pointed at him. "That's not helping." Killian sighed dramatically. "Very well." He squared the deck against the tabletop. "Then we end it properly." David narrowed his eyes. "That doesn't sound encouraging."

"It isn't," Killian admitted. Archie immediately looked nervous. "What happens now?"

Using his hand and hook, Killian neatly cut the deck. Then cut it again. Then a third time. David watched. Grumpy watched. Archie frowned. "That seems unfair." Killian paused. "What does?" Archie pointed toward the cards. "The way you handled them." The pirate blinked. "Archie." Archie looked at him expectantly. "Yes?" Killian placed a hand over his heart, sounding mildly offended. "I've been handling cards for over two centuries." Archie stared back. "Exactly."

Killian opened his mouth. Closed it. Then pointed. "Fair." With a dramatic sigh, he slid the deck toward David. "Cut it yourself then, Charming." David immediately did. "There." Grumpy narrowed his eyes. "That's still not enough." Killian blinked. "Not enough?" The dwarf jabbed a thumb toward David. "He's a prince." David frowned. "What does that have to do with anything?" Grumpy snorted and jabbed a thumb back and forth between David and Killian. "Pirates and princes are basically the same kind of trouble." David looked genuinely offended. "We're really not." Grumpy took a long drink of grog and shrugged. "Close enough."

Killian barked out a laugh and slid the deck toward Grumpy. "Very well. Your turn." Grumpy immediately snatched the cards and cut them with exaggerated care. "There." Still suspicious, he shoved the deck toward Archie. "You do it." Archie blinked. "Why me?" Grumpy pointed toward Archie with the authority of a man appointing a judge. "You're the only honest one here." Killian pressed a hand to his chest. "Now that's just hurtful." David nodded toward the deck. "He's got a point." The therapist sighed but accepted the deck.

After a moment, he cut it and placed it back on the table. "Satisfied?" Grumpy considered the question. "Not remotely." Killian looked deeply offended. "I liked it better when nobody questioned my integrity." Grumpy snorted. "We never trusted your integrity."

Killian placed the stack in the center of the table. "The Final Draw." David sighed. "Naturally." Archie hesitated. "What are the rules?" Killian smiled. "The highest card wins the entire pot."

A beat passed. Archie's shoulders relaxed. "Oh." Another beat. Then the therapist frowned. "That's... surprisingly simple." Killian looked scandalized. "Captain's Folly is a refined game." David nearly choked on his ale. Killian gave David a look, "You can draw first, Prince." David narrowed his eyes suspiciously. "That doesn't make me feel better." Then he reached forward. He pulled a card. Peeked at it. His face immediately fell. "Jack."

Archie swallowed and slowly drew his card. His eyes widened. "Ace." Silence. For the first time all evening, the therapist sat a little straighter and tried very hard not to smile. "I think I'm winning." David pointed at him. "Look at that. He's actually happy." Archie turned to David, "Don't say it out loud," he warned. Grumpy shot him a look and immediately replied, "No. You think you've won. Those are different things." Grumpy looked at the deck and sighed. "I hate this game." The dwarf reached for his own card. He flipped it over. A king. Grumpy's grin widened. "Now that's a card." David groaned. "You've said that about literally every card you've played." Grumpy took a drink. "Because they're good cards."

Only Killian remained. The pirate rested his hand on the deck. His expression became unreadable. David noticed instantly. "Oh, no." Grumpy pointed accusingly. "That's the face." Archie looked confused. "What face?" Grumpy narrowed his eyes at Killian. "The face he makes right before something incredibly annoying happens." David immediately nodded. "It is."

Killian slowly drew a card. He looked at it. Said nothing. His grin began to spread. Slowly. Deliberately. Like a storm gathering on a distant horizon.

David covered his face. "No." Grumpy pointed accusingly. "That's definitely the face." Archie looked between them. "What card is it?"

Killian looked up. The grin widened. Then he turned the card over. Ace of spades. Silence. Absolute silence. Then Grumpy shot to his feet. "No." David threw his head back laughing. "No way." Archie stared. "That's the highest card, isn't it?"

"Aye," Killian replied smugly. Grumpy jabbed a finger at him. "That's impossible." Killian calmly swept the enormous pile of coins toward himself. "It appears to be quite possible." Grumpy jabbed a finger at the pirate. “You cheated." Killian looked genuinely offended. "I did not." Grumpy pointed toward the deck. “You handled the deck." Killian immediately pointed around the table. "You all cut the deck." Grumpy threw up his hands. "You handled it first." Killian shook his head. “And then each of you cut it." David pointed toward the cards. "And somehow you still got the Ace of Spades." Killian spread his hand innocently. "Remarkable luck." Grumpy narrowed his eyes. "Suspicious luck."

Killian sat forward and tapped the table with his hook. "It absolutely is not.” The pirate then casually gestured toward himself. "A captain's privilege." David nearly choked on his ale. "THAT'S NOT A RULE!" Killian tilted his head thoughtfully, as though genuinely considering the objection. "Is it not?" Grumpy pointed both hands at him. "See? This is exactly what I've been talking about all night."

Archie looked genuinely distressed. "I was so close." Killian patted his shoulder. "You did wonderfully." The therapist did not look comforted. Grumpy folded his arms. "I demand a recount." Killian blinked at him. "It's cards." Grumpy folded his arms stubbornly. "Then a recount of the cards." Killian considered this. "Denied." The dwarf pointed triumphantly at David. "See? See? That's exactly what a guilty man says."

The argument immediately resumed. David was laughing. Archie was trying to determine whether "Captain's Privilege" had ever actually been mentioned. Grumpy was threatening to write down every rule and present them as evidence. And Killian sat in the middle of it all, richer by one pot and entirely too pleased with himself.

Eventually David wiped a tear from his eye. "I'm never playing this game again." Killian gathered the last of the coins with a satisfied smile. "Aye." David pointed. "You said that way too confidently." The pirate's grin widened. "Aye."

The laughter rolled across the deck once more. For a little while longer, the night remained untouched by curses, lost years, and all the sorrows waiting beyond the harbor. There was only moonlight, salt air, friendship, and a ridiculous pirate game that nobody fully understood. And as the Jolly Roger swayed gently beneath the stars, Killian allowed himself to enjoy it. Just this. Just tonight. Just the sea, the laughter, and the people he loved.

Granny’s Diner
(Simultaneously with Jolly Roger scene above)

Table by Door

The diner was alive—plates clinking, the low sizzle of the grill, Ruby’s bright laugh cutting through the murmur, the rich, grounding scent of fresh coffee warring with the salty crispness of fries and the faint sweetness of pie cooling on the counter. It was the kind of noise that made secrets feel heavier.

Regina sat at a table near the entrance. one leg crossed elegantly over the other, swirling a glass of red wine with the kind of elegance that made it look like she’d been born doing it, the deep ruby liquid catching the warm overhead lights, its faint berry-and-oak scent drifting across the table like an unspoken challenge.

The door opened with a soft jingle, Emma entered, the warmth of the diner shutting out the bite of Storybrooke’s evening air. She headed to Regina’s table and sat down across from her, her leather jacket creaking against the red vinyl as she settled. The sound felt too loud in the sudden hush that fell between them.

Emma grabbed a napkin from the dispenser on the table and started to shred it into small, restless strips that fluttered onto the table like fallen snow, each tear a tiny release of the tension knotting her stomach. Regina’s eyes glinted with a mix of amusement and calculation as she watched Emma’s restless fingers. She sensed something

was weighing on Emma's mind and she was pretty sure she knew what it was. The soft frantic rasp of paper against paper the only sound between them for a long moment. The air thickened around their table, heavy with things unsaid.

Emma leaned forward, the faint squeak of vinyl accompanying her movement, placing her elbows on the table. "Okay, spill it, Regina," she finally said, voice low but insistent, edged with something raw. Her eyes narrowed with that stubborn spark that Regina knew all to well, the same one that had stared down giants, dark curses, and every version of Killian Jones she'd ever met. Beneath it, her heart raced with a vulnerability she despised, a fear that this conversation might confirm what she'd been trying so hard to ignore, that she could lose him, just when she'd started to believe in them, that she might never be more than a chapter in a story that belonged to someone else. "You knew Killian and Desylva way back. Before the curse, before all this. What were they like together?"

Regina's lips curved into a slow, sly smile, the kind that said she'd been waiting for this question. She savored the question like the first sip of a fine vintage. Her eyes distant and shadowed. She lifted her glass, letting the liquid catch the diner's warm overhead light before taking a measured sip, savoring it the way she savored the power of knowing something Emma didn't. She set her glass down with deliberate care, the soft clink of crystal against Formica ringing like a warning bell. Her fingers lingered on the stem, knuckles whitening slightly, as the wine's warm, dark aroma curled upward.

"They were…" She paused, the word catching in her throat like broken glass. "They were everything the rest of us pretended we didn't want to believe in." Her voice dropped, quieter now, almost reverent, smooth as velvet, edged with something almost fond. "Fire and fury wrapped in a tempest… a storm you couldn't look away from, even if you wanted to." Her voice carried a rare note of genuine admiration, though the smirk never quite left her lips, the faint scent of her perfume… something rich and spiced… drifting forward as she leaned in slightly. "Killian was all swagger then, a pirate king with a silver tongue that could charm the scales off a mermaid and the virtue off a princess." Her smirk deepened. "And Desylva…" Regina's breath hitched, barely audible, her gaze drifting for a moment as if seeing them again. "Desylva was his match in every way. Wild. Untamed. Magic crackling in her wake like a live wire, sparking off her like she was made of storms. The air around them tasted like ozone and salt and something dangerously sweet."

Regina looked down at her wine, watching the surface tremble with the faint vibration of the diner's life. The low murmur of the diner's jukebox threaded through her words. "They didn't just fight together. They moved together. Laughed together. Lived together like the rest of the world was background noise." Emma paused mid-shred, curiosity softening her guarded stare. Regina's gaze drifted somewhere distant. "They never fought. Never needed to." Regina continued. "They were always in perfect sync. You'd find them in some grimy tavern rolling dice, the clatter of ivory against scarred wood, or whispering over rum by lantern light, the low crackle of flame and the faint slosh of liquor in tin mugs, then sneaking off or vanishing below deck… All tangled limbs and stolen kisses… the creak of bedframes and the muffled gasps carried on the salt air. The rest of the world ceased to exist the moment they touched. … Nothing else mattered." A rare warmth touched her tone, nostalgia, admiration, and the faintest edge of envy.

Emma's brow arched, a flicker of curiosity softening the guarded stare she'd worn since sitting down, her fingers absently shredding the napkin into smaller and smaller pieces. The diner's warmth wrapped around her like a familiar blanket, but none of it could quite chase away the chill settling in her chest. Hearing about Killian like this, from Regina of all people, stirred something deep and unsettled, a mix of curiosity and an ache she didn't want to name. She'd always known he had a past, layers of pain and loss buried under that cocky grin but picturing him so completely entwined with someone else, with Desylva, hit like a punch to the gut. It made her question everything. She'd spent months slowly letting him in despite her walls, letting herself believe that maybe, just maybe, she was enough for someone like him. Now, doubt crept in like shadows lengthening at dusk, every word Regina spoke felt like a crack in that fragile hope. Was she just a placeholder, a temporary harbor in his endless sea? Was there room left for her in a heart that had once belonged so fully to another? Was she only ever the rebound for a storm she could never match?

Emma's fingers paused mid-shred, the napkin forgotten. She leaned back slightly, brow arching, curiosity softening the guarded edge she usually wore. Her heart gave a quiet, uncomfortable squeeze, twisting with a jealousy that burned low and hot, a quiet, vicious thing she hated herself for feeling, but couldn't stop. She thought of the beanstalk, to the way Killian had looked at her then, like she was a challenge, a spark in his endless dark. She wondered, with a pang that stole her breath, if he'd ever looked at Desylva the same way, or if that look had been

deeper, more consuming. The thought twisted something in her gut, a quiet jealousy she pushed down, focusing instead on the napkin crumbs scattering across the table. Her mind already trying to reconcile this vivid picture with the man she knew.

“Sounds intense,” she said, her voice steady on the surface, but the words tasted bitter, laced with a doubt she couldn’t shake. The image of Killian tangled with Desylva, laughing, whispering, disappearing together, burned behind her eyes. She thought of the quiet moments she’d shared with him, late nights on the Jolly Roger, his voice dropping soft when he said her name, the way his smirk would soften when he thought she wasn’t looking Suddenly they felt small, fragile, like pale copies of something that had once been brighter, fiercer. What if those moments were just echoes of what he’d had with her? The doubt gnawed at her, sharp and insistent. The jealousy flared sharp and ugly, a hot knot in her throat. Was that what he really wanted? Someone who could match his chaos, not someone who’d spent her life trying to control it. It made her feel suddenly small, suddenly uncertain, like she was standing on the edge of something she hadn’t realized was a cliff, the ground crumbling beneath her feet.

Regina gave a small, broken laugh, the sound almost lost in the clink of a fresh coffee pot being set down nearby. “Intense doesn’t begin to cover it, Swan,” she took a slow sip of wine, the soft sound of her swallow barely audible, the glass catching the diner’s warm light as she tilted her head. “Desylva grounded him, calmed him in way no one else ever could. … Anchored him. … Tethered that restless, vengeful soul of his to something real. … When she came into his life, the vengeance started to fade, that dark edge that clung to him like a second skin slowly slipping away. … You could see it in the way he looked at her. Like she was the horizon he’d been chasing his whole damn life.” Her voice cracked, just for a second. “And he did the same for her. He brought her storm to life. Gave her strength. … They were inseparable. A force of nature no curse, no realm, no enemy could touch.” She took a slow sip of wine. Her tone carried a rare thread of admiration, the smirk lingered, sharp and knowing, but the faint tremor in her hand betrayed her.

“Rumpel tried everything to break them. He couldn’t stand seeing Hook so… happy. And I…” she hesitated, the admission hung between them, bitter and jagged on her tongue, the faint metallic tang of the wine lingering as she set the glass down again. “I helped him.” She met Emma’s eyes, unflinching. “I was young and eager to please. … But no matter what we threw at them, they never broke. Every scheme, every manipulation, only made them stronger …. Their bond overcame everything.” Emma muttered under her breath, the words almost lost in the low buzz of conversation around them, “True love.”

Regina’s gaze flicked to her, sharp and knowing, but softer than usual. “Yes.” She took another measured sip, the wine’s warmth visible in the faint flush at her throat. “The longer they were together, the more Hook vanished and Killian resurfaced.”

Emma’s gaze flicked toward the booth by the jukebox where Desylva sat with Ruby, Snow, and Belle, their laughter spilling over the hum of conversation. Ruby tossed a fry in the air and caught it with a grin; Desylva’s head tilted back in a genuine laugh, her dark hair catching the light. The sight stirred something raw inside her, a quiet fear that she’d never be enough to match that kind of intensity, that kind of history. Regina’s words lingered, painting a picture that made Emma’s heart clench. Killian softened, anchored, his vengeance fading because of Desylva. It was the version of him Emma had glimpsed, the man behind the hook. The thought that someone else had brought that out first twisted like a knife, making her chest tighten. She thought of the way he looked at her sometimes, soft and unguarded, and wondered if that look had ever truly been hers, or if it was just an echo of something he’d once given to Desylva. The jealousy twisted deeper, mingling with a raw, aching fear. What if Killian looked at Desylva and saw everything he’d lost, everything that had been missing? What if the softness he showed Emma was just a pale echo of what he’d once had with her?

Emma’s expression softened, just for a second, as she leaned back slightly, arms crossing, the faint creak of her jacket punctuating the motion. “So, what happened?” she asked, her tone quieter now, laced with a subtle undercurrent of empathy, not just for him, but for the loss that had shaped the pirate she’d come to care for—maybe more than she’d admitted to herself. But even as she spoke, the fear lingered. What if Desylva’s return meant losing him, pulling him back to a love that had defined him long before she ever climbed that beanstalk?

Regina took another slow sip, letting the question hang, then took a deep breath, the soft inhale barely audible over the diner’s ambient noise, and leaned in, voice lowering until it was almost a confession. “The night before they were to be married, something happened. She vanished.”

Emma felt a pang, imagining Killian's world shattering, the hope flickering out like a candle in the wind. It mirrored her own losses too closely—the walls she'd built after Neal, the fear of letting anyone in again. "Vanished?" she echoed, her brow furrowing, a flicker of protectiveness for him rising unbidden.

Regina nodded, fingers tightening briefly around the stem of her glass, until her knuckles showed white, the faint clink of crystal against table underscoring the word. "At the time I didn't know what had happened. Rumors flew that Rumpel had taken her, but when I asked him, he denied it, of course." She gave a small, bitter smile. "You know how he is." Emma scoffed, the sound sharp and dry, arms crossing over her chest, the shredded napkin forgotten. "Of course he did. And you believed him?" Regina shot her a look—defensive, raw, not angry but almost pleading. the faint rustle of her sleeve as she shifted. "Yes, Swan. At the time I did."

Emma's skepticism flared, but so did a reluctant understanding—Regina had been different then, tangled in her own darkness. Her jaw tightened, the low hum of the jukebox underscoring her words. "He's a liar, Regina. You know that," Emma said, her voice firm, but there was a softness in her eyes now, a shared recognition of how lies and loss could warp a person, "Why wo…" Regina looked down into her glass, and cut her off, voice firm but quiet, the faint tremor of old guilt threading through the words, "All I knew was that she was gone."

A beat of silence settled between them, broken only by the soft clink of dishes and the low murmur of other conversations. Regina, staring into her glass as though seeing the past swirl in the wine's dark depths and continued before Emma could push further. "When Killian lost her…" Emma, voice firm, jaw tight, corrected, "You mean when she was ripped away from him." Her correction wasn't a question, but a statement, her jaw tightening as she leaned back slightly, arms crossing over her chest.

Regina inclined her head, conceding the point with a faint nod, her fingers tapping the glass once. "Yes. When she was ripped away from him…" She met Emma's gaze again, the weight of memory heavy in her eyes, her voice breaking, just for a heartbeat. "The pain started to bring Captain Hook back in full force. Sharp. Ruthless. That hook gleaming with every grudge he'd buried for her sake. … The more time passed, the stronger Hook became. Eventually Killian disappeared entirely, and Hook was back. Twice as mad, twice as strong, and twice as vengeful."

As Regina described the transformation back to Hook, Emma's reflections turned inward, her heart heavy with the realization that the man she'd fought beside, laughed with, maybe even started to love, had been shaped by a loss so profound it had nearly destroyed him.

Emma raised an eyebrow, the faint squeak of vinyl as she shifted, her mind drifting back to the man she'd met on that beanstalk, cocky, dangerous, all charm and sharp edges, and felt a swell of compassion, mixed with a fear she couldn't quite shake. A fear that Desylva's return might pull him back into that light, leaving her in the shadows. The fear deepened into a churning conflict. Part of her wanted him to find that happiness again, to heal. But another part, raw and selfish, dreaded losing the man who'd fought beside her, who'd seen her walls and stayed anyway. The thought of him slipping back into that darkness, pulled by a love she could never rival, made her stomach churn. She'd fought for him, believed in him, let herself hope. Now she wondered if she'd been delusional, if she'd ever really stood a chance against a history so powerful. "You never asked Gold again?" she pressed, her voice steady, but her fingers clenched the napkin remnants tighter.

Regina took another slow sip, the soft sound of her swallow barely audible, then gave a small shrug, setting the glass down. "No. I knew better," her voice clipped, "I figured if he did take her, he had a reason. One he wasn't going to share with me." Emma gave her a long, judging look, that said exactly what she thought of that logic. The clink of a fork against a plate punctuating the silence.

Regina stared back into her wine, voice quieter, almost hollow, as though the past might surface there. "One day I heard she was dead. I never learned what really happened." She looked up at Emma, eyes glistening for just a moment before the mask snapped back into place. "But Killian refused to believe it. He said he'd feel it if she were truly gone."

The revelation about Desylva's supposed death hit Emma like a gut punch, her mind flashing to Killian's refusal to believe it, the stubborn hope that mirrored her own refusal to give up on Henry, on family. She leaned back, reflective, arms still crossed. the faint rustle of napkin scraps beneath her fingers. "True love always wins. True love always finds a way," she said, the words coming out almost like a mantra, but laced with a quiet desperate ache, wondering if that kind of love was something she'd ever fully know, or if it was slipping away from her now. The thought gnawed

at her, intensifying the knot in her chest. What if she'd been fooling herself, thinking she could be his anchor? What if true love had already won, and she was just the one standing in its way?

Regina gave a small, wry smile, lifting her glass in a silent toast before taking another sip. "Yes." Regina set the glass down, fingers tracing the rim with slow, deliberate strokes, her voice softening. "He searched for years. Searched until he couldn't anymore."

Hearing how Killian had searched for years, only to let Hook consume him again, deepened the sorrow twisting in Emma's chest. She thought of the beanstalk and felt a swell of compassion, mixed with a fear she couldn't quite shake.

Regina met Emma's eyes once more, voice cracking just enough to betray the weight of it. "He never gave up—not really. Part of him always hoped. … But the Captain Hook part of him wanted vengeance. Eventually he gave in to Hook… and became that ruthless pirate again." A quiet beat settled between them, filled with the clink of dishes and the murmur of other diners. Regina's eyes flicked to the window, then back to Emma. "You remember what he was like when you met him," Regina said.

Emma huffed a small, dry laugh, her lips twitching into a half-smile despite herself. "How could I forget?" Her mind drifted back to that first encounter and what followed. The beanstalk towering above them, Killian's roguish grin flashing in the sunlight, his hook catching the rope as they climbed, all charm and danger wrapped in black leather. She could still feel the adrenaline of that day, the way he'd teased and taunted her, his words a dance of flirtation and defiance, the giant's lair looming as they'd sparred with wits and wary glances. But now, knowing what she knew, she saw the cracks beneath that bravado, the pain he'd buried deep. It made her heart ache in a way she hadn't expected, a conflict raging inside. She wanted him to be happy, to find that lost part of himself, but the fear of being left behind—of not being enough—clawed at her, making every breath feel heavier. "He was a cocky bastard," she said, her voice softening with the memory, "all swagger and sly looks. Ready to double-cross me the second I turned my back. But there was something else there, even then, something broken under all that bravado and swagger."

Regina's smirk returned, sharper now, as she leaned forward, resting an elbow on the table. "That was the Hook left behind when she was taken. Cracked open by loss. Hardened by it. Desylva's chaos kept Killian alive, Swan, in ways nothing else could. She'd summon a gale just to win a playful bet, and he'd laugh like it was foreplay, egging her on while the crew scrambled to keep the ship from capsizing." Emma's cheeks warmed despite herself. "With a single look or a simple touch," Regina continued, "he could rile her up or calm her down. Make her mark blaze like a beacon or dim to a whisper. His very presence fueled her magic. A mere kiss could ignite her storm." She paused then continued, "And she could quiet the pirate in him with a single touch. draw strength from him like a succubus." Emma swallowed, remembering the moment Desylva had returned, how the air had crackled around her.

Regina paused, eyes flicking toward the booth where Desylva sat with Ruby, Snow, and Belle, their laughter bright. "You saw them here the day she returned. When I walked in, her mark flared, her eyes stormed, sparks flying from her fingers. I thought she'd blast me across the diner. But then he touched her. Whispered to her. And she calmed instantly. Her eyes returned to normal, her mark dimmed, her fingers stopped sparking." Regina's voice dipped, almost conspiratorial. "They are connected in ways I don't quite understand. They need each other." Her voice dipped, sly and pointed. "True love, sure. But messy. Dangerous even. … You'd have hated the chaos of it, all that reckless abandon clashing with your need to control everything." She arched a brow, daring Emma to argue, her wine glass hovering near her lips as she watched for a reaction.

Emma didn't rise to the bait. Her fingers stilled over the shredded napkin, her gaze following Regina's to the booth by the jukebox. But it was more than that; it was the terror of vulnerability, of having let someone in only to face the possibility of losing them to a past she couldn't compete with. Desylva was everything Emma had always felt she wasn't, powerful, untamed, perfectly matched to Killian's chaos. The jealousy burned hotter now, raw and unrelenting, mingling with a deep, aching doubt. What if she'd been fooling herself, thinking she could ever be enough for him? What if every soft look, every quiet moment, had been him settling, waiting for the real thing to come back? Her chest tightened painfully, her breath shallow as she fought to keep her expression neutral. She shook her head slowly, trying to push it down, but the conflict churned, leaving her feeling exposed, her heart pounding with a mix of resentment and reluctant understanding.

“Maybe,” she said, then paused, taking a deep breath that felt like it cost her something. “So, you’re saying he’ll go back to her?” she asked, her voice quieter, a vulnerability creeping in that she rarely showed, the words carrying the weight of unspoken fears—what if she wasn’t enough to pull him from that darkness the way Desylva had?

Regina noticed the flicker in Emma’s expression, something raw and uncertain. She inclined her head slightly. “Weren’t you listening, Swan? … The answer is yes. … He won’t be able to fight it. The pull to her is stronger than any magnet. Like a ship drawn to a harbor. They will be together again. It’s just a matter of time.”

Regina’s confirmation, “*It’s just a matter of time*”, landed like a stone in Emma’s chest, stirring a swirl of emotions, resignation, a flicker of jealousy, but also a quiet hope that true love, wherever it led, might heal the fractures in all of them.

The diner’s warm hum wrapped around them—plates clinking, coffee brewing, the jukebox kicking on with a faint twang.

Regina sipped her wine once more, her smirk softening into something almost sympathetic, the weight of Killian and Desylva’s history hanging between them like a shadow neither could quite grasp. She watched Emma for a moment longer, something unreadable flickering across her face, regret perhaps, or recognition. Then rose smoothly from the table, wine glass still half-full, and left without another word, her heels clicking softly against the linoleum, the soft jingle of the door the only sound she left behind as she swept out of the diner, leaving Emma alone with the echoes of everything she’d just heard.as she disappeared into the night.

Emma stayed seated, staring at the pile of napkin shreds, the weight of what she’d heard settling deep in her chest like an uncharted tide. Her eyes flicked back to the booth by the jukebox. Her heart ached with a strange, suffocating mix of sorrow jealousy, and fear. Fear for Killian, for herself, for the possibility that the man she’d started to love might always belong to someone else. She watched for a few more moments, the diner’s warmth feeling a little colder now, the laughter at the other table a distant sound. Her thoughts tangled in reflections of what might have been, and what still could be lost, the quiet ache of uncertainty settling over her like fog rolling in from the sea, thick, suffocating, and impossible to outrun. She didn’t know if she could fight for him, or if she even should, when the truth felt so painfully clear, she might never be the one he truly needed. She silently rose from the table and left, leaving her torn between fighting for what she wanted and fearing it was already lost.

Booth by Jukebox

The neon hum of the jukebox cast a kaleidoscope of red, blue, and gold across the table where Desylva sat with Snow, Ruby, and Belle. The surface was a battlefield of half-drunk coffee mugs, their porcelain rims stained with faint lipstick marks, and a plate of fries picked over to a scattering of golden crumbs. The air was rich with the scent of brewed beans and melted butter.

The jukebox hummed a faint tune, an old ballad of love and waves. Its lights danced over Desylva’s wild hair, the dark strands spilling over her shoulders like a storm cloud caught in the diner’s cozy embrace. She traced the rim of her mug with a fingertip, her storm-gray eyes distant yet softened by a rare flicker of peace, the steam curling upward like a ghost of the open sea she once roamed.

Snow leaned in across from her, her cream coat brushing the table’s edge, her voice gentle as a spring breeze, “It’s good to see you settling in. This place has a way of finding room for everyone, even the wildest hearts.” Her hair framed a face alight with quiet hope, her fingers twirling a fry absently as she smiled.

Ruby kicked back in her chair, one boot propped on the edge of the table, her red-streaked hair catching the jukebox’s glow like embers in the night, “Yeah, you’ve got grit, lady. Fit right in with the crazies here.” Her grin was sharp and sly, a wolf’s edge softened by warmth as she snagged a fry and popped it into her mouth, chewing with a playful wink that dared the world to keep up.

Belle sat beside her, cradling a worn book in her lap, its leather cover creased from countless readings, her tea steaming in a delicate cup as she nodded over the rim, “And you’ve got stories. I can tell. I’d love to hear them sometime, maybe over a quieter cup.” Her smile was soft, her eyes bright with the curiosity of a scholar who’d traded castles for adventures, the jukebox’s light glinting off her auburn curls.

Desylva's lips twitched into a faint smile, her fingers tapping the mug in rhythm with the song's rolling cadence, a sailor's habit unbroken by years ashore. "It's strange," she admitted, her voice low and threaded with a wistful edge. "After decades of confinement, chains and shadows, and before that years on the open sea, wild and free, I thought I'd forgotten what ordinary life even felt like. This stillness, this... normalcy, it's a foreign tide."

She paused, her gaze drifting to the window where the harbor's fog shrouded the Jolly Roger's masts. "But Killian makes it feel like home, even here." Her smile softened. "His laugh. His touch. Like an anchor in a squall. No matter how rough the sea gets, I always seem to find my way back to him."

Snow's eyes softened, a tender glow reflecting her own steadfast love, and she reached out to brush Desylva's hand with a fleeting, sisterly touch, "He's your harbor, isn't he?" Desylva didn't answer immediately. She didn't need to. The smile that tugged at her lips said enough.

Ruby's grin widened, her laugh a bright bark as she leaned forward, "Damn right, and I bet he's a wild one when the lights go low!" her boots thudding back to the floor as she snatched another fry, tossing it in the air and catching it with a smirk. Belle chuckled, setting her tea down with a clink, "A pirate and a storm. What a pair. It's the kind of tale that writes itself."

Desylva's smile deepened, a spark of mischief flaring in her gray eyes as she met their gazes, the jukebox clicking to a new song, a lilting shanty that hummed faintly of salt and longing. "You know," she added, her voice softening with a rare vulnerability, "I never had any female friends before." She laughed softly at how strange that sounded. "Out there, my only mates were the crew of the Jolly Roger. Rough lads, all salt and swagger. This…" she gestured to the table, the mugs, the shared laughter, "…this is new. Feels like a different kind of crew. One I didn't know I needed."

Snow's smile widened, warm and welcoming. Across the table, Ruby flashed her a wolfish grin and pointed a fry at her like a captain appointing a new crewmate. "Well, you've got us now, storm girl. We're tougher than we look." Belle nodded, her eyes gleaming, "And we stick together. Just like a ship's company."

Desylva looked around the table and realized she wasn't alone anymore. The feeling settled warmly in her chest, strange and unfamiliar, yet deeply welcome. Maybe Snow had been right. Storybrooke really did have a way of finding room for everyone.

The diner's chatter wrapped around them like a cozy cocoon. The clatter of dishes from the kitchen, Granny's sharp call to a dawdling server, the low murmur of townsfolk at the counter. Yet their table felt like a world apart, a haven stitched together by shared glances and the quiet clink of mugs. The night pressed against the windows, fog curling thick and silver, but inside, the warmth of their bond glowed steady, a lantern's light against the dark.

Jolly Roger / Granny's Diner
(Action Shifts Back and Forth. The scenes weaving between ship and diner in a harmonious interplay.)

Jolly Roger

The laughter from Captain's Folly refused to die. David was still chuckling into his ale. Archie was attempting to remember which of the game's rules had been real. Grumpy had already begun outlining what he claimed would become a formal fraud investigation. Killian sat at the center of it all, richer by one absurdly disputed pot and far too pleased with himself.

David leaned back in his chair, mug in hand, and fixed the pirate with a knowing grin. "So, Hook," he said, his voice full of brotherly mischief, "tell us about her. What's the real story with Desylva?"

Granny's Diner

The jukebox table lit up as Snow clapped her hands, suddenly unable to contain her curiosity. She leaned across the table toward Desylva, eyes bright with anticipation. "What about Killian? What was he to you out there?"

Desylva's eyes sparkled immediately.

Jolly Roger

Killian's hook tapped once against the tabletop. A slow smile spread across his face. That turned out to be the only encouragement he needed. He leapt to his feet, kicking his chair aside, and began singing, his voice lilting with a pirate's flair. The men joined in, their actions bursting with energy.

Killian
Sailed the seas with a storm in sight,
Met a lass with a tempest's might,
Her gray eyes caught me, soft and true,
A pirate's heart found a love to brew.

Killian vaulted onto a coil of rope and pointed dramatically toward the horizon with his hook, acting out the tale as though the events were unfolding before them once more. David grabbed an abandoned mop and brandished it like a ship's mast, bellowing the question as though interviewing a sailor returning from an epic voyage.

David
Tell me more, tell me more, was she wild and free?

Archie attempted to wave his arms like signal flags, only to get tangled in the motions and nearly knock his glasses off. Somehow he kept singing anyway.

Archie
Tell me more, tell me more, did she call the sea?

Grumpy folded his arms and refused to move for nearly half a verse before his boot started tapping anyway. By the end of the line he was stomping loudly enough to keep the rhythm for everyone else.

Grumpy
Took too long, but they're back in tune,
Love's a calm tide 'neath a silver moon.

The men linked arms and lurched across the deck in an exaggerated line of drunken sailors. Killian spun David beneath his arm, David nearly collided with Archie, and Archie crashed shoulder-first into Grumpy. The dwarf barked a protest, then immediately resumed singing without missing a beat.

All Men
Stormy lovin', sailed me so high,
Stormy lovin', under her sky,
Stormy lovin', hearts intertwined,
Oh-oh-oh, true love's the kind!

Granny' Diner

A slow smile spread across Desylva's face as she rose from her chair, twirling a spoon like a dagger before using it as an imaginary microphone. She barely waited for the question to finish before launching into song. Desylva tossed the spoon onto the table and stepped away from it as though leaving the safety of shore behind. Her eyes lifted toward an invisible horizon as she reenacted the memory, one hand pressed briefly to her heart before she looked up with a smile that belonged to another time.

Desylva
Found my rogue by the ocean's call,
Felt his kiss as the night did fall,
His blue eyes held me, warm and deep,
A stormy vow that my heart would keep.

The others joined without hesitation. Chairs scraped backward, mugs were abandoned, and within seconds the quiet corner of Granny's looked less like a late-night diner and more like the opening number of a particularly enthusiastic musical.

Snow rose with an excited laugh and immediately committed to the performance. She twirled a fry like a ballroom partner, her coat sweeping around her as she dipped low enough to earn amused looks from nearby diners.

Snow
Tell me more, tell me more, was it sweet and grand?

Belle rose with the enthusiasm of someone watching her favorite story come to life. Hugging her book to her chest, she stepped gracefully into the open space beside the table before extending it outward like a treasured gift.

Belle
Tell me more, tell me more, did he take your hand?

Ruby kicked her chair back and immediately turned the performance into theater. The fry became a cigar, then a captain's pipe, then a pointing finger as she swaggered around the jukebox like she owned the place.

Ruby
Sweet as rum on a calm sea night,
Two souls bound in the lantern light.

The women linked arms and swept across the diner in a loose circle. Desylva led the charge, Snow nearly dragged Belle into an extra turn, and Ruby cheerfully ignored every attempt at choreography in favor of making it more dramatic.

All Women
Stormy lovin', sailed me so high,
Stormy lovin', under his sky,
Stormy lovin', hearts intertwined,
Oh-oh-oh, true love's the kind!

Jolly Roger

Killian strode the length of the deck as though crossing entire realms in a single step. One hand rested over his heart while his hook traced an invisible horizon beyond the harbor, his expression growing unexpectedly sincere beneath the theatrics. His eyes distant and dreamy.

Killian
Crossed the realms with her name in my soul,
Felt her pull like the tides that roll,
Her voice a whisper, sweet and low,
A siren's call through the winds that blow.

David fell into step beside him, thumping his own shoulder and nodding knowingly as though he had witnessed every step of the journey himself, his grin equal parts teasing and proud.

David (lean in)
Tell me more, tell me more, did she mend your scars?

Archie attempted an ambitious turn and immediately lost track of where his feet were going. He windmilled both arms for balance, somehow avoiding the railing at the last possible second before continuing as though that had been intentional.

Archie (point upward)
Tell me more, tell me more, guide you past the stars?

Grumpy folded his arms in stubborn resistance. Three beats later his foot joined the rhythm. Moments after that he was keeping time with his mug, his scowl steadily losing ground to a reluctant smile.

Grumpy
Soft as mist, yet she's tough as nails,
Love like that never truly fails.

The line reformed. Killian spun through the center like a born performer, David raised his mug high and bellowed along beside him, Archie finally found the rhythm, and Grumpy's stomping became loud enough to serve as percussion for the entire deck.

All Men
Stormy lovin', sailed me so high,
Stormy lovin', under her sky,
Stormy lovin', hearts intertwined,
Oh-oh-oh, true love's the kind!

Granny's Diner

Desylva moved through the diner like she was crossing the deck of a ship, her hands tracing the shape of old storms above her before settling over her heart. The movement carried equal parts memory and wonder.

Desylva
Met his gaze 'neath a sky so vast,
Healed the wounds of a shadowed past,
His laugh a current, soft and free,
A love born on the open sea.

Snow clasped her hands over her heart and swayed dreamily before launching into another spin, lifting the fry overhead as though presenting the world's greatest love story.

Snow (hug herself)
Tell me more, tell me more, did it feel like home?

Belle transformed her book into whatever the song required, first a ship's wheel, then a map, then a treasured keepsake, narrating the entire adventure with delighted expressions.

Belle
Tell me more, tell me more, through the waves you roam?

Ruby leaned so far back in her chair that Belle visibly prepared to catch her. Somehow she kept perfect time with the music anyway.

Ruby
Steady as the tide, wild as the breeze,
Love like that puts the heart at ease.

Desylva swept Snow into another turn while Belle abandoned any pretense of dignity and joined Ruby's increasingly exaggerated dance.

Their laughter mixed with the music as they clasped hands and spun through the narrow space between tables.

All Women
Stormy lovin', sailed me so high,
Stormy lovin', under his sky,
Stormy lovin', hearts intertwined,
Oh-oh-oh, true love's the kind!

Jolly Roger

Killian dropped dramatically to one knee, extending his hand as though making a solemn vow to the sea itself. When he rose again, he swept his hook upward in one smooth motion, grinning broadly at the cheers that followed.

Killian
Anchored near when the dawn broke wide,
Saw her strength in the morning tide,
Her touch a haven, warm and near,
A pirate's peace after years of fear.

David counted the years off on his fingers with increasingly exaggerated solemnity before breaking into a grin and clapping loudly enough to keep everyone moving.

David
Tell me more, tell me more, was it worth the wait?

Archie pushed his glasses back into place and launched into a surprisingly dramatic gesture that looked rehearsed until he nearly stepped on his own foot halfway through.

Archie
Tell me more, tell me more, fate or twist of fate?

Grumpy pounded his boot against the planks one last time before lifting his mug in a grudging toast. He tried to maintain his scowl, but the smirk won anyway.

Grumpy
Grumble all I want, it's plain to see,
She's his calm in a raging sea.

They linked arms and lurched across the deck in a wildly uneven line. Killian occupied the center like a captain leading a charge, David nearly sloshed ale onto everyone, Archie caught Grumpy before he stumbled, and Grumpy immediately complained about being helped.

All Me
Stormy lovin', sailed me so high,
Stormy lovin', under her sky,
Stormy lovin', hearts intertwined,
Oh-oh-oh, true love's the kind!

Granny's Diner

Desylva folded her arms around herself for a heartbeat before reaching outward, as though finding someone waiting for her on the other side of the years. The tenderness in her expression drew all three women into the moment.

Desylva
Clung to him as the storm winds sighed,
Felt his heart where my dreams reside,
His hook a promise, cold yet dear,
A pirate's love through the fog and fear.

Snow spun through the open space between tables, holding her fry aloft like a ceremonial candle. Her eyes practically sparkled as she dipped dramatically, completely invested in every romantic detail of the story.

Snow
Tell me more, tell me more, was it pure and bright?

Belle twirled her book once before hugging it tightly against her chest. With a wistful smile, she stepped forward as though she were wandering through the pages of her favorite romance, thoroughly enchanted by every word.

Belle
Tell me more, tell me more, did it spark the night?

Ruby swaggered through the center of the performance like she owned both the diner and the harbor outside. She flexed dramatically for no reason whatsoever, drew an eye-roll from Snow, then dissolved into a teasing sway while winking at the others as if she knew exactly where the story was headed.

Ruby
Strong as oak, yet it bends so sweet,
Two lost souls where the heartbeats meet.

They circled together beneath the glow of the jukebox. Snow and Belle managed a surprisingly graceful turn before Ruby crashed into the formation with all the subtlety of a cannon broadside, sending everyone into laughter.

All Women
Stormy lovin', sailed me so high,
Stormy lovin', under his sky,
Stormy lovin', hearts intertwined,
Oh-oh-oh, true love's the kind!

Jolly Roger

All Men
She's his storm, his guiding star,

David lifted his mug toward the heavens as though presenting a newly discovered star. Killian pointed his hook skyward in agreement while Archie enthusiastically sketched imaginary constellations in the air and Grumpy attempted to do the same while pretending not to enjoy himself.

Granny's Diner

Snow exaggeratedly guided an imaginary ship into harbor while Belle acted as an enthusiastic harbor master. Ruby immediately began making crashing noises from the sidelines, earning a glare from Snow and laughter from everyone else.

Women
He's her port, both near and far,

Jolly Roger/Granny's Diner

Killian/Desylva
Sailed through years, now side by side,
True love flows with the evening tide!

On the Jolly Roger, the deck thundered beneath a storm of boots and applause as Killian climbed back atop the table, striking a pose that suggested he fully expected a standing ovation.

At the Diner, the women whirled together beneath the glow of the jukebox. Desylva's dark hair fanned out behind her while Snow nearly lost track of the chorus trying to keep up with the dance. Belle laughed openly. Ruby loudly declared herself the star of the production.

All Together (Both locations; All voices blend)
Stormy lovin', sailed me so high,
Stormy lovin', under the sky,
Stormy lovin', hearts intertwined,
Oh-oh-oh, true love's the kind!

On the Roger, Killian vaulted back to the planks and immediately found himself swept into the final chorus. The four men swayed shoulder to shoulder, boots pounding in unison while David held his mug aloft like a victory banner.

At the Diner, Desylva sent the chair skidding aside and the entire performance finally unraveled. Snow stumbled into Belle, Ruby nearly knocked over a basket of fries, and all four women collapsed into helpless laughter around the table.

Jolly Roger

The mood shifted as Killian's grin turned roguish, his voice dropping to a raspy tease as he kicked the table. "Aye, but there's more to the tale, mates!" The men hooted immediately, sensing trouble. Their cheers echoed across the harbor as the performance threatened to become completely ungovernable.

Granny's Diner

Desylva smirked, tossing a fry with a wink, "Oh, he was more than sweet, ladies!" The women laughed, their dance turning saucy, the shanty swinging into a bawdier beat.

Jolly Roger

Killian strutted across the deck, swinging his hips like a pirate captain returning victorious from a legendary voyage. He tossed his coat over one shoulder, twirled his hook like he was reeling in a prize, and aimed a shameless grin at the others as they erupted in laughter.

Killian
Spied a minx with a storm to tame,
Reeled her in for a saucy game,
Her hips a-swayin', wet with glee,
A pirate's prize, she's the catch for me!

David sprang up and launched into a wildly exaggerated jig. Ale sloshed dangerously close to the rim of his mug as he danced circles around Killian, repeatedly trying to interrupt the song with increasingly ridiculous commentary.

David
Tell me more, tell me more, did she dance the deck?

Archie rose halfway out of his chair before committing entirely. Laughing despite himself, he pressed a hand to his chest, then attempted a dramatic flourish that nearly ended with him tripping over a coil of rope.

Archie
Tell me more, tell me more, leave the sheets a wreck?

Grumpy slammed his grog onto the table and pointed accusingly at the sky as though personally offended by the entire performance. Despite his complaints, his boots hammered out the loudest rhythm on the deck.

Grumpy
Lovers like that make a dwarf's head ache,
Romp too loud, keep everyone awake!

The men linked arms once more and lurched across the planks like a crew caught in rough seas. Killian spun David beneath his arm, David nearly toppled Archie, and Archie collided with Grumpy hard enough to earn a protest that nobody listened to.

Men
Stormy rompin', shook me all night,
Stormy rompin', her squeals delight,
Stormy rompin', fun in the fray,
Oh-oh-oh, we played away!

Granny's Diner

Desylva strutted forward, winking as she mimed splashing water with her hands, then ran a finger down her thigh, giggling and spun with flair.

Desylva
Snagged my pirate with a cheeky wink,
Doused his sails 'til he couldn't think,
His hook's a tease, tickled my thigh,
Left me giggling 'neath a rum-soaked sky!

Snow hopped up, twirling her coat like a cape, then bumped hips with Desylva, laughing as she fanned herself with a fry.

Snow
Tell me more, tell me more, was he rough and fun?

Belle rose, swaying with her book hugged tight, then opened it and pretended to fan her face, blushing as she joined the dance.

Belle
Tell me more, tell me more, 'til the dawn begun?

Ruby kicked her chair aside, strutted to the jukebox, then locked her wrists together, wriggling free with a sly grin and a shimmy.

Ruby
That hook a cuff, pinned your wrists just right?
Held you fast 'til you squirmed with fight!

The women linked arms and swept across the diner once more. Desylva led a saucy twirl. Snow twirled Belle into an unexpectedly graceful turn. Ruby dramatically claimed the jukebox as her personal stage, shaking her hips against it.

Women
Stormy rompin', shook me all night,
Stormy rompin', his squeals delight,
Stormy rompin', fun in the fray,
Oh-oh-oh, we played away!

Their laughter carried across the diner and drew amused glances from nearby tables.

Jolly Roger

Killian swept through the center of the chaos like a born storyteller, stomping in time with the chorus as he beckoned the others closer. Within moments the entire performance revolved around him. He rocked his hips, miming grabbing Desylva in a tight hold, his hook swung as he stomped the deck with a wicked grin.

Killian
Caught her close in a lusty squall,
Rock the planks 'til we nearly fall,
Her moans a siren, loud and sweet,
A pirate's lust on a rolling beat!

David charged alongside him, laughing so hard he nearly spilled his ale. Every few steps he attempted another flourish and somehow made himself look even more ridiculous.

David
Tell me more, tell me more, did she claw your back?

Archie commandeered a nearby chair and pretended it was the helm of a ship, steering dramatically through imaginary storms before abandoning it when the song swept him away again.

Archie
Tell me more, tell me more, give the helm a whack?

Grumpy punctuated the rhythm by banging his mug against the tabletop. He shook his head at every verse while continuing to participate more enthusiastically than anyone except Killian.

Grumpy
Too much noise, it's a blasted din,
Bet ya broke the bed ya were in!

The deck became a whirl of motion. Killian led the charge with a hip thrust, David dragged Archie into another spin, and Grumpy shoved his way into the center while loudly insisting he wanted no part of any of this.

Men
Stormy rompin', shook me all night,
Stormy rompin', her squeals delight,
Stormy rompin', fun in the fray,
Oh-oh-oh, we played away!

Granny's Diner

Desylva straddled an imaginary Killian, rocking her hips with a sultry grin.

Desylva (wink)
Rode my pirate 'til the timbers creaked,
Left him panting, his voice all weak,
His growl a rumble, deep and sly,
A stormy romp 'neath a lightning sky!

Desylva fanned herself as if breathless, winking at the group. Snow twirled her coat, then belted a high note mid-spin, bumping Desylva with a playful laugh.

Snow
Tell me more, tell me more, did he make you sing?

Belle bounced lightly, clutching her book, then mimed a springy bed with a blush and a giggle.

Belle
Tell me more, tell me more, feel the mattress spring?

Ruby howled, shaking her hair, then kicked the jukebox with a shimmy, grinning wickedly.

Ruby
Wild as wolves, they're a howling pair,
Toss the bed 'til it's worse for wear!

The dance dissolved into cheerful chaos. Desylva spun Snow beneath her arm, Belle tried desperately to keep hold of her book, and Ruby improvised increasingly dramatic flourishes that made everyone else laugh harder.

Women
Stormy rompin', shook me all night,
Stormy rompin', his squeals delight,
Stormy rompin', fun in the fray,
Oh-oh-oh, we played away!

Jolly Roger

Killian seized hold of the mast, miming pinning Desylva to the wall, his hook slashing the air, with a roguish leer. Then pushed off it landing back in the center of the deck to another round of cheers.

Killian
Pinned her down ‘neath thunder’s call,
Railed her wild ‘gainst the cabin wall,
Her gasps a tempest, hot and raw,
A pirate’s claim in her stormy maw!

David pointed toward Killian as though presenting evidence before a jury, then immediately dissolved into laughter and had to steady himself against the rail.

David
Tell me more, tell me more, did she bite your lip?

Archie rocked from side to side with the swell of the ship, laughing harder than he had all evening, his glasses perpetually one enthusiastic gesture away from falling off.

Archie
Tell me more, tell me more, rock the bloody ship?

Grumpy pounded a boot against the planks, shook his fist in theatrical outrage, and then barked out another line without missing the beat.

Grumpy
Grumble all I like, they don’t care,
Shake the Roger ‘til it’s bare!

The cheering grew louder. Killian and David spun in opposite directions, Archie attempted to keep up, and Grumpy's stomping had long since become the unofficial percussion section.

Men
Stormy rompin’, shook me all night,
Stormy rompin’, her squeals delight,
Stormy rompin’, fun in the fray,
Oh-oh-oh, we played away!

Granny’s Diner

Desylva threw her head back with a sultry laugh, spinning with flair.

Desylva (grind hip, mime teasing hook)
Teased his hook with a saucy grind,
Drove him mad ‘til he lost his mind,
His thrusts a fury, fast and free,
A pirate’s storm crashing into me!

Snow stomped and shook her shoulders, twirling her coat like a storm, giggling as she bumped Ruby.

Snow
Tell me more, tell me more, did ya shake the walls?

Belle swayed, fanning herself with her book, then let out a playful yelp, blushing as she spun.

Belle
Tell me more, tell me more, heed your wildest calls?

Ruby kicked a chair with a wicked grin.

Ruby (strut to jukebox, shake hips hard)
Hot as rum, they're a blazing spree,
Rattle the Roger from sea to sea!

They spun wildly, Desylva led with a hip shake, Snow twirled Belle, Ruby shimmied against the jukebox. Their laughter raucous.

Women
Stormy rompin', shook me all night,
Stormy rompin', his squeals delight,
Stormy rompin', fun in the fray,
Oh-oh-oh, we played away!

Jolly Roger

Killian (mime grabbing a catch)
She's a gale, bouncin' in my hold,

David flexed as though preparing for some impossible feat of strength, earning a round of mock applause. Archie nearly doubled over laughing while Grumpy shouted that nobody was impressed.

Granny's Diner

Desylva (strut with hand on hip)
He's a rogue, frisky, brash, and bold,

Snow wagged a finger like scolding a naughty pirate. Ruby and Belle mimicked swashbuckling poses.

Jolly Roger/Granny's Diner

Killian/Desylva
Hook and storm, makin' mischief grand,
Toss the sheets 'cross the sea and sand!

On the Jolly Roger, the deck thundered beneath a storm of boots and applause as Killian climbed atop the table once more. He spread his arms wide and accepted the cheers like a pirate king addressing his crew.

At the Diner, the women whirled together beneath the glow of the jukebox, laughing so hard they nearly missed the rhythm. Desylva spun through the center of the circle, scattering handfuls of fries like confetti while Snow tried unsuccessfully to keep everyone moving in the same direction. Belle ducked a flying fry with a startled laugh, and Ruby immediately began tossing a few of her own, turning the diner floor into the world's least organized celebration.

All Together
Stormy rompin', shook me all night,
Stormy rompin', squeals pure delight,
Stormy rompin', fun in the fray,
Oh-oh-oh, we played away!

On the Roger, Killian vaulted back to the planks and was immediately swept into the final chorus. The four men swayed shoulder to shoulder, mugs raised high, their laughter carrying far beyond the harbor as the song reached its triumphant finale.

At the Diner, Desylva sent the chair skidding aside once more, and whatever remained of the choreography finally surrendered. Snow stumbled into Belle, Belle nearly dropped her book, and Ruby laughed so hard she had to grab

the edge of the table to stay upright. Within seconds all four women had collapsed into a giggling heap around the booth, hands slapping the table as nearby diners looked on with amused smiles.

Jolly Roger

The men roared with laughter. David nearly lost his footing and grabbed Killian's shoulder to steady himself. Archie doubled over laughing, removing his glasses long enough to wipe tears from the corners of his eyes. Grumpy drained the last of his grog, still muttering complaints that nobody believed for a second.

Slowly, the deck settled into something resembling order. The thunder of boots and applause faded into scattered chuckles and the rhythmic slap of waves against the hull. Lantern light swayed across the planks. Salt air drifted through the rigging. Above them, the stars burned bright over Storybrooke Harbor.

Killian finally dropped back into his chair, breathing hard from the exertion. The roguish grin lingering on his face softened, leaving something quieter behind. His blue eyes glinting with a mix of nostalgia and mischief.

David dropped into the chair beside him and nudged his shoulder. "That's some tale, Hook," he said with a broad grin. "She's one hell of a storm, isn't she?" Killian's smile widened before he could stop it. David immediately noticed. "Oh, there it is." Killian lifted an eyebrow. "What?" David pointed at him. "That look." Archie pushed his glasses back into place. "He does have a look." Grumpy snorted. "Aye. Looks like somebody hit him in the head with a love story." The accusation only made Killian laugh.

Despite every appearance that the performance had finally ended, David started the humming the tune under his breath. Archie joined almost immediately. Grumpy resisted for nearly three seconds before stomping his boot in time with the rhythm. Killian groaned. "Absolutely not." David ignored him entirely. Within moments the chorus had returned. Killian eventually joined in despite himself.

David
Sailed the seas with a storm in sight,

Killian
Met a lass with a tempest's might,

Archie
Tell me more, tell me more, did she call the sea?

David
Tell me more, tell me more, was she wild and free?

Their voices rolled across the harbor once more, weaker now, less performance and more shared amusement. Nobody bothered with choreography this time. David swayed in his chair. Archie conducted the rhythm with his mug. Grumpy kept time with his boot against the planks.

Grumpy
Took too long, but they're back in tune,
Love's a calm tide 'neath a silver moon

All
Stormy lovin', sailed me so high,
Stormy lovin', under her sky,

David
Stormy lovin', hearts intertwined

Archie
Oh-oh-oh, true love's the kind!

The final note drifted away. Nobody rushed to fill the silence. David wore a knowing grin. Archie watched over the rim of his mug. Grumpy shook his head as though the entire performance had been ridiculous, though the smile tugging at his beard betrayed him. After all the noise, the harbor seemed strangely still. For a moment, the only sounds were the waves against the hull and the distant creak of the rigging.

Killian sat quietly for a moment, lost in thought. The laughter lingered on his lips, but something softer settled behind his eyes as his thoughts drifted inevitably to Desylva. For all the teasing and laughter, the feelings beneath it were real. He turned the lyrics over in his mind and found himself smiling. The jokes amused him. The truth behind them touched something deeper. Then he pushed himself to his feet once more.

Killian rose once more, unable to stay seated, and seized his chair before spinning it around dramatically. "She's my tempest, always was. Makes me feel alive just thinkin' of her!" His voice carried a raw edge, thick with pride and longing, his hook slashing the air as he spun back to the table.

The admission earned an immediate cheer. David nearly spilled his ale applauding. Archie beamed openly. Grumpy pointed his mug at Killian. "See? That's the sort of thing I was trying to get him to admit all night." Killian rolled his eyes and pointed his hook at the dwarf. "Nobody asked you." Grumpy lifted his mug in a mock toast. "I know." Killian gestured dismissively toward him. "Then stop helping." Grumpy took another drink, shook his head, and settled back in his chair with a smug grin. "No."

The final notes dissolved into laughter. David rested an arm across Killian's shoulders. Archie leaned against the rail, smiling quietly. Grumpy muttered something about sentimental idiots before settling back onto the bench beside them.

Nobody hurried to leave.

The harbor lay calm around them. The sea whispered against the hull. Overhead, the moon watched from a sky scattered with stars. For a little while longer, there were no curses, no battles, no lost years to reclaim. Only friendship. Only laughter. Only the people who had somehow become family.

The air thrummed with the lingering echo of Desylva's storm and Killian's sea, binding them in a salty, starlit embrace as the Jolly Roger swayed gently under the moon's watchful eye.

Granny's Diner

The jukebox table buzzed with the afterglow of the shanties, the tender strains of "Stormy lovin'" and the wild hoots of "Stormy rompin'" fading into the diner's familiar clatter... the sizzle of the grill, the clink of mugs, the low hum of late-night chatter.

The women settled back into their seats, the air still crackling with the joy of their performance, laughter lingering like a soft melody. Ruby fanned herself dramatically with a napkin, wearing a wicked smirk as though she expected applause. Snow was still catching her breath from the impromptu production, while Belle carefully smoothed the cover of her book, laughing at the memory of the chaos they'd just unleashed.

Desylva leaned against the table's edge, her storm-gray eyes alight with a rare, unguarded lightness, her fingers wrapped around a steaming coffee mug that sent tendrils of warmth curling into the air. Her dark hair fell loosely over her shoulders, catching the diner's warm glow as she gazed out the window toward the harbor, where the Jolly Roger's silhouette loomed in the fog.

Snow brushed a strand of hair from her face and leaned forward, resting her chin in her hands, "That was beautiful, Desylva. You and Killian, you've got a love that sings through every note." Her smile held the quiet wonder of someone who still believed wholeheartedly in happy endings.

Belle set her book down beside her tea, the steam curling upward as she nodded, her eyes bright with awe, "It's epic, really. Like a tale spun from salt and thunder. With all the heart of a storybook and the grit of the sea." She traced the edge of her cup, her fingers lingering on the porcelain as she smiled at Desylva.

Ruby stretched languidly, her grin sly and unapologetic as she snagged a fry from the basket, popping it into her mouth with a wink, “Hell yeah. It’s hot too. You two could light up the whole damn town with that spark.” She pointed a fry at Desylva. “Romance one minute, ruckus the next!” Her laugh rang out, bold and infectious. ““Boring relationships don't get sea shanties written about them.” Her boots tapped the floor as she leaned back, fanning herself with a napkin.

Desylva’s laughter spilled forth, a low, rich sound that danced with the jukebox’s faint hum, her mug clinking softly as she set it down, “He’s my pirate, through and through. Always knew how to steer me right. Even in the wildest gales. Tender as a lullaby or fierce as a squall. Depending on the night.” Her voice softened, then sparked with mischief as she met Ruby’s grin, the memory of their bawdy encore flashing in her eyes.

For the first time that evening, nobody felt the need to fill the silence. The women shared a quiet moment, their bond settling over the table like a lantern’s golden glow, a warmth that wrapped around them as tightly as the shanties had bound their voices.

Snow reached for her coffee, her fingers brushing Desylva’s in a fleeting gesture of solidarity, while Belle hummed a soft snippet of the chorus, “Stormy lovin’, sailed me so high…” her tea forgotten as she lost herself in the melody. Ruby snagged another fry, smirking as she tossed it in the air and caught it, “And stormy rompin’ shook the night, huh?” drawing a fresh round of giggles.

The diner’s bustle hummed on around them—the clatter of plates, the distant ring of the order bell, Granny’s sharp call from the counter—but it faded into a steady backdrop as they sipped and smiled, the romance and revelry of the songs lingering in their voices. The jukebox clicked to a new tune, its soft strains weaving through the air.

Desylva's gaze drifted back to the window, her smile deepening as she pictured Killian swaying on the Roger’s deck, his hook glinting under the stars. probably surrounded by laughter and entirely too pleased with himself.

The women’s laughter rose again, the night stretching out before them like a calm sea after a storm, rich with the echoes of love sung soft and wild.

Day 13

Docks - Late Evening

The harbor was quiet. Fog drifted across the water in thin ribbons, softening the lights of the fishing boats tied alongside the docks. Somewhere out on the bay, a buoy bell rang faintly. Emma wandered without any real destination. She told herself she was taking a walk. Really, she was trying not to think. About the way Killian looked at Desylva. About everything Regina had said last night. About the growing certainty that maybe she'd already lost before she'd ever had a chance. A rhythmic scraping sound drew her attention. At the end of one pier, Smee sat on an overturned crate, repairing a fishing net.

His brow furrowed in concentration as thick fingers worked knots into the worn rope. He glanced up. "Evenin', Sheriff." Emma offered a distracted nod. "Hey." Smee studied her for a second. "You look about how the Cap'n used to." That earned a small frown. "What does that mean?" Smee tugged another knot tight. "Means you look like you're carryin' something heavy."

Emma stared out toward the water. For a long moment neither spoke. Then she quietly muttered, "Was she really that important to him?" Smee didn't have to ask who she meant. Some names never needed saying. Desylva. He chuckled softly. "Aye." The answer came without hesitation. Without doubt. "Aye, she was."

Emma looked down at the dock. The words hurt more than she wanted them to. Smee noticed. He sighed. "I've seen him happy before." Emma glanced toward him. "With her." His eyes drifted toward the distant silhouette of the Jolly Roger. "The kind of happy that makes a man forget every bad thing that's happened to him for a little while." Emma swallowed. Smee nodded. "She gave him that."

The words settled heavily between them. Emma looked away. Exactly what she'd feared hearing. But Smee wasn't finished. He threaded another section of net together. Then added quietly, "But so are you." Emma blinked. "What?"

Smee pointed a finger toward her before returning to his work. "You. … After he lost her, the Captain was gone." The older pirate's expression darkened. "Not sad. … Not heartbroken. … Gone. … I remember nights when he'd stand at the helm until dawn starin' at the horizon, convinced he'd spot her. … He became angry. … Mean. … Reckless."

Emma could hear the certainty in his voice. The weight of history. "He spent years chasin' revenge because revenge was all he had left." Smee shook his head. "I watched it happen."

The harbor bell rang again somewhere in the fog. Then he looked directly at Emma. "Then he met you." Emma didn't know what to say. Smee smiled faintly. "This version of Killian? … The man who sits in diners. … The man who helps Henry with his homework. … The fool who talks about havin' a home." He laughed under his breath. "That's new."

Emma's eyes softened. Smee continued. "I've seen him in love before. … With her. … But the man he is right now? … That's because of you."

Silence stretched between them. Gentler this time. Less painful. Finally Smee leaned back against the crate. "You didn't replace her, Emma." Emma looked at him. Smee smiled and continued, "You brought Killian back."

The words hit harder than Regina's entire story. Because Smee wasn't trying to convince her of anything. He was just telling the truth as he saw it. Emma stared toward the Jolly Roger, barely visible through the evening fog. Then toward the lights of Storybrooke. Toward home. Toward Henry. Toward the life Killian had built. A life she'd been part of. For the first time all day, the knot in her chest loosened. Not gone. But smaller. "Thanks, Smee."

He shrugged. "Don't mention it."

Emma smiled faintly. Then turned and started walking back toward town. Behind her, Smee returned to his net. Above the harbor, the fog rolled slowly across the water. And out in the darkness, the Jolly Roger waited.

Day 14

Morning

Fog cloaked the docks in a thick, gray shroud, mist curling around the pilings like ghostly fingers, weaving through the air with a damp chill that seeped into everything it touched, muting the world to a soft, mournful hush.

Killian stood alone at the edge of the pier, his black leather coat glistening with condensation, its collar turned up against the cold. His boots rested on the slick planks, the wood creaking faintly under his weight as the sea lapped below, its soft murmur a restless undertone to the stillness. His hand was buried deep in his pocket. His hook rested against the damp railing, glinting dully through the fog. His dark hair clung to his forehead, damp strands falling into his eyes as he stared out at the shrouded horizon, where the Jolly Roger's silhouette loomed like a specter, the masts piercing the mist.

"She's my past I can't bury," he muttered into the wind, his voice low and rough, carried away by the breeze that tugged at his coat. "Every touch, every kiss pulls me back to her storm. Those wild nights, her lightning in my veins, her laugh cutting through the chaos like a beacon. She pulled me from the abyss once, gave me a reason beyond vengeance. But Emma…" His voice cracked, a sob breaking free as he sank against the railing, its damp chill soaked through his coat, pressing against his back as he bowed his head.

His hook scraped the wood with a faint screech, a jagged sound swallowed by the fog. His blue eyes shimmered with unshed tears, the sea's soft murmur offering no solace, only echoing the turmoil roiling within him. "How do I choose when my heart's split in two. When every beat screams for both, and losing either'd be like losing the wind or the waves?" His breath hitched, a shudder running through him as he pressed his forehead to the railing, the cold metal grounding him against the storm of his thoughts.

A shuffle of footsteps broke the silence. Smee emerged from the mist, his stout frame bundled in a worn wool coat, his red hat atop his graying curls, damp with fog. His boots squelched against the wet planks as he approached,

his round face creased with concern. He clapped a meaty hand on Killian's shoulder, the touch firm but awkward, his voice gruff yet earnest. "You'll sort it, Cap'n, you always do. Been through worse'n this, you have. Storms and curses and that crocodile's tricks. You'll find yer way."

His words hung in the air, heavy with a loyalty forged over centuries, but they rang hollow against the depth of Killian's anguish. The pirate lifted his head, his blue eyes meeting Smee's with a flicker of frustration, then softening to a weary gratitude. "Aye, Smee, always the optimist, eh?" he rasped, his voice thick with emotion as he straightened, brushing damp hair from his face with his hook. "But this ain't a squall to sail through or a beast to slay. It's my bloody soul tearing itself apart, and I've no chart for this course."

Smee's hand lingered a moment longer before dropping, his stout figure shifting awkwardly as he scratched at his beard, the fog curling around him like a shroud.

Killian turned back to the sea, his jaw tightening as he gripped the railing with both hand and hook. The mist thickened, swallowing the horizon, and the Jolly Roger faded further into shadow, its creaking hull a distant whisper. Smee's words, though well-meant, offered no clarity, only deepened the turmoil gnawing at him, the pull of Desylva's storm clashing with Emma's steady shore. "She's in my blood. Every scar's got her name on it," he murmured, more to himself than Smee, "But Emma's a quiet I never knew I needed. I can't bury one without killing the other." His voice faded into the fog, a ragged thread lost to the wind.

Smee shuffled closer, his breath puffing in the cold as he ventured, "Maybe ye don't have to choose, Cap'n, not yet. Time's a funny thing here." Killian's lips twitched, a bitter half-smile, "Aye, time's a cruel bastard, mate, and it's running out." He pushed off the railing, his coat dripping as he turned from the docks. His boots thudded against the planks, a determined rhythm cutting through the mist as he headed inland, his turmoil unresolved, driving him toward Archie's office, seeking answers the sea couldn't give.

Smee watched him go, his figure swallowed by the gray, muttering to the wind, "He'll sort it, he has to," though the doubt in his own voice lingered, carried away by the fog's ghostly embrace.

Day 15

Street

The next evening fog rolled thick and heavy, cloaking the town in a damp, gray veil. The streetlamp outside the door to Archie's office cast a muted halo through the mist, its light barely piercing the gloom to touch the windows, where condensation beaded on the glass like tears frozen in time. Killian stood at the door, his black leather coat glistening with moisture. His breath misting in the chill as he opened the door, entered the building, and headed up the stairs.

Hall outside office door

Killian knocked on the office door, a sharp rap of knuckles followed by the nervous tap of his hook against his thigh, a restless rhythm that betrayed the storm churning within him.

Inside Office

Pongo barked a soft, muffled greeting, his tail thumping against the floor. Archie opened the door, his red hair tousled from a long day, his tweed jacket slightly rumpled as he stepped aside, ushering the pirate in with a warm, "Come in, Killian," his voice a steady anchor against the fog's oppressive weight. The office glowed with the soft amber of the hearth, its fire crackling low, casting flickering shadows across the bookshelves. The air carried the comforting scent of chamomile tea steeping in a kettle and the faint musk of old leather bindings, a contrast to the sea-salt dampness clinging to Killian's coat as he stepped inside, his boots leaving faint wet prints on the hardwood.

Killian didn't sit. He paced the small room, his hook tapping a staccato against his thigh, his hand raking through his dark hair, disheveling it further. His blue eyes, usually sharp with wit or resolve, were clouded with a raw desperation, their depths swirling like a sea caught between storm and calm. "I'm lost, mate, utterly bloody lost," he rasped, his voice rough and jagged, as if torn from deep within. "Before I met Desylva, I was nothing but rage and vengeance. A pirate consumed by it, drowning in rum and blood after Milah was ripped from me, after Rumpelstiltskin

took everything. She changed that. My tempest, my storm. She calmed me, Archie. Her laugh, her fire, the way she'd wield her lightning like a blade, it brought light back to my life, pulled me from that dark abyss. We conquered realms together, her and me, wyverns, curses, seas that'd swallow lesser souls, and when she was taken, that rage roared back, fiercer than ever. It stayed, gnawing at me, driving me. Until Emma."

He paused, his pacing halting as he gripped the back of an armchair, his knuckles whitening. His voice softened, a tremor beneath it, "Emma tamed it again, gave me a purpose beyond revenge. Henry, this town, her steady eyes seeing past the hook to the man beneath. But the moment I saw Desylva again, it was like time rewound. My storm was back, alive, her gray eyes pulling me like a tide I can't fight. I want her, Archie. Every jest, every touch, lures me back, like a magnet. I'm tearing myself apart not knowing who I am without either."

Archie settled back into his chair behind the desk, the leather creaking softly as he adjusted his glasses, their lenses catching the firelight in brief glints. Pongo shifted, resting his muzzle on his paws, his dark eyes tracking Killian's restless movements with quiet concern. Archie's tone was gentle yet probing, a therapist's calm threading through the pirate's chaos.

"You're caught between two profound loves, Killian. Two forces that've shaped you in ways most can't fathom. Desylva's the storm of your past, wild, untamed, tied to the pirate you were, the Captain Hook who thrived on danger and defied the odds across realms. Emma's the shore you've built here, the man you've become, seeking peace after all that loss. Now Desylva's return's stirring it all up again. It's not about picking one like some simple coin toss, it's about what they mean to you, what they've carved into your soul." He leaned forward, resting his elbows on the desk, his tweed sleeves brushing the wood as his voice deepened with intent. "You've survived loss before, rebuilt yourself from ashes more than once. What's your heart whispering beneath all this chaos?" His eyes held Killian's, steady and searching, the fire's soft pop punctuating the silence as the pirate's pacing stilled, his shoulders slumping under the weight of the question.

Killian sank into the armchair at last, the cushions sighing as he dropped his head into his hand. His hook rested awkwardly against his knee, glinting faintly, while his hand pressed against his brow, fingers digging into his skin as if to hold his fracturing thoughts together. His voice emerged a ragged thread, barely above a whisper. "It's screaming for both, Arch. Des is etched in my scars, my soul, her laugh echoes in my bones from nights under moonlit cliffs, battles where her storm saved me, nights of storm fueled passion. Emma's my quiet, the life I never thought I'd ever have again. I can't bear to break her, to see those eyes dim because of me. I'm a bloody mess, torn clean in two, and I don't know how to choose without losing half of myself."

His throat tightened, a single tear escaping to trace a path down his stubbled cheek. He swiped it away with a rough flick of his wrist, his blue eyes lifting to Archie's, raw and pleading, "What if I lose them both, Des to the past again, Emma to my damned indecision? I'd not survive it, not again."

Archie reached across the desk, resting a hand on Killian's shoulder. His grip was firm yet gentle, a steady balm against the pirate's unraveling. His voice softened, carrying a quiet reassurance, "That mess is what makes you human, Killian. It's love's chaos, not betrayal. You don't have to decide alone. Talk to them, let them guide you through this storm. You're not a villain here, just a man with a heart big enough for two, and that's no curse, it's a strength."

Killian's breath hitched, his hand clenching into a fist against his knee as Archie's words sank in. His hook tapped once, twice, a faint metallic clink against the chair's frame, then stilled. Archie's smile was soft, reassuring, as he leaned back, his hand slipping from Killian's shoulder, "You won't lose them. They both see you, truly see you. Desylva through the fire of your past, Emma in the light of your present. Trust that, Killian. Trust them to know you, even in this mess."

Killian nodded, a slow, heavy motion, his jaw tightening as he rose. His coat rustled as he straightened, the damp leather catching the firelight in slick gleams. "Aye, I'll talk to them. Bloody hell, I owe them that much," he rasped, his voice thick with emotion, "Thanks, mate, for not letting me drown in this." He turned to the door, pausing with his hand on the knob.

The fog outside pressed thicker against the windows, its gray tendrils curling like smoke as Pongo whined softly behind him. Archie watched him go, his glasses fogging slightly from the hearth's warmth. The door clicked shut.

Street

Killian stepped back into the mist, his silhouette swallowed by the night, his heart a tangled knot of storm and shore, unresolved but buoyed by a fragile hope as he faced the women who defined him.

Day 17

Street

The sky was a deep indigo, stars obscured by a thin veil of clouds drifting in from the sea, their edges silvered by a waxing moon casting faint light across the street.

Inside Archie's Office

Emma slipped into Archie's office after a late-night patrol, the town cloaked in a stillness that pressed against the windows. Her red leather jacket bore the faint sheen of mist from her rounds, its zipper glinting as she stepped through the door, her blonde hair, pulled into a loose ponytail, was damp at the ends, curling slightly against her neck, and her boots left soft thuds on the hardwood as she crossed the threshold, the scent of damp earth and coffee lingering on her from a long shift.

The office glowed with the warm amber of the hearth, its fire burning low but steady, casting flickering shadows across the bookshelves. Pongo dozed nearby, sprawled on a worn rug, his black-and-white fur rising and falling with each gentle snore, his ears twitching at her entrance. Archie sat by the fire in an armchair, a steaming mug of chamomile tea cradled in his hands, his red hair tousled, and his glasses perched low on his nose. He looked up as she entered, offering a gentle smile that crinkled the corners of his eyes. "Evening, Emma," he said, his voice a soft balm against the night's quiet, gesturing to the chair across from him.

"Archie, I need to talk. About Killian," Emma said, her voice tight and strained as she fidgeted with her jacket zipper, the metal clicking faintly under her restless fingers. She sank into the offered chair, its faded green cushions sighing under her weight, her knees bouncing slightly as she settled. Her eyes, shadowed with exhaustion and a raw vulnerability, met his. Her hands stilled briefly on the zipper before dropping to her lap, twisting together as she exhaled shakily, her breath visible in the firelight.

"I love him, Archie. I've let him in, more deeply than anyone since Neal broke me, since I built those walls after years of being alone, abandoned in this world. He's my partner, my rock. We've fought for this life together, through curses and all the chaos this town throws at us. But I see how Desylva lights him up, literally, her wild laugh, her storm magic. She's brought out a part of him I can't reach, a part of him I didn't even know until she walked in. I'm terrified I'm losing him. I don't know if I should fight for him or let him go to her." Her eyes glistened, tears welling as her voice broke, fracturing into a whisper, "I've let him in, really in, past every damn wall, and it'll shatter me if he chooses her. I love him so much it hurts. I don't want to lose us, Archie, not after everything." She pressed a hand to her chest, as if to steady the ache, her jacket creaking softly with the motion.

Archie set his mug on the small table beside him, the ceramic clinking faintly against the wood. He leaned back, adjusting his glasses with a deliberate motion, their lenses catching the fire's glow as he nodded, his expression warm and attentive, "What's really weighing on you, Emma, beneath that fear?" he asked, his tone gentle yet probing, inviting her to unravel the storm she carried.

She swallowed hard, her throat bobbing as she looked into the fire, its embers popping softly. "Being alone again, like always, or pushing him away by holding too tight and losing him anyway. I've lost so much, Neal, Graham, every chance at family I thought I'd never get. Killian's different. He stayed, fought beside me, saw me when I didn't want to be seen. But now, with her, I don't know how to do this. How to love him and not break." Her voice trembled, a tear slipping down her cheek. She wiped it away with a quick swipe of her sleeve, the leather rustling as she hugged her arms around herself, her ponytail sagging as her head dipped, the firelight painting her face in shades of gold and shadow.

Archie leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees, his tweed sleeves brushing together as his voice softened with a quiet strength. "That's your power, Emma, opening your heart, letting him in despite those scars. Desylva

stirs his past, yes, a wild, untamed part of him tied to who he was. But it doesn't erase what you've built together. It's not a contest between you and her; it's not about winning him. He's torn because he loves you both, and that speaks to how deeply he cares. How much you mean to him here, now. What scares you most isn't just losing him, it's losing yourself in that fear, isn't it?"

He paused, his eyes steady behind his glasses, watching as she nodded, a small, shaky motion. Pongo stirred, lifting his head with a soft whine, his tail thumping once against the rug before he settled again. "You've got those scars from loss, Neal's betrayal, Graham's death, but love's not a fight to win, Emma. It's messy and beautiful, and Killian's not leaving you. He's struggling to hold onto both, just like you're struggling to hold onto him. Share this with him, your vulnerability, this fear. It's your strength, not a weakness. What you have is real, and he knows it. Every moment, every battle you've faced together."

Emma's breath steadied slightly, her hands unclenching as she met his gaze. Her eyes still shimmered, but a flicker of resolve ignited beneath the tears, a spark catching in the dark. "What if he can't choose, Archie? What if he keeps tearing himself apart, and me with him?" she asked, her voice low, the words heavy with the weight of the past 17 days watching Killian drift between her and Desylva.

Archie's smile softened, lines deepening around his eyes as he leaned back. "Then you'll find a way together. He's not Nea. Not running from you. He's here, caught in his own storm. … You're not alone in this. Lean on him, on your family here, on Henry, on your parents. … You've got people who see you, who'll hold you up."

He reached across, resting a hand briefly on her arm, his touch light but grounding. Her jacket creaked under his fingers, the fire's warmth seeping through the leather.

She nodded, steadier now, her jaw tightening as she wiped her eyes again, this time with purpose, "Thanks, Archie, I'll try. … I owe us that much." Rising, she zipped her jacket with a decisive tug, her boots scuffing the floor as she headed for the door. She paused as a soft rumble of thunder echoed outside.

She glanced back with a faint, weary smile. "Guess I'm not the only one wrestling storms tonight." Archie chuckled softly, lifting his mug in a small salute. "You're not, and you'll weather it, Emma. You always do."

The door clicked shut behind her, as Pongo's tail thumped once more, the office settling back into its quiet glow, leaving Archie to sip his tea and ponder the tangled hearts of Storybrooke.

Street

Emma exited the building and stepped into the night, the mist curling around her silhouette.

Day 19

Henry tracked Killian down by the docks, the salt breeze tugging at his jacket as he approached, his storybook clutched tight under his arm, his young face etched with a determination that belied his age. The pirate stood brooding, staring out at the restless waves, his silhouette framed against the fading light, and Henry planted himself beside him, voice steady despite the shimmer in his wide eyes, "You don't have to choose yet; the story's still unfolding, and I won't let it end here."

Killian's lips twitched into a faint smile, a crack in his storm-cloud demeanor, as he ruffled the boy's hair with his hand, "Wise lad you are, but it's tearing me in two all the same."

Henry's resolve ran bone-deep, forged in the fires of a life shaped by Regina's fierce love, Bae's abandonment, and the family he'd carved out with Emma and Killian. A light he'd defend with every ounce of his being. Desylva's return was a miracle he refused to let slip away. A chance to mend the fractured endings that haunted him, his father's death, his mother's buried pain. He tapped the book's worn cover with purpose, "You and Desylva are in here, true love spanning realms; I've lost too much to let this go wrong, and I'll fix it, I swear."

Killian's throat tightened, emotion roughening his voice as he met the boy's earnest gaze, "You're a dreamer, Henry, never let that fade." The words hung between them, a quiet vow amidst the harbor's murmur, as Henry's faith burned bright, a beacon against the uncertainty gnawing at Killian's heart.

Day 20

Granny's Diner

Inside

Killian and Desylva rose from their booth in Granny's Diner, the air thick with the lingering scents of brewed coffee and the faint sweetness of powdered sugar dusting fresh donuts. The jukebox hummed a soft Elvis tune, its nostalgic chords weaving through the clatter of plates and the low murmur of patrons—fishermen swapping tales of lean hauls, locals nursing mugs under the amber glow of hanging lights.

Ruby darted past with a tray, her red-streaked hair flashing like a beacon, her wolfish grin tossing a teasing spark their way, "Have fun, you two! Don't get lost in that fog!" Her voice carried a playful lilt, her skirt swishing as she spun toward table six with a tightrope walker's grace.

Grumpy slouched at the counter, his beard flecked with beer foam, his gravelly mutter trailing after them, "Don't trip over yourselves, idiots. Watch the damn cobblestones." His scowl softened faintly as he glanced at Desylva, a grudging respect for her storm-hardened spirit flickering in his dark eyes before he buried his nose back in his mug.

Killian's black leather coat rustled as he shrugged it on, the damp fabric catching the diner's warm light in slick gleams, its collar brushing his stubbled jaw. His hook rested lightly at his side, its steel curve glinting with every sway of the overhead lights, a quiet reminder of the pirate who'd braved realms for the woman beside him. Desylva adjusted her own worn leather jacket, its patched elbows scuffed, her dark hair spilling wild over her shoulders like a cascade of ink, catching the amber glow in chaotic waves. Her storm-gray eyes met his, a flicker of lightning dancing in their depths. Her cursed mark pulsing faintly beneath her sleeve, a soft blue glow that thrummed with the diner's electric hum, as if her magic stirred in his presence.

Their hands laced together as they moved toward the door, Killian's fingers threading through hers with a warmth that sent sparks skittering up his arm, her driftwood ring pressing gently against his skin, its sapphire glinting like a captured star under the fluorescent lights. Her touch was a tether, grounding him amidst the chaos of his heart. Emma's steady eyes lingering in his mind, Desylva's wild spirit pulling him like a tide. They exited, the bell's chime a soft echo slicing through the diner's bustle.

Outside

The fog curled around them like a living veil. Their boots crunched faintly on the damp cobblestones, the mist swallowing the diner's glow behind them as they walked into the night, their clasped hands a quiet vow against the gathering shadows.

Hardware Store

Outside

Killian and Desylva stood outside the hardware store under the soft, flickering glow of a streetlamp, its halo barely piercing the thick fog that cloaked the streets, the air heavy with a damp chill and the faint tang of salt drifting from the distant docks.

Their kiss stretched long and deep. Her lips pliant and yielding, warm against his. Her breath a soft, trembling whisper that curled against his stubbled jaw, rekindling memories of wild, storm-swept nights aboard the Jolly Roger—moonlit cliffs where her lightning had danced, their bodies tangled in the cabin's shadows, her laughter a melody against the sea's roar. His hand cupped her face, fingers tracing the curve of her cheek, his hook resting gently at her waist, the cold steel a stark contrast to the heat of her leather jacket pressed against him. Her hands

slid to his shoulders, gripping the damp leather of his coat, pulling him closer as if to erase the decades that had torn them apart, her storm-gray eyes half-lidded, shimmering with unshed tears in the lamp's faint light.

As he drew back, his breath ragged, Emma's steady face flashed in his mind—her eyes, her quiet strength anchoring him through Storybrooke's chaos—a coil of guilt twisted tight in his gut, bitter and sharp, warring with the love that surged for the woman before him. His blue eyes shadowed with conflict, he brushed a strand of her dark hair behind her ear, his voice low and rough, "I need time, love," he murmured, the words heavy with unspoken promises and pain. She nodded, her lips curving in a faint, understanding smile, though her heart ached as she watched him step back, his boots scuffing the cobblestones, his silhouette swallowed by the fog as he walked into the night, the sway of his coat a fading echo of the pirate she'd loved across realms.

Desylva lingered under the streetlamp, her breath misting in the chill. Her fingers brushing the driftwood ring on her left hand, its grain worn smooth by years of captivity, its sapphire a quiet beacon of their vows, glinting faintly as she turned it in the light. She lifted her wrist, pushing back her sleeve to reveal the cursed mark, a glyph etched in blue flame, its faint pulse flickering like a heartbeat, alive with the magic Killian's presence had stirred. His touch, his kiss, had always fueled her storm, gusts that roared with his laughter, lightning that flared with his gaze, rain that fell with his tears. In the tower, chained and drained, she'd clung to memories of his hands on her skin, his lips claiming hers with a hunger that set her magic ablaze, giving her strength to endure Rumpelstiltskin's torment. Now, standing in Storybrooke's fog, she yearned for that fire again, for him to make love to her as he had in their wild, reckless nights, bodies pressed close in the Roger's sway, her storms answering his every touch, their passion a tempest that drowned the world.

She saw the hesitation in his eyes, the weight of Emma's love anchoring him to this new life. A life she hadn't shared, a shore she hadn't reached. He wasn't ready, not yet, his heart a tangled sea of past and present, and the realization settled heavy in her chest, a quiet ache beneath her fierce longing. She wondered if they could ever be as they were, two souls bound by storms, defying realms with their love, her magic a mirror to his fire.

The mark pulsed softly, a reminder of the power his nearness unlocked, but also of the curse that had stolen so much time. She traced the ring again, its sapphire cool against her skin, and whispered to the fog, "Will we find our way, Killian? Or is this all we'll have, echoes of what was?" Her voice trembled, carried away by the mist, unanswered but resolute.

She turned and entered the hardware store, her boots thudding softly on the creaky wooden floor, the bell above the door jingling faintly as it swung shut.

Inside

Up the narrow staircase she climbed, her hand trailing along the chipped railing, to her apartment—a cramped haven she'd claimed amidst the chaos below. The store's shelves sagged under the weight of rusty wrenches, dented toolboxes, and cans of paint stacked haphazardly, their labels peeling in the damp air. The scent of steel hung sharp and metallic, mingling with the acrid bite of turpentine and the faint must of old wood, a stark contrast to the sea-salt wildness she carried.

Apartment

Her apartment was sparse, a single room with a sagging mattress draped in a patched quilt, a wooden chair by a cracked window overlooking the fog-shrouded street, a small table cluttered with a chipped teacup and a dog-eared book of sea shanties. Her leather jacket creaked as she hung it on a hook, her fingers brushing the cursed mark once more, its glow dimming in the quiet.

She sank onto the bed, the springs groaning under her weight, and stared at the ring, its sapphire catching the faint streetlight filtering through the window. Her storm-gray eyes softened, a flicker of hope battling the ache within. She was home, but the sea between her and Killian still churned, and only time would calm its waves.

Sheriff's Station

Emma pressed a steaming mug of coffee into Killian's hand, their fingers grazing briefly, her eyes searching his as he froze, the words spilling out hoarse and raw, "I don't know who I am without Des. … She's my storm, my soul, in

every breath I take. … She's the storm I was born to chase. … But you, Emma, you're the steady ground I never thought I'd find again. … And I feel like I'm drowning."

Emma's hand tightened around his, a lifeline in the dim light, her own eyes misting as she held his gaze, "We'll figure this out, Killian; I'm not letting go of us that easily." Her voice carried a quiet strength, a promise woven into the station's hum of static and the faint clink of her badge against the desk, binding them in the fragile space between his past and present.

Day 21

Henry, driven by a fierce need to stitch their wounds whole, seized the reins of his makeshift mission, clutching his storybook like a talisman against fate's cruel whims. Desylva's return was a rare chance to defy the endings he'd seen shatter too often.

Morning: Loft

Henry sprawled across the table, sketching their epic quests with a pencil that trembled only slightly—Wonderland's jabberwocky, Atlantis's leviathan—his eyes lighting up as he turned to Desylva with a shaky smile, "You're the Tempest, see? Your magic's unreal, and your love with Hook, it's legendary; I won't let it slip away." She ruffled his hair, her voice thick with unspoken gratitude, "You're a dreamer, kid; don't ever lose that spark."

Afternoon: Granny's Diner

Henry rallied the crew—Regina, Belle, Archie, Ruby, Grumpy, Snow, and David—his voice rising over the diner's clatter, "Operation Tempest. We reunite them, break Gold's grip!" It cracked with emotion as he pressed on, "I've watched love die before; I won't let it happen again. They deserve their happy ending, and we can make it happen."

Snow pulled him into a tight hug, her voice soft but firm, "We believe in love, Henry; you're not carrying this alone." David nodded, his steady presence a rock, "We'll fight for it, kid." Ruby's grin flashed wide, "He's got a solid plan; I'm in." Grumpy crossed his arms, scowling, "Fine, but if Gold shows, I'm swinging first."

Dusk: Docks

Henry dragged Killian to the docks, the sea lapping at the pilings as he thrust the book forward, "Propose again! She's your true love, it's right here in these pages!" Tears welled in Killian's eyes, his voice breaking, "I believed that once, lad, and part of me still does, but Emma's my family too; I'm coming apart at the seams."

Henry flung his arms around him, tears spilling freely, "You're my family, both of you; I just want you happy," his words a desperate plea against the harbor's quiet roar.

Evening: Jolly Roger

As the sun dipped low, Desylva sensed the storm raging in Killian. She pulled him close, her hands framing his face, her glistening eyes searching his, "I see it, Killian, your heart's splitting in two; I'd give anything to see you whole, even if it's her you love too; I won't shatter what saved you." She kissed him, tender yet fierce, their tears mingling on her cheeks, "I just want you happy, pirate," she whispered, her voice a fragile thread.

He clutched her close, his own voice fracturing, "You're my storm, my love, every breath draws me back to you like a tide I can't fight. I'm crumbling under it." He stumbled back, head reeling, torn between the tempest of his history and the calm of his present, the weight of their love and loss pulling him under.

Day 22

Archie's Office

The next night, after restless hours wrestling with his tangled heart, Killian found himself back at Archie's office, the dim glow of a desk lamp casting soft shadows across the room as he sank into the worn leather chair, his coat still

damp from the evening mist. “I kissed her again,” he confessed, his voice rough with yearning, “and it was like lightning through my veins. Every part of me came alive. I crave her storm, Arch; I ache to be with her again, to take her in my arms and feel her heat as we lose ourselves completely, the way we used to.” He paused, running his hand through his hair, blue eyes shadowed with torment. “But Emma’s gaze cuts through me. Her eyes haunt me. I’m drowning in guilt, torn between them.” Archie leaned forward, his elbows resting on his knees, his tone gentle yet probing as he adjusted his glasses. “Just how close have you gotten with Desylva?” he asked, his voice carrying a careful curiosity.

Killian shot him a sharp, knowing look, a faint smirk tugging at his lips before it faded. “If you’re asking if I’ve slept with her yet, mate, I haven’t. Not that the want isn’t burning me alive. It’s taken every ounce of restraint not to just sweep her up like I used to; we were bloody amazing together, she was…” His words trailed off, caught in a swell of memory—flashes of wild nights aboard the Jolly Roger, her storm-gray eyes blazing with passion, their bodies moving as one with the rhythm of the sea. He shook his head, swallowing hard. “We haven’t. Just electric kisses. Sparks that could set the whole damn town ablaze.” Archie tilted his head, his expression thoughtful. “Why haven’t you?” he pressed softly, his tone free of judgment, only seeking to unravel the knot within Killian’s chest.

Killian’s gaze dropped to the floor, his hook tapping lightly against the armrest as he grappled with the answer. “I want it to be special,” he admitted, his voice quieter now, laced with a vulnerability he rarely let slip. “If we’re to find our way back to each other, I want to do it right. Not just a reckless tumble, but something that means more, something lasting. She deserves that, and so do I.” Archie nodded slowly, a faint smile touching his lips as he clasped his hands together. “I see,” he said, his voice warm with understanding. “You obviously love them both, Killian. Desylva and Emma. And the fact you’re holding back, despite that fire, shows just how deeply you’re wrestling with this. You’re caught in a storm of your own making, but storms don’t last forever. Let those feelings guide you; trust your heart to steer you toward the shore.”

Killian’s throat tightened, his fingers clenching into a fist as he forced out the fear gnawing at him. “What if I lose them both, Archie? What if I choose wrong and end up adrift, alone again?” His voice cracked, the weight of centuries as a pirate, lost, unmoored, pressing down on him. Archie’s smile widened, gentle but certain, his eyes crinkling with the quiet confidence of someone who’d seen hearts mend before. “You won’t,” he assured, his tone steady as a lighthouse in the fog. “Love like this… messy, real, pulling you in two directions… it doesn’t destroy you; it shapes you. You’re not the man you were when you sailed the seas. You’ll find your way. Whether it’s with Desylva’s tempest or Emma’s calm… or something else entirely. Just breathe through it.”

The room fell silent save for the soft tick of a clock on the wall, the sound grounding Killian as he let Archie’s words settle over him like a lifeline tossed into churning waters. He leaned back, exhaling a shaky breath, his hook gleaming faintly in the lamplight as he wrestled with the storm within. Desylva’s wild pull tugging at his soul, Emma’s steadfast presence anchoring his guilt. “Des has always been my hurricane,” he murmured, almost to himself, picturing Desylva’s fierce grin and the way her touch could unravel him. “And Emma, she’s the calm.” Archie sat back, folding his arms, his gaze kind but unwavering. “Then let them both be your compass for now,” he said simply. “You don’t have to choose tonight.”

Killian nodded, a flicker of resolve breaking through the turmoil in his chest, though the ache remained, a bittersweet tangle of longing and loyalty. He rose, tugging his coat tighter around him, the weight of his conflicting loves still heavy but somehow less suffocating under Archie’s steady counsel. “Thanks, mate,” he muttered, his voice gruff with gratitude as he moved toward the door, the mist beyond waiting to swallow him back into the uncertain night. Archie watched him go, his smile lingering, knowing the pirate’s heart, scarred yet fiercely alive, would find its course, one way or another, through the storms he couldn’t outrun.

Day 23

Snow stood alone in the loft, the late morning light slanting through the lace curtains, casting a softer, diffused glow across the wooden floor, its warm oak planks bore faint scuffs from years of family life, now dappled with shadows as clouds drifted outside. Henry was at school and David had left for patrol, his sword missing from its spot by the window, leaving the loft hushed save for the faint, rhythmic ticking of a brass clock on the mantle, its hands pointed just past eleven, a steady sentinel over the weeks that had stretched since Desylva’s return began reshaping their lives. Snow leaned against the counter’s edge, her cream sweater sleeves rolled up to her elbows, revealing the faint lines of old scars on her forearms. Her braid was slightly frayed, loose strands curling around her ears from

restless fingers tugging at it over the past fortnight, her eyes lingering on the closed storybook resting on the round table, its leather cover still warm from her occasional touch, a silent testament to the unresolved questions she and David had wrestled with and left unanswered.

The creak of the loft's heavy door snapped her from her thoughts. Emma stepped inside, her red leather jacket zipped tight over a gray sweater, its vibrant hue a stark contrast to the pallor of her face, her blonde hair pulled into a messy ponytail with strands escaping to frame her cheeks, damp from a light drizzle that clung to the air outside. She carried a coffee from Granny's in her hand, its lid slightly askew, steam curling faintly upward to mix with the loft's warmth. Her left hand fidgeted with the zipper of her jacket, a nervous tic, as she set the cup on the table with a soft thud, her fingers lingering on the lid as if anchoring herself. Her eyes, so like Snow's yet shadowed with a raw, unguarded vulnerability, darted around the room before settling on her mother. Her boots, scuffed from countless patrols, left faint wet marks on the floor as she sank into a chair, its cushions sighing under her weight.

"Mom," she began, her voice tight and brittle as she toyed with the coffee's lid, twisting it until it squeaked, her nails scraping faintly against the plastic. Her shoulders slumped beneath the leather, her breath hitching as she spoke. "I need to talk about Killian. … I love him, Mom. … I never thought I'd fall for Captain Hook, of all people, with his stupid leather coats, cocky smirk, and pirate swagger. But I have, deeper than I ever imagined, and I'm terrified I'll lose him now. … Desylva's his true love, the book says so, all those pages of storms and pirate vows and some grand destiny I can't touch. How do I compete with that? Should I even try? … If this was just a normal mess, some guy and his ex showing up, what would you tell me to do?" Her voice cracked, fracturing on the last words. She pressed the heels of her hands against her eyes, rubbing hard as if to push back the tears threatening to spill, her ponytail swaying as she bowed her head.

Outside, a faint breeze rattled the windowpane, carrying a whisper of Desylva's storm through the town, a distant echo of the chaos in Emma's heart.

Snow turned from the counter, her gaze softening with a mother's instinct as she crossed to Emma's side. Her boots clicked softly on the wood, her sweater brushing the table's edge as she pulled a chair close, its legs scraping faintly as she positioned it so their knees nearly touched. She reached for Emma's hand, gently prying it from her face. Her fingers were warm, steady against Emma's trembling ones, calloused from years of bows and battles yet tender as she clasped them in both of hers, her eyes shimmering with empathy and the weight of their earlier debate with David.

"Your father and I were talking about this two weeks ago, Emma, trying to untangle it ourselves," she said, her voice gentle but threaded with a quiet strain, her thumb brushing a soothing rhythm across Emma's knuckles. "If this were normal, I'd tell you to fight for him. Not against Desylva, but for what you've built with him, because love's messy and fierce and worth every scar it leaves. … I'd say trust your heart, trust him, because I've seen how he lights up with you. The way he steadies you when the world's too heavy. But it's not normal, is it? … We live in a world where true love beats everything. Where if it's written in that book, it's destiny, etched deep like it was for me and David, waking from curses with a kiss. … We can't change that, you know it as well as I do. You've seen it, lived it, just like us." She tilted her head toward the storybook, its leather cover a silent arbiter between them, memories of David's anguished plea for Emma's happiness flashed in her mind, softening her conviction with a mother's doubt, her braid slipping further as she leaned closer.

Emma pulled her hand back, crossing her arms tightly across her chest as she leaned forward. Her jacket creaked, her elbows digging into her thighs as her voice broke, raw and ragged like a wound torn open, "But it hurts, Mom, it really hurts, more than I thought it could. … I believe in the book. I have to. … It's guided us, saved us, told me I'm the Savior when I didn't want to hear it. But Killian… He didn't have a predestined story in there, not like you and Dad, not like me. … He was just a pirate, a rogue carving his own path with that damn hook. Until Desylva came into the diner, and now it's like the book's claiming him retroactively, rewriting him into her storm. … I've built something real with him, those quiet moments where he's mine, holding me when I can't sleep, and now she's back, and I see how she lights him up, like a piece of his past I'll never reach. … What do I do with that pain?"

Tears welled in her eyes, one slipping down her cheek to trace a glistening path. She wiped it away with a shaky swipe of her sleeve, her coffee sitting untouched, its steam dissipating into the air as the loft's warmth pressed close, the clock's ticking a steady pulse against her faltering breath, her ponytail sagging as her head dipped lower.

Snow's heart clenched, a sharp pang beneath her ribs. She slid her chair closer, the wood scraping louder as her knee brushed Emma's, the denim of their jeans rustling faintly. She reached out again, this time cupping Emma's face gently with both hands. Her palms were warm against Emma's chilled skin, her thumbs brushing away the tear's damp trail as she held her daughter's gaze, her eyes steady yet glistening with shared pain.

"I know it hurts, Emma. I felt that fear when I thought I'd lost David to curses and kings, when I woke in that forest alone, my heart breaking until I found him again," she said, her voice low and firm, though it trembled at the edges with the weight of memory. "Their story needs to play out. … Desylva's return, Killian's heart. It's not finished yet, not while he's here with us. … You never know what might happen, what the book might show us next. … He's torn because he loves you both. Her as his past crashing back like a storm, you as his present, maybe his future if you hold on. … Don't fight against her. Fight for what you have, for the love you've carved out in this town, messy as it is. He's not choosing to hurt you. … He's lost, caught between her storm and the anchor you've become. Trust him, trust that love, even if it cuts deep right now." Her hands slid to Emma's shoulders, squeezing gently as she leaned in.

A sudden, inexplicable gust stirred the loft, lifting a few stray crumbs from the counter, and the storybook on the table blew open with a sharp rustle, its pages fluttering wildly as if alive, settling on a spread near the end.

Emma blinked, her breath catching in her throat as she pulled back from Snow's touch. Her hands hovered over the open book, trembling slightly as she leaned forward, the ink still sharp and dark on the parchment, the illustrations vivid with Desylva's storm magic and Killian's hook glinting in the chaos. "These last few paragraphs weren't there before," she said, her voice a shaky mix of awe and dread as she traced the new lines with a fingertip, words unfurled in elegant script, detailing Desylva's return through Regina's shattered curse, her reunion with Killian at Granny's Diner under flickering lights, the sapphire ring catching the glow as he traced it, their sparring in the woods with her lightning grazing his blade, ending in tangled laughter under pine shadows.

Snow leaned in beside her, her braid brushing Emma's arm as she peered at the text. Her eyes widened, a faint gasp escaping her lips as she pressed a hand to her chest, feeling the quickened thud beneath her sweater. "The story's updating," she murmured, her fingers brushing the page's edge. The ink seemed to shimmer faintly, as if still drying into the parchment, the illustrations pulsing with a subtle life, "It's alive, Emma, shifting with what's happening now, right here in Storybrooke."

Emma's gaze lingered on the words, her fingers tightening into fists as she sat back. Her voice dropped to a whisper, heavy with resignation yet threaded with a fragile spark, "He's mine in my heart, Mom, every late night, every stupid knot he ties with Henry, but if the book's still writing, maybe there's a chance it's not over yet. I'll fight for him, for us. I have to. But God, it's hard not knowing if I'll lose him to her storm."

Snow squeezed her shoulder tighter, her touch a lifeline as she pulled Emma into a brief, fierce hug. Her daughter's leather creaked against her sweater, their breaths mingling as the loft fell silent again, the storybook open between them, its new pages a fragile promise and a looming threat, leaving Emma's heart raw and exposed as the day stretched on, uncertain and unresolved under the weight of destiny's ink.

Day 24

The following day at Granny's, Killian sat with Emma and Desylva, their conversation deep and unguarded. He finished speaking, and Emma nodded with a small smile, "We're a team. We'll figure it out together."

Ruby, watching from the counter, grinned at Grumpy, "They're a pack now. Love's messy but beautiful." Grumpy snorted, "Too mushy for me, too much kissing in this town," his gruff loyalty a quiet sentinel as he swigged his beer.

Day 25

Night

The air sharp and crisp with the scent of pine and the faint bite of coming frost. Snow had invited Killian and Desylva to the loft, the warm glow of lamplight spilling through the lace curtains, casting delicate patterns across the wooden floor as the stars glittered faintly beyond the panes. The kettle hissed softly on the stove, releasing the soothing

scent of chamomile tea that drifted through the room. Snow poured it into mismatched mugs, their chipped edges a testament to years of family life, her dark hair framing a gentle smile as she handed one to Desylva. Her cream sweater hugged her petite frame, her braid resting neatly over her shoulder. Her voice was soft, weighted with the empathy of shared scars, “You’ve fought for love, Desylva. Through realms and curses. We know that struggle too well, David and I. It’s a fire that doesn’t dim, no matter how dark the path gets.” Desylva took the mug, her storm-gray eyes flickering with a quiet gratitude. Her leather jacket hung on a hook by the door, leaving her in a worn tunic that hinted at battles past, her dark hair loose and wild, catching the light as she cradled the warmth in her hands, her cursed mark a faint scar beneath her sleeve.

David stood by the counter, his broad frame steady as he clapped Killian’s shoulder with a firm hand, his flannel peeked from beneath his leather jacket, its red plaid a splash of color against the loft’s earthy tones, his blue eyes meeting Killian’s with an unyielding yet warm resolve. “You’re family, whatever happens, we’ve got your back,” he said, his voice a low rumble, a promise forged in battles past, his fingers squeezed briefly before releasing, a gesture of solidarity as he leaned against the counter, arms crossed. Killian stood beside him, his black coat unbuttoned, his hook glinting faintly in the lamplight. His blue eyes darted between Desylva and the room, shadowed with the strain of weeks wrestling his heart.

Snow stepped closer to Desylva, her hands cradling her own mug, steam curling upward as she spoke, “We’ve lost and found each other too, over and over, through curses, towers, dark forests. It’s what binds us, that fight to hold on.” Her empathy stretched across the room like a bridge, linking their stories. Her eyes softened as they met Desylva’s, a silent recognition of the love that had carried them all through.

Henry sprawled on the couch, his sneakers dangling over the armrest as he flipped through his storybook, its pages rustling softly. His dark hair fell into his eyes, and he grinned up at David as the man ruffled it with a playful tousle, his deep chuckle filling the space. “Kid’s got a knack for pulling us together, doesn’t he?” Henry piped up, “Yeah, family’s the best magic,” his voice bright with the innocence of youth, yet wise beyond his years.

The loft glowed with the quiet strength of a home rebuilt, exposed beams cast soft shadows across the ceiling, their rough texture a testament to resilience, while the fire crackled in the hearth, its warmth seeping into the room, mirroring the fragile rhythm Killian and Desylva were carving out beneath Storybrooke’s watchful stars. Desylva set her mug on the table, her fingers brushing Killian’s arm as she moved closer to him. Her touch sparked a faint gust that flickered the flames, her gray eyes locking with his blue ones, a harmony laced with love and the ache of choices yet unmade. Killian’s breath hitched, his hand slipping from his pocket to rest over hers. His voice was a low murmur, meant for her alone, “You’re my storm, love, always have been,” and her smile, fierce yet tender, answered him without words.

Snow watched them, her mug still warm against her palms. Her gaze shifted to David, a silent question in her eyes as she tilted her head toward the pair. David followed her look, his jaw tightening briefly before softening, his hand dropped from his crossed arms, brushing the counter’s edge as he stepped closer to Snow, his voice a hushed rumble meant only for her. “Look at them, Snow, the way he steadies her, the way she lights him up. It’s like us, back in those early days. Fighting fate, finding each other.”

Snow nodded, her braid slipping slightly as she leaned into him, her voice a whisper, “They belong together, David. I feel it, like the book’s been whispering it all along. Their scars match, their fire, it’s true love, isn’t it?” Her eyes shimmered with a mix of awe and sorrow, the realization settling like a stone in her chest. David’s arm slid around her waist, his flannel brushing her sweater as he pulled her close, his gaze lingering on Killian and Desylva, “Aye, it is, etched deep, like ours. But Emma…” His voice trailed off, heavy with the unspoken cost, the ache for their daughter threading through his words.

Desylva laughed softly at something Killian murmured, her storm-born gust swirling the tea’s steam in playful eddies. His hook traced a gentle arc along her wrist, a gesture so natural it seemed to echo their bond. Snow’s breath caught, her hand tightening around her mug as she turned her face into David’s shoulder. “She’ll hurt, David, but we can’t deny this, can we? It’s what we’ve always believed in.” David pressed his lips to her hair, his voice a low, steady promise, “We’ll be there for her, hold her up, like always. They’ve got their story, and we’ve got ours. Family bends, it doesn’t break.”

The fire popped, a log shifting as Henry glanced up from his book, oblivious to the shift in the room. Killian and Desylva stood entwined, their quiet laughter a melody against the loft’s warmth, a love rekindled that Snow and

David now saw as inevitable. The realization settled over them, bittersweet and certain. Their faith in true love affirmed, yet shadowed by the pain it would bring Emma, a tension unresolved as the night deepened, the loft a fragile haven under Storybrooke's stars.

Day 26-32

A persistent fog draped the town in a silvery shroud, softening the edges of its clapboard houses and muting the rhythmic crash of waves against the harbor's rocky shore. The mist clung to the air, damp and cool, threading through the streets like a ghost's breath, its tendrils curling around lampposts and blurring the outlines of fishing boats bobbing in the distance.

Henry tore through this haze with a purpose. His sneakers slapped against the damp cobblestones of Main Street, leaving faint echoes that bounced off the fog-draped buildings, his navy jacket flapping wildly as the wind snatched at its hem, tugging it back like an impatient hand. His storybook was clutched to his chest like a sacred relic. Its weight a steady comfort against his pounding heart as he darted toward the docks, his breath puffing in frosty clouds that shimmered briefly in the weak light filtering through the overcast sky.

The Jolly Roger - Morning

The Jolly Roger rose into view through the haze, sails furled tightly against the gray expanse above, hull swaying gently with the tide's pull, the faint creak of i timbers a whisper of adventures past. Henry scrambled up the metal gangplank, its wet steps slick beneath his soles. His hands gripped the rails for balance, as he hauled himself aboard, his chestnut hair sticking to his forehead, damp with mist and sweat, his eyes wide and blazing with a fervor that lit his flushed cheeks.

He found Killian at the helm, black coat slung over one shoulder, a rag in his hand as he polished the ship's wheel, worn smooth by centuries of command, its grain gleaming faintly under his careful strokes. His hook caught the sun as it peeked through the clouds, casting a glint across the deck that danced like a star on the wood. "Killian!" Henry's voice rang out, sharp and breathless, cutting through the creak of the ship and the distant cry of gulls wheeling overhead. He skidded to a halt, boots slipping slightly on the damp planks.

Killian turned, his posture easing as he leaned against the wheel, one dark brow arching in curiosity. His blue eyes, sharp as the sea's edge, flickered with amusement beneath a tousle of windblown hair, the salt-stiff strands framing his rugged face. "Easy, lad, what's got you stormin' aboard like a hurricane?" he asked, his voice a low, gravelly drawl tinged with a pirate's lilt, his rag pausing mid-swipe as he tucked it into his belt, his attention fully on the boy

Henry's grin split his face ear to ear, a beacon of excitement in the fog's gloom. "I've been up all night with the book, reading every line, analysing every sketch, and I found it! You've got to hear this!" He thrust the storybook forward with a triumphant flourish, its pages crackling as he flipped it open with trembling fingers. His small hands, smudged with pencil lead from late-night notes, pointed to a passage inked in curling, elegant script beside a sketch of a stormy sea, jagged cliffs loomed under a sky torn by lightning, waves crashing in a fury of white foam. The text read,

***Desylva, born during the autumn equinox under a full moon and a Veyran tempest, her cries lost in the thunder that shook the cliffs, secret kept from all but the wind*.**

"I checked with Belle and Mom on Veyran time in relationship to us and, if our calculations are correct, her birthday is next week!" Henry exclaimed, his words tumbling over each other in a rush, his voice rising with each syllable as he bounced on his toes. "It says she was born during a storm so wild it tore trees from the ground. Nobody knew, not even you! She's kept it hidden all this time!"

Killian's grin widened, a slow, roguish curve that crinkled the corners of his eyes. He stepped closer, peering at the page over Henry's shoulder, his hook tapping the wheel rhythmically, a metallic clink against the wood as a spark of delight flared in his chest, warming the cool air around him. "Well, I'll be damned," he murmured, his voice softening with wonder, a trace of awe threading through his usual swagger. "Figures she'd keep it close to her chest, sly as the wind she commands."

He straightened, his gaze drifting to the horizon where the fog met the sea, his mind already spinning with possibilities. “We’ll give her a birthday to match it, then, something grand, fit for a storm queen.” His blue eyes glinted with mischief and love, the idea taking root like a flame catching dry tinder, fueled by the chance to honor the woman whose storm had anchored his soul through centuries of chaos.

Killian straightened fully, his shoulders squaring as his mind raced with visions of lanterns glowing against the night, laughter echoing over the waves, the Jolly Roger alive with celebration. His heart thrummed with the chance to give Desylva a night as fierce and radiant as the tempest that birthed her.

“A surprise party,” he declared, his voice rising with conviction as he tossed the rag aside, letting it land in a heap by the helm, his blue eyes glinting with mischief and determination. “On the Jolly Roger. She deserves a night that’ll shake the stars, and I’ll need the whole bloody town to pull it off.”

Planning – Operation Storm Party

He set out that afternoon, his boots thudding against the docks’ planks as he rallied Storybrooke’s eclectic crew with a pirate’s charm and a captain’s command. His coat billowed behind him, damp with fog, as he wove through the mist, his hook catching faint glimmers of light with each purposeful stride.

Sheriff’s Station

Henry, buzzing with uncontainable energy, darted to the sheriff’s station. Killian right behind him. Henry’s voice echoed off the walls as he burst through the door, waving a scrap of paper scrawled with his messy handwriting. “Operation Storm Party!” he shouted, his grin infectious as he slapped the name onto a corkboard littered with case notes.

Emma looked up from her desk, her coffee mug steaming as she arched a brow, her red leather jacket creaking as she shifted. “Operation what now?” she asked, her tone dry but her eyes twinkling with amusement. “Desylva’s birthday. We’re throwing her a surprise party on the ship!” Henry explained, breathless. Emma’s smile turned bittersweet, a flicker of warmth shadowed by an ache she couldn’t name, her thoughts drifting to Killian’s torn heart. “She’ll love it, Hook, go big or go home,” she said, leaning back in her chair, her voice steady despite the pang beneath it.

Town Hall

Regina stood in the town hall’s marble foyer, arms crossed over her black coat. Her lips pursed as Killian pitched the plan, Henry at his heels. She sighed, rolling her eyes with theatrical exasperation. “Fine, I’ll handle the lights, but don’t expect me to sing,” she snapped, though her stern facade cracked as Henry beamed up at her, “You’re the best, Mom!” Her fingers twitched, already summoning ideas for magic lanterns, a faint smirk betraying her reluctant excitement.

Granny’s Diner

Ruby leaned over the counter, wiping her hands on her apron, its white fabric smudged with ketchup and grease. Her red-streaked hair bounced as she clapped with glee, her wolfish grin flashing like a crescent moon. “Oh, Desylva deserves it. Wild as she is, she’s earned a bash that’ll rattle the rafters! I’m in. What do you need?” she asked, her voice bright with enthusiasm, already leaning forward as if ready to sprint into action.

Grumpy slouched by the jukebox, nursing a beer—its foam clinging to his beard as he scowled, arms crossed tight over his flannel shirt, “If I must, fine, but don’t expect me to wear a damn party hat or dance a jig,” he growled, though his gruff tone softened as he glanced at Killian, a reluctant spark of camaraderie in his dark eyes.

Market

Snow paused mid-sorting apples at the market stall, her dark hair tucked beneath a wool scarf that framed her face in soft gray. Her eyes softened as she clasped her hands, a gentle smile breaking through the fog’s chill. “It’s perfect. Desylva’s one of us now, and a party’s just the thing to welcome her home,” she said, her voice warm with conviction, the apples’ crisp scent mingling with the damp air.

David, hefting a crate of pumpkins beside her, flashed a broad grin, his flannel sleeves rolled up, his leather jacket slung over a nearby post. “We’re in, give us a job, Hook, and we’ll make it unforgettable,” he said, his eyes twinkling with the promise of teamwork forged in battles past.

Archie’s Office

Archie, peering over his glasses at his desk, nodded thoughtfully as Killian poked his head in. “A celebration of resilience. She’s fought through so much,” he mused, scribbling a note about communal healing on a pad, his voice gentle but firm, his tweed jacket rumpled from a day of sessions. “I’ll help with the music. Something to lift her spirits,” he offered, his calm demeanor a steady anchor to Killian’s fervor.

Jolly Roger

The Jolly Roger became the heart of the scheme. Killian chose the deck as the stage, its planks polished to a faint sheen under his careful eye, scrubbed with saltwater and a stiff brush until they gleamed, the masts rising like sentinels against the autumn sky, their silhouettes stark in the fog.

Lanterns borrowed from Granny’s storeroom were strung along the rigging, dozens of them. Their amber glass salvaged from old fishing boats, swaying gently as Smee clambered up with a hammer and nails, muttering, “Hope they hold, Cap’n, don’t fancy fishin’ ‘em outta the drink!” his stout frame wobbling as he secured each one, the glass clinking softly in the breeze.

Tables scavenged from the diner’s back room were dragged aboard, their chipped edges draped in deep blue cloth that shimmered like the midnight sea. Smee’s old fishing nets, salt-crusted and knotted, were hauled from the hold, and hung as décor, their rough weave catching the light like a spider’s web spun with dew, salt crystals glinting faintly as they swayed.

Granny’s Diner

Ruby took over Granny’s kitchen. Her apron dusted with cocoa as she baked a triple-layer chocolate cake, the oven’s heat fogging the windows with a warm haze. Her hands whisked a sea-salt frosting, its crystalline grains glistening like frost on a wave, the rich scent of melted chocolate and brine wafting through the diner as Granny peeked over her shoulder, nodding approval, “Not bad, girl, might even impress that storm lass,” she said, her voice gruff but warm.

Grumpy trudged in from the docks, kegs slung over his shoulders. His boots thudded across the diner’s worn floor as he stacked them beside the counter, growling, “Don’t spill my beer, or I’ll make ye mop this place ’til it shines.” His scowl eased as the cake’s aroma reached him, and he muttered, “Suppose it’s worth it,” wiping sweat from his brow before giving the frosting a grudging nod.

Charming Loft

Snow and David worked late into the night. The kitchen table strewn with white fabric, paint cans, and brushes. Snow dipped her fingers into silver paint, her laughter bubbling as she scripted “*Happy Birthday, Storm Queen*” in swirling letters, the words curling like clouds across the banners, smudging her cream sweater with silver streaks. “She’ll be speechless,” she said, brushing a smudge from David’s cheek. He grinned, splattering blue onto her scarf, “Good, she deserves a shock that’s not a curse for once,” he teased, his hands steady as he pinned the fabric to dry.

Henry’s Room

Henry holed up in his room, the glow of a desk lamp casting shadows across his walls as he sketched invites. His pencil scratched out storm clouds and the Jolly Roger’s silhouette on parchment scraps, his tongue poking out in concentration. Each one sealed with a crimson wax stamp he’d swiped from Regina’s desk, the wax dripping like blood as he pressed his thumb to it, “Perfect!” he whispered, stacking them for delivery, his eyes gleaming with pride.

Library

Archie rifled through vinyls at the library, his tweed jacket dusted with age-old grime. “Drums and fiddles, lively, like her spirit,” he decided, pulling records with titles like Sea Reels and Tempest Tunes. He handed them to Ruby, who smirked, “Oh, I’ll make ‘em dance ‘til the deck shakes!” she promised, tucking them under her arm.

Regina’s Vault

Regina conjured magic lanterns. Her fingers snapped, sparks flaring as golden orbs floated upward, their glow pulsing like captured stars. She muttered, “This better not get sappy,” but a faint smile tugged at her lips as she pictured Henry’s glee, her magic weaving a constellation above the ship’s deck.

Town

The town buzzed with quiet anticipation, each soul weaving their thread into the tapestry of Desylva’s surprise.

Jolly Roger

Killian stood at the helm as dusk fell, the fog parting to reveal a sky streaked with amber, his heart full as he murmured to the wind, “For you, my storm, a night to rival your thunder.”

Day 33

The day dawned crisp and bright. The persistent fog that had cloaked the town for weeks parted like a velvet curtain torn asunder, revealing a sky washed pale blue, its expanse streaked with wispy clouds that drifted lazily over the harbor, their edges gilded by the rising sun’s golden glow. Gulls wheeled overhead, their cries sharp and piercing, slicing through the rustle of dry leaves skittering across the docks. Each gust of wind carried the scent of pine from the dense woods encircling the town, mingling with the briny tang of saltwater rolling in with the tide, the sea’s breath cool and alive against the crisp autumn air.

The harbor stirred gently, fishing boats bobbing on their moorings, their hulls creaking in rhythm with the lapping waves. The Jolly Roger loomed at the pier’s end, her dark silhouette proud and timeless, sails furled tight, a relic of wild seas now cradling a new promise.

Cannery

Killian had spent the night in a cluttered nook above the cannery where fishing nets hung like cobwebs and the air smelled faintly of tar and salt. His temporary refuge while the Jolly Roger was in pre-party mode,

He rose early, the wooden floor groaning under his boots. He pulled on a fresh shirt, its black fabric crisp against his scarred chest, the faint scent of leather and sea clinging to it like a second skin. His hook gleamed in the dawn light filtering through the cracked window, the crescent catching the sun as he adjusted it with practiced ease. His heart thrummed with a pirate’s anticipation, a restless beat tempered by the love that had anchored him through nearly five decades, now swelling with a tender urgency as he descended the creaking stairs to fetch Desylva from her makeshift home above the hardware store.

Hardware Store

“Des?” Killian called up the narrow staircase, his voice light but laced with a roguish grin that betrayed his ruse, the words dancing with a playful lilt as he leaned against the doorframe, arms crossed.

She appeared at the top, framed by the dim glow of a single bulb. Her leather jacket hung loose over a gray sweater knitted with faint storm patterns, its threads shimmering subtly like distant lightning in the morning light, her dark hair spilling free in wild waves that danced in the breeze gusting through the open door below. Her boots scraped the worn planks as she descended, arms crossed over her chest, her storm-gray eyes narrowing with playful suspicion, “What’s this about, pirate? You’re schemin’, I can smell it from here, smells like trouble and sea brine,”

she said, her drawl low and teasing, a smirk tugging at her lips as she tilted her head, the challenge in her gaze as sharp as a squall on the horizon.

Killian chuckled, a deep, rolling sound that warmed the chill air, stepping closer, his hand offered a strip of cloth torn from an old shirt, its edges frayed and salt-stained, “Just trust me, love, close those storm eyes for a bit,” he coaxed, his blue eyes glinting with mischief and a flicker of something deeper, a promise woven into the tender rasp of his voice. Her laugh broke free, bright and rare, cutting through the morning like a lightning strike, “You’re mad, Killian Jones, mad as a hatter and twice as reckless,” she said, but she relented, her fingers brushing his as he tied the blindfold gently behind her head.

Heading to dock

Her breath hitched, a soft catch in her throat as he guided her to the docks, his arm steady around her shoulders, the sea’s scent sharpening with each step, the Jolly Roger’s familiar creak growing louder, the hull groaning softly with the waves like a lover’s sigh.

The Jolly Roger

The deck was a vision as they stepped off the metal staircase. Lanterns strung along the rigging swayed in the crisp air, their amber glass casting warm golden pools across the blue-draped tables, the cloth rippling faintly like the sea at midnight under a star-pricked sky; Smee’s fishing nets hung along the rails, shimmering with dew that caught the sunlight, their salt-crusted knots glinting like scattered pearls against the wood.

Ruby’s towering cake stood center stage. Three tiers of chocolate glistening with sea-salt frosting, its surface swirled with crystalline flecks that sparkled like frost, the rich, dark aroma curling through the breeze, a masterpiece of moist layers and decadent sweetness that promised indulgence with every bite.

Smee’s old shanties hummed faintly from a wind-up gramophone he’d dragged from the hold, its brass horn scratched and dented, the needle scratching a nostalgic tune, “Yo ho, yo ho, a pirate’s life for me” that mingled with the gulls’ cries overhead, the deck alive with the promise of celebration under Killian’s careful orchestration. Lanterns hung with sailor’s knots, tables draped with cloth pilfered from the hold, every detail a tribute to the woman who’d weathered storms beside him, her absence a wound now healing with her return.

Killian paused, fingers lingering on the blindfold, “Ready, love?” he murmured, his voice a low rumble against her ear, thick with the weight of what he’d planned, his breath warm against her skin. Desylva’s lips quirked, “Get on with it, Hook, or I’ll summon a squall to sink your secrets and this ship with ‘em,” she teased, her tone a playful challenge laced with the trust that had bound them across seas and decades. He slipped the cloth free, his fingers brushing her cheek as her gray eyes blinked open. Her gasp sliced the silence, sharp and unguarded, as she took in the sight, her hand flying to her chest as if to steady her racing heart, tears prickling at the edges of her vision like raindrops on glass.

The town stood gathered on the deck, a patchwork of faces lit by the morning sun. Ruby threw her arms skyward, “Surprise!” her red hair a flare in the lantern light, her grin wide and wolfish as she waved a spatula she’d brought from the diner, its handle sticky with chocolate, her apron dusted with cocoa from the morning’s frantic prep, a smudge streaking her cheek like war paint. Grumpy raised a frothy mug, “Happy damn birthday, don’t make me say it twice!” his scowl cracking into a reluctant smirk as he sloshed beer over the rim, the foam dripping onto the deck in a frothy puddle that gleamed.

Snow and David stepped forward, a beacon of warmth amid the crowd, “Happy Birthday!” Snow’s voice was soft and lilting, her cream sweater catching the breeze as it ruffled her dark hair, while David’s echoed, “To the Storm Queen!” his flannel a bright splash of red and blue against the ship’s dark wood, their hands linked tightly as they beamed, their smiles a united front of unwavering support, their eyes crinkling with pride.

Henry darted up, nearly tripping over a coil of rope, “It’s all for you!” his storybook clutched tight against his chest, his sneakers scuffing the planks as he bounced with uncontainable glee, his eyes wide with excitement. Archie nodded from the sidelines, perched on a barrel, “To your strength, Desylva!” his gentle smile crinkling the corners of his eyes behind his glasses, his tweed jacket a soft contrast to the ship’s rugged lines, a pencil tucked behind his ear as he clutched his notepad like a talisman.

Emma leaned against the rail, her posture casual but her presence steady, “Happy birthday,” she said, her voice soft and measured, her eyes warm but shadowed with a quiet ache as she shoved her hands deeper into her red leather jacket pockets, her blonde hair catching the sunlight in a halo that softened her guarded edges.

Regina flicked her wrist with a flourish, the magic lanterns flared brighter, bathing the deck in a golden glow that pulsed like captured stars, their light dancing across the wood in shimmering waves. Her eyes glinted with a mix of amusement and restraint, “Don’t get used to this, storm girl,” she muttered, her tone dry, but her lips twitched upward in a rare half-smile as Henry whooped beside her, “You’re awesome, Mom!” his voice piercing the air with unrestrained joy, his sneakers squeaking as he spun in a circle.

Desylva’s breath caught, a ragged hitch in her chest, her hand flew to her mouth, fingers trembling, “Killian…” tears welled, spilling down her cheeks in silver tracks as she turned to him, her storm-gray eyes shimmering like the sea under moonlight, reflecting the lanterns’ glow. Her jacket rustled as she stepped closer, the leather creaking faintly, her voice trembling with disbelief, “You did this? All of it?”

Killian cupped her face, his thumbs brushing her tears with a tenderness that belied his pirate’s roughness, “For my storm, happy birthday, love,” he said, his voice a rough whisper thick with decades of longing, “I’d move the stars themselves to see you smile like this again, to give you a day worthy of the tempest you are, the heart that’s weathered more than any sea I’ve sailed.” His lips met hers, deep and fierce, a kiss that tasted of salt and leather. Her hands tangled in his dark hair, tugging gently as his coat flared around them, the driftwood ring pressing against his chest through his shirt, a vow unbroken across time, the kiss a storm of its own that drowned out the world, the deck falling silent for a heartbeat before the crowd erupted.

Ruby whooped, her voice cutting through the din, “That’s the spirit! Kiss her ‘til the ship sinks, Captain!” her laughter rang out like a bell as she clapped, her spatula waving like a conductor’s baton, cocoa dust fluttering from her apron. Grumpy groaned, rolling his eyes, “Oh, please, mushy, mushy, spare me the sap, I’m drownin’ in it!” but his mug lifted high, foam dripping as he toasted despite himself, a rare chuckle rumbling in his chest like distant thunder.

Snow clasped her hands, her fingers twisting together, “Beautiful, it’s like a tale spun from the sea!” her eyes misty with unshed tears as David wrapped an arm around her shoulders, “Cheers to that, here’s to love and storms, the wildest kind!” his voice boomed across the deck as he raised an imaginary glass, his grin broad and unshakable, his flannel sleeve brushing Snow’s cheek.

Henry beamed, his fists pumping the air, “Best party ever! Told you it’d be epic, straight out of the book!” he darted forward to hug Desylva, nearly knocking her off balance, her laugh broke free, bright and unguarded, a sound like rain on canvas as she ruffled his hair, “You’re a menace, kid, a regular little cyclone,” she said, her voice thick with affection as she squeezed him back, her fingers lingering on his shoulder.

The music swelled. Ruby’s playlist kicked in from Archie’s vinyls, the gramophone traded for a portable speaker as drums thumped a heartbeat rhythm, fiddles weaving a lively reel that bounced off the waves lapping against the hull.

Killian pulled Desylva to the center of the deck, his grin widening as he raised his voice over the crowd. “A tune for my lass, aye?” Ruby stopped the music. Killian’s rough baritone cut through the noise, steady and bold. He began, his eyes locked on hers, a soft breeze stirring as thunder rumbled faintly in the distance.

Killian
A storm tore wild, her rock I spied,
She clung to stone ‘gainst raging tide,
I dove through waves, my hook held high,
Pulled her from doom ‘neath thunder’s cry.
Aboard my Roger, safe she came,
Her storm-gray eyes lit love’s first flame.

Desylva’s lips curved, her voice rising in answer, rich and resonant with a storm’s edge, her cursed mark pulsing a faint blue beneath her sleeve as lightning flickered overhead.

Desylva
A storm raged wild, I clung to stone,
A rock my cage, the sea my moan,
He sailed through waves, his hook agleam,
Pulled me from death in lightning's beam.
Aboard his Roger, free yet bound,
That pirate's gaze my heart soon found.

Their voices merged, a duet that rolled over the deck like waves meeting the shore, the chorus swelling with shared fire, her mark glowing brighter as a breeze swept through, carrying the scent of rain.

Both
You're the fire in my heart, my north and star,
The wind that calls me home from seas afar,
Through every gale, my love holds true,

Killian
Oh, lass o' the storm, I'm lost in you.

Desylva
Oh, rogue of steel, I'm lost in you.

Killian's grin flashed as he sang on, his hand resting on her shoulder, thunder punctuating his word.

Killian
Her laugh was thunder, her touch a spark,
Lit up my soul in the endless dark,
Each night we danced on decks below,
Her storm wove magic, wild winds blow.
That spar I carved, a driftwood ring,
Sapphire set, her heart to bring.

Desylva matched him, her gray eyes glinting with memory, her mark pulsing in time with a soft crack of lightning.

Desylva
His voice like waves, it drew me near,
A captain's grin, no hint of fear,
Each clash of steel, each tender glance,
Built love's wild, uncharted dance.
His hook traced paths 'cross stormy seas,
I fell for him, my heart at ease.

Killian's tone deepened, his voice carrying the weight of promise, a low rumble of thunder rolling overhead.

Killian
'Neath starry skies, I took her hand,
A driftwood ring from storm's first stand,
Desylva, my tempest, you're my heart,
Marry me, love, a shared life start,
She smiled aye, the seas did cheer,
Our vow was sealed, no storm to fear.

Desylva's voice softened, edged with defiance, her mark glowing vivid blue as lightning streaked the sky.

Desylva
Then Rumpel took me, an imp's cruel hand,
Fifteen years lost to dark demand,
In chains I fought, no storm to wield,
My spirit trapped in gloom concealed.
His name I carved in every fight,
A spark held fast through endless night.

Killian's growl carried loss and fury, thunder booming closer.

Killian
He stole her, upon a cursed night's play,
Three years on, "She's dead," they'd say,
I scorned the lie, searched sea and shore,
Years bled by, found naught, no more.
Hope drowned, vengeance gripped me tight,
A dark path carved through endless night.

Desylva's voice hardened, a storm held in check, her mark pulsing wildly as a breeze whipped across the deck.

Desylva
The Dark Curse fell, twenty-eight years,
A fog of time drowned hopes in tears,
My storm grew still, my will confined,
A shadow life, his face my mind.
Through frozen days, I whispered low,
His blue eyes called where winds don't blow.

Killian's eyes blazed as he sang of reunion, lightning flashing in the distance.

Killian
Forty-six years, a vengeful wraith I'd been,
'Til Storybrooke's diner, she stormed within,
No word, no clue she'd lived 'til then,
Her gray eyes blazed, alive again.
That sapphire gleamed, time's lie undone,
My storm lass back, our hearts rerun.

Desylva's voice rose, fierce with triumph, her mark a beacon as thunder growled.

Desylva
In Storybrooke's glow, the diner's hum,
I walked through fog where fate had sprung,
There he stood, my Hook, my flame,
Blue eyes the same, despite the game.
The curse had broke, our time renewed,
At counter's edge, our love broke through.

Together, their voices soared, a final chorus that shook the timbers, lightning splitting the sky as her mark flared, breezes swirling around them.

Both
You're the fire in my heart, my north and star,
The wind that calls me home from seas afar,
Through every gale, my love holds true,

Killian
Oh, lass o' the storm, I'm lost in you.

Desylva
Oh, rogue of steel, I'm lost in you.

The party guests watched, spellbound. Ruby's spatula froze mid-wave, her grin softening; Grumpy's mug hovered at his lips, his scowl easing; Snow clutched David's arm, tears spilling freely; Henry bounced on his toes, storybook forgotten; Emma's guarded edges softened, a faint smile tugging; Regina's half-smile lingered, her lanterns pulsing in time. Smee clapped from the railing, his grin wide as he swayed, "Like old times, Cap'n and lass, singin' to each other 'cross the decks, every night a shanty duel!" his face creased with fond memory, eyes misty with the echo of their past.

Ruby darted to the speaker, restarting the music with a flourish. Drums thumped back to life, fiddles picking up their reel as the deck vibrated with rhythm. The guests broke into murmurs, their voices a low hum beneath the tune. Grumpy muttered to Archie, “Still got that pirate spark, eh?” his eyes flicking to the pair. Snow whispered to David, “Their voices, pure magic,” her gaze lingering. Henry tugged Regina’s sleeve, “They’re epic, right?” his glances darting back. Emma nodded to herself, a quiet, “Not bad,” under her breath, her eyes tracking them.

Thunder rumbled faintly, a soft breeze curling through the air, the echo of Desylva’s storm magic fading as her mark dimmed to a gentle glow.

Desylva’s eyes danced with a spark of wonder as she met Killian’s. “You remembered Veyra’s storms?” her voice cracked, raw with memory. His grin softened, a rare vulnerability in the curve of his lips, “Aye, every thunderclap that forged you, every gale that shaped us, etched in my bones like a chart to you,” he murmured, his blue eyes tracing her face with quiet reverence as he pulled her into a dance. Her boots tapped the deck in time, a staccato beat against the wood, his coat swaying as he spun her, their steps a rhythm born on this ship so long ago, fluid and instinctive, a dance of sea and storm.

A few hours later

The deck thrummed with life as everyone gathered around Ruby’s towering cake, glistening under the amber glow of swaying lanterns, the sea-salt frosting swirled with crystalline flecks that sparkled like frost on a winter sea. The crowd’s voices rose in a ragged, joyful chorus, belting out “Happy Birthday!” a glorious cacophony of off-key notes clashing with the lively fiddles from the portable speaker, blending into a heartfelt roar that echoed over the harbor’s gentle waves. Fishermen’s gruff baritones mingled with Snow’s lilting soprano, Henry’s high-pitched enthusiasm cutting through, while Grumpy’s reluctant growl trailed behind, his mug raised half-heartedly as foam sloshed onto his boots. The air was thick with the bittersweet scent of chocolate, curling through the crisp autumn breeze, laced with the briny tang of the sea and the faint pine from the woods beyond.

Ruby leaned in close, her red-streaked hair catching the lantern light like a flare, a smudge of cocoa still streaking her cheek from her frantic morning prep. Her wolfish grin softened as she whispered, “Make a wish, storm girl,” her voice low and warm, her eyes glinting with mischief and affection. Desylva turned to Killian, standing beside her, his black coat swaying faintly as he met her gaze with a tender smile, his blue eyes shimmering with unspoken promises. Her storm-gray eyes softened, a flicker of lightning dancing in their depths as she closed them, her breath steadying. She leaned forward, her dark hair spilling over her shoulders like ink, and blew out the single candle—a tall, twisted taper flecked with gold, its flame flickering defiantly before snuffing out in a thin wisp of smoke that curled upward, carrying her silent wish into the sky. The crowd erupted in cheers, a wave of applause and whoops rippling across the deck. Ruby’s spatula waved like a victory flag, Henry’s fists pumped the air, and even Regina’s half-smile widened as her magical lanterns flared brighter, casting golden sparks that danced over the wood.

Ruby handed Desylva a knife, its worn wooden handle smooth from years in Granny’s kitchen, its blade glinting wickedly in the lantern light, reflecting the faces of the gathered townsfolk in its polished surface. Desylva’s hands were steady despite the tears drying on her cheeks, leaving faint salt trails that shimmered like dew under the glow, her leather jacket creaking softly. Her cursed mark pulsed faintly beneath her sleeve, a soft blue glow syncing with the distant rumble of thunder, as if her storm magic stirred with the weight of the moment. She gripped the knife firmly, her fingers brushing the driftwood ring on her left hand, its sapphire catching the light like a captured wave. With a deep breath, she sliced through the chocolate tiers with a smooth, deliberate stroke, the sea-salt frosting crumbling under the blade’s edge, revealing dark, moist layers that glistened like polished obsidian. A rich, bittersweet aroma flooded the air, thick enough to taste, drawing a chorus of “oohs” and “ahs” from the crowd. Smee clapped his hands, while Snow clasped her hands, her cream sweater ruffling in the breeze.

Granny shuffled over, her orthopedic shoes scuffing the deck’s planks, her gray bun bobbing as she adjusted her glasses, the lenses fogging slightly from the cake’s warmth. “Cut it straight, girl, don’t waste my kitchen’s work!” she barked, her tone gruff but her eyes twinkling with pride, a wry smile tugging at her wrinkled lips. Her apron, frayed at the hem and dusted with flour from dawn’s baking, flapped as she planted her hands on her hips. “Took three damn hours to get that frosting right. Sea salt’s tricky, had to balance it just so, or it’d overpower the chocolate. Don’t you dare muck it up!” Her voice carried the weight of a matriarch’s authority, softened by a rare warmth as she watched Desylva’s careful cuts, her gaze lingering on the storm-witch’s steady hands, a flicker of approval softening her stern features.

Desylva's lips quirked into a faint smile, her gray eyes flicking to Granny with a playful glint. "Aye, aye, Granny," she teased, her voice low and resonant, carrying the lilt of the seas she'd once sailed. She made another precise cut, the knife gliding through the cake's dense layers, each slice revealing a perfect cross-section of moist chocolate sponge flecked with tiny salt crystals that sparkled like stars. Ruby darted forward with a stack of mismatched plates, some chipped from Granny's diner, others scavenged from the Roger's galley, their edges worn from years of use, her red heels clicking as she distributed them. "First slice for the birthday lass!" she declared, sliding a generous wedge onto a plate and handing it to Desylva, the frosting smearing slightly on her fingers, leaving a sticky trail she licked off with a grin.

Killian stepped closer, his hook resting lightly at his side, its steel curve catching the lantern light as he took a plate from Ruby, his hand brushing Desylva's arm. "Looks fit for a queen, love," he murmured, his voice a rough whisper thick with affection, his blue eyes tracing the salt trails on her cheeks with quiet reverence. Desylva's laugh broke free, a bright, unguarded sound like rain on canvas, as she nudged him with her shoulder, her jacket rustling. "Flatterer," she quipped, but her gaze softened, locking with his, a silent current of love passing between them, as potent as the storms they'd weathered together.

The crowd pressed closer, their murmurs a low hum beneath the fiddles' lively reel, plates clattering as Ruby and Henry passed out slices. Smee balanced his plate precariously, nearly dropping it as he waved at Desylva, "Tastes like the old days, lass. Sweet as a calm sea after a gale!" his voice cracking with glee, chocolate crumbs clinging to his graying beard. Snow took a dainty bite, her eyes closing briefly as she savored the flavor, "Ruby, this is divine," she said, her voice lilting with delight, while David shoveled a forkful into his mouth, nodding vigorously, "Best cake in any realm," he mumbled through crumbs, earning a playful eye-roll from Snow. Henry, already on his second slice, grinned with chocolate smeared across his cheek, "This is gonna go in the storybook. Epic cake for an epic storm!" his sneakers scuffing the deck as he darted to grab another piece, dodging Ruby's mock swipe.

Granny hovered nearby, her sharp eyes scanning each slice with a hawk's precision, muttering under her breath about uneven portions. "That one's too thin, girl, you'll starve the lad!" she grumbled, pointing at Henry's plate, though her lips twitched upward as he flashed her a cheeky grin. She shuffled to a table, sinking on to a barrel with a groan, her orthopedic shoes creaking, and accepted a small slice from Archie, who offered it with a gentle smile. "Fine work, Widow Lucas," he said, his tweed jacket brushing the table's edge, his notepad tucked under his arm as he took a bite, his glasses glinting in the lantern light. Granny snorted, but her cheeks flushed faintly, "Better be, Cricket, or I'd have your hide for wastin' it," she retorted, her wry humor masking the pride in her twinkling eyes.

Desylva stood at the cake's center, knife still in hand, her storm-gray eyes sweeping the deck. Ruby's infectious laughter, Grumpy's reluctant toast, Snow and David's linked hands, Henry's boundless energy, Emma's quiet warmth, Regina's subtle magic, Smee's nostalgic cheer, Archie's thoughtful nod. Her heart swelled, a tempest of gratitude and love churning within, her cursed mark pulsing softly in rhythm with the distant thunder, a faint breeze rustling the nets along the rails. She glanced at Killian, his presence a steady anchor beside her, his black coat a dark wing against the golden light, and felt the driftwood ring press against her finger, its sapphire a twin to the hope in his eyes. This moment… this ship, this town, this family… was a gift she'd never dreamed of reclaiming, a birthday forged in love and defiance, sweeter than the chocolate melting on her tongue.

A few hours later

Laughter spilled over as Grumpy downed his brew in one swig, "Good stuff, beats dwarf ale any day, and that's sayin' somethin'!" his grumble lost in a belch as he wiped foam from his beard with the back of his hand, leaving a smear across his cheek.

Ruby raised a fork, chocolate clinging to its tines, "To Desylva, the wildest storm we've got, and the best damn friend!" her shout met with clinking mugs and plates clattering as more cake was passed around, crumbs scattering across the blue cloth like stars strewn across a midnight sea.

Henry darted through the crowd, weaving between legs, "To epic love!" his toast high-pitched and fierce, chocolate smeared across his cheek in a triumphant streak. Emma watched from the sidelines, her smile warm but her chest tight with a bittersweet pang.

Snow sidled up beside her, “She’s radiant. Look at her glow, like the sun after a squall,” she said softly, her eyes tracing Desylva’s every move. David nodded, his voice steady as he rested a hand on Snow’s shoulder, “They’re magic together, pure and simple, like somethin’ out of a legend.”

Archie, scribbling in his notepad by a lantern, murmured to himself, “A night of healing, connection like this, mends old wounds, stitches the soul back together,” his pen scratching a steady rhythm as he smiled, his glasses reflecting the golden light in twin crescents.

A few hours later

The night deepened, the sky darkening to a velvet indigo pricked with winking stars. Lanterns flickered with Desylva’s unconscious gusts, a playful ripple of her storm magic dancing through the air, rustling the nets and setting the banners fluttering like sails catching a breeze. Her laughter mingled with the music as she leaned into Killian, her shoulder brushing his.

Henry darted about, sneaking extra cake with the stealth of a seasoned thief, “This is better than any story. I’m gonna write this one down!” his grin wide, chocolate staining his fingers and the edge of his storybook as he licked them clean. Emma lingered near the rail, her hands shoved deep in her pockets, her eyes traced the pair, her smile aching with a quiet longing, “They’ve got something rare, something most of us only dream of,” she muttered to herself, brushing a strand of blonde hair from her face as the wind tugged it free. Snow squeezed her arm gently, “You’re part of this too, Emma. They’re family now, and so are you,” her voice a soothing balm against the ache. David clapped her shoulder, his grin broad and infectious as he stole a bite of Snow’s cake, earning a playful swat, “Hey, bandit, that’s mine!” she laughed, swiping at his hand.

A few hours later

Desylva turned to Killian, her voice trembling as she gripped his coat, her fingers curling into the leather, “I never dreamed of this, not after everything we’ve lost, everything we’ve fought…” her gray eyes searched his, shimmering with unshed tears that caught the lantern light like fractured stars. His hand slipped into his coat, a deliberate motion, “You’re my world, love,” he said, his voice rough with emotion as he pulled out a small box, weather-worn wood carved with a tempest rune, its edges smoothed by decades of longing. He pressed it into her palm, “I’ve had this for nearly fifty years, Des. Meant to give it to you on our wedding day, before fate tore us apart, before the seas swallowed our promises.”

She gasped, her fingers brushing his as she opened it with trembling hands. A silver necklace gleamed within, a pendant shaped like a storm cloud, its curves glinting in the lantern light, a tiny sapphire at its heart pulsing like a captured raindrop, alive with a faint, ethereal glow. Killian continued, “That sapphire… it’s cut from the same stone as the ring you’re wearing. A piece of me, kept for you all this time.” Her storm flickered the lanterns once more, a gentle gust that set them swaying, the air humming with her magic. “Killian, it’s…” her voice broke, a fragile thread snapping under the weight of her awe.

He removed it from the box and fastened it around her neck, his fingers grazing her skin with a tenderness that belied the years, the calluses catching faintly against her collarbone. “A storm for my storm,” he whispered, his blue eyes piercing hers with unshakable resolve, “I’ve held onto it through every dark night, every cursed sea, dreaming of this moment, when I could see it join the ring, both resting where they belong, with you, my heart’s true north.”

Her smile bloomed, radiant and unguarded, tears spilling anew as she pulled him close. Her hands framed his face, fingers tracing the lines etched by time and salt, “You mad, wonderful pirate,” she rasped, her voice thick with love and wonder, her lips finding his in a soft, lingering kiss that hushed the deck for a moment, the weight of his words sinking into her soul like an anchor finding home, the sapphire cool against her skin a twin to the ring’s steady warmth.

A few hours later

The town glowed beneath a sky now fully dark, a tapestry of stars winking above. The Jolly Roger thrummed with life, its deck alive with music, laughter, and the clatter of mugs raised in endless toasts. Ruby spun Henry in a wild dance, her red heels clicking against the wood. “Best bash yet, top that, Storybrooke, I dare ya!” her laughter infectious as he stumbled, giggling, his arms flailing like a windmill. Grumpy grunted from a bench, his boots propped

on a crate, “Aye, s’pose it’s not half bad, for a bunch of saps,” his mug raised as he tapped his foot to the beat, a rare gleam of contentment in his eyes. Smee joined in, his voice cracking with glee, “To the Cap’n and his lass, may their storms never fade!” his shanty warbling as he waved a hand.

A night of pure joy unfolded. Desylva’s necklace glinted as she swayed with Killian, her boots tapping a steady rhythm, his coat flaring around them like a dark wing. Their love a tempest that lit the dark, fierce and unyielding, the town a constellation of light and life around them, their voices and laughter weaving into the night.

The Jolly Roger stood as their haven once more, its creaking hull a cradle for a moment stolen from fate’s grasp, the sea whispering against its sides as if singing its own shanty to the pair who’d defied it time and again, their bond a beacon burning bright against the endless horizon.

A few hours later

The last echoes of the party drifted into the night as the townsfolk slipped away from the Jolly Roger, their voices fading like the tide pulling back from the shore. Henry’s bright laughter lingered in the crisp air as Regina tugged him down the gangplank, her dark coat swirling in the fog that had crept back over the harbor, her magic lanterns dimming to a soft, ember-like glow that flickered across the deck like dying fireflies.

Ruby’s final whoop rang out, sharp and playful, as she hefted an empty tray onto her shoulder, tossing a wink back at the ship, “Don’t do anything I wouldn’t, you two!” her red-streaked hair vanishing into the mist like a flame snuffed out. Grumpy’s grumbling about “too much mush” trailed off with the clink of his mug against the dock’s edge, his heavy boots thudding toward town, the faint scent of beer lingering in his wake. Smee, sensing the Cap’n wanted to be alone with his tempest, shuffled after Grumpy, as he muttered about needing a pint himself, his stout frame disappearing into the fog.

Snow and David waved from the shoreline, their silhouettes framed by the fog’s silvery veil. Snow’s scarf fluttered like a white flag in the breeze, David’s hand raised in a final salute, his flannel a splash of color against the gray. Emma lingered a heartbeat longer, her eyes soft with a wistful warmth, her leather jacket creaking as she turned away with a quiet nod, her boots fading into the night’s hush, her blonde hair catching the last of the lantern light before she vanished.

The deck settled into a hush, broken only by the gentle lap of waves against the hull and the creak of the ship’s timbers swaying with the tide. The lanterns swayed faintly in the crisp air, their amber light casting a golden haze over the blue-draped tables, now littered with cake crumbs, crumpled napkins, and overturned mugs stained with beer foam, the remnants of revelry scattered like driftwood after a storm.

Killian and Desylva stood alone beneath a sky pricked with stars that gleamed like scattered diamonds, the fog weaving a soft curtain around the Jolly Roger, cocooning them in its quiet embrace. Desylva leaned against the port railing, her silhouette sharp against the fog’s glow, her leather jacket hung loose, its worn seams catching the lantern light in faint glimmers, the gray sweater beneath knitted with faint storm patterns that shimmered in the dimness like threads of lightning. Her dark hair fluttered in the cool breeze, strands brushing her cheeks as she gazed out at the horizon where the sea blurred into the mist, her hands resting on the wood, the driftwood ring glinting on her finger like a beacon from their past. The sapphire pendant at her throat pulsed faintly, its tiny blue heart catching the light, a gift still warm from Killian’s touch. Her storm-gray eyes traced the water’s edge, lost in the quiet, the weight of the night settling into her bones like a long-awaited calm.

Killian stepped closer, his boots scuffing softly against the planks. His black coat hung open, revealing the crisp shirt beneath, its buttons undone at the collar to show a glimpse of scarred chest, the faint rise and fall of his breath visible in the chill. His hook rested lightly at his side, its curve gleaming as he joined her at the rail. His breath fogged in the cold air, mingling with hers as he studied her profile, the lines etched at her eyes and mouth softened by the golden glow, her presence a tempest tamed for a moment under the starlit sky. “Des…” he murmured, his voice low and rough with the sea’s echo.

Her head turned slowly, her gray eyes meeting his, shimmering with a vulnerability she rarely bared. Her fingers reached for his, threading through them, the driftwood ring pressing warm against his skin, a tether across decades that anchored them both. She drew a shaky breath, her gaze dropping to their joined hands. His thumb brushed the ring’s rough edge, tracing its familiar grooves as if it held every memory of their lost years.

“I’ve missed you,” she whispered, her voice trembling as the confession spilled free, raw and unguarded. Her eyes flicked up, locking with his, tears pooling like rain on a stormy sea, “Every day in that tower… stone walls pressing in, chains biting my ankles, mirrors mocking me with my own face. … I’d close my eyes and hear your voice, rough as the waves, calling me ‘lass’. … Every night in the woods, hiding under roots and rain, I’d dream of your laugh, wild and free, like the wind off the Roger’s bow. The way you’d look at me, Killian, like I was the only storm that mattered. … It kept me breathing, even when I thought I’d break.” Her breath hitched, a tear slipping down her cheek to catch the lantern light. Her free hand brushed it away, but another followed, her storm stirring faintly as a gust rippled the nets overhead, rustling the silence.

Killian’s chest tightened, his blue eyes darkening with a tempest of his own, grief, longing, and a love that had smoldered through decades, now flaring bright as he gazed at Desylva. The realization hit him like a rogue wave. He couldn’t fight this anymore. She was the one he needed, the missing piece that made his world whole, and damn it all, he was going to show her. He stepped closer, his hand cupping her jaw, his thumb tracing the silvery trail of a tear with a reverence that trembled through him, “You’re here now, love, right where you belong,” he rasped, his voice thick with emotion, raw with the truth he could no longer deny. His hook slid to her waist, pulling her gently against him, the cool metal a steady anchor as he kissed her, slow and deep, his lips warm and firm against hers, carrying the faint taste of rum and salt from the night’s revelry. Her hands slid up his chest, clutching his shirt as she pressed closer, her storm gusting around them, ruffling his dark hair and sending a shiver through the lanterns’ flickering glow, the air alive with the hum of her magic.

The kiss deepened, a quiet hunger sparking into flame between them, undeniable and fierce. Killian’s arm encircled her, his hook resting cool against the small of her back as he drew back just enough to meet her gaze, finding her gray eyes ablaze with a fire that mirrored his own, her breath quickening in the charged space between them.

His grin flashed, roguish yet tender, a pirate’s promise in the curve of his lips, “Hold on, lass,” he growled low, resolve steeling his voice as he swooped her up in one fluid motion, determined to prove what his heart had finally surrendered to.

Her laugh broke free, bright and unguarded, a sound like thunder rolling soft over the sea, echoing the joy he’d longed to hear again. Her arms looped around his neck, boots dangling as he cradled her against his chest, her leather jacket creaking, as it brushed his shirt, her hair spilling over his shoulder like ink against the night, catching the lantern light in wild, untamed waves.

“You sure?” she questioned, hoping he really was ready to come back to her. He smiled, “Yes. I love you. I want you. I need you.” Her fingers tightened in his hair, tugging playfully, “And I you,” her voice breathless with delight. His chuckle rumbled deep in his chest, “I don’t want to wait a moment longer,” he turned, navigating the deck with sure steps. His boots thudded against the planks as he crossed to the companionway, the ship’s creak a familiar song beneath them.

Below deck

Lanterns flickered in the corridor, their golden light dancing across the walls, casting long shadows as he opened the door to the cabin.

Killian‘s cabin

The cabin was a sanctuary carved from their past. A sturdy bed stood against the far wall, its frame draped in a quilt of deep blue and gray, threads stitched with swirling storm patterns that shimmered faintly, as if Desylva’s magic had bled into the fabric; a sea chest crouched at its foot, its lid etched with a tempest rune—maps spilled across the desk in the corner, their parchment edges curling like waves frozen mid-break, pinned by a half-burned candle in a tarnished brass holder, its amber wax pooling in thick drips that gleamed in the flickering light. A window framed the foggy sea, the faint gleam of stars piercing through like distant beacons calling them home. The air thrummed with the scent of wood, aged leather, and the faint musk of Killian’s presence. His coat, weathered by voyages across realms, her storms that lingered in the ship’s very bones, a heady perfume of their shared history.

Killian set her down gently, her boots brushing the worn rug woven with faded nautical knots. Her storm-gray eyes locked with his, shimmering with a love and longing that spanned decades, their depths reflecting the candle’s glow

like a turbulent sea under moonlight. They removed their boots, kicking them aside with soft thuds that echoed in the quiet. Desylva's leather jacket slid off her shoulders with a sensual rustle, her fingers lingering on the seams as she let it fall in a sleek cascade, revealing the storm-woven sweater beneath, its silver threads glinting like lightning.

Killian's hand caressed her jaw, fondling the curve of her cheek with reverent touches, his thumb tracing her lips, while his hook grazed her side, cool metal teasing her warmth as he kissed her deeply, each press a vow sealed in silence. Her hands roamed his chest, tugging his coat as she peeled the damp fabric from his shoulders, letting it pool at his feet in a heavy, dark wave. His shirt followed, her fingers caressing his scars, fondling the ridges of battles fought together, her nails grazing his skin with hungry precision, igniting shivers.

His bare chest is my ocean, scars jagged like reefs under my fingers, his heat a tidal wave crashing through my core, my soul screaming to merge with his forever.

Her sweater caught the candlelight as she lifted it over her head, her movements fluid, the fabric slipping away to reveal her skin, goosebumps rising under the cool air.

Gods, her skin's a silken storm, each curve a swell of heat searing my soul, my heart clawing to claim her, to drown in her love after decades of aching emptiness.

She pressed against him, her hands cupping his face, fondling his stubble as their lips met again. "I thought I'd lost you forever," she purred, her voice breaking with memory. His growl was fierce, "Never again, lass," as he lifted her, laying her onto the quilt, her dark hair fanning across the pillow like spilled ink, her eyes locked on his piercing blue.

Their breaths mingled, quick and warm, her storm stirred, a faint gust rustling the quilt's edges, sending the candle flame dancing wildly, shadows leaping across the cabin's walls. His hook rested beside her on the bed, its cool metal a stark contrast to the heat of his skin as he leaned over her. Her hands slid into his dark hair, tugging him down with urgent need, her fingers fondling the strands. His lips caressed her jaw, trailing slow, deliberate kisses along her throat, lingering where the sapphire pendant pulsed against her heartbeat, its blue glow a captured storm.

Her pulse throbs under my lips, a wild sea pounding my heart, her warmth a fire that burns away years of grief, my soul tethered to her every breath.

Her fingers traced his shoulders, nails grazing as she pulled him closer, "Killian…" her voice a sigh heavy with need.

His kisses sear my skin, each one a lightning strike igniting my veins, my heart a storm surge desperate to crash into his love.

His hand roamed, peeling her pants with a reverent slowness, his fingers caressing her thighs, fondling her curves as the fabric slid away, pooling beside the bed, the bed's runes glowing faintly to mend a scratch from his hook. Her storm flared, a soft rumble beyond the window as the sea trembled with their union, "You're here," he murmured, his lips caressing her ear, "Real and mine."

Her curves are my horizon, each touch a wave of heat flooding my blood, my heart a shipwreck saved by her love's tide.

Her laugh was a ripple of joy, "Always yours, pirate." Her fingers slid down his back, caressing his spine, fondling his scars as she arched into him. Her hands tugged his belt free, the leather clinking as she slid it through the loops, her fingers cupping his hips as she eased his pants down, revealing his arousal.

His arousal is my tide, hard and fierce, a sea ready to flood my core, my soul trembling with need to feel him whole.

He kicked his pants aside, his hand fondling her waist, cupping her breast, their clothes shed like old fears, a trail scattered across the rug. Her gaze softened, her hands cupping his face, her voice sultry, laced with a storm's edge, "It's been 46 years since your ship has been in my harbor. I've missed it." Her lips curved into a teasing smile, her gray eyes glinting with mischief and desire, "I need you to slip into my port. Plunder me, pirate. Let's make a storm." Killian's grin widened, a roguish spark in his blue eyes, "Aye, love, I'll give you a proper plunderin'," he rasped, his voice thick with hunger, "We'll brew a tempest to shake the Roger's bones." A faint crackle of thunder rolled outside, the air charging with her magic as the sea stirred in response.

He paused above her, his breath ragged, as he braced himself, hook grazing the mattress, its runes shimmering to mend a gouge. Her gray gaze held a storm of love and need, her hands caressing his jaw, fondling his stubble, “I dreamed of this,” she confessed, her voice trembling, “Nights in the dark, imagining your touch.”

His gaze is my lightning, piercing my soul, his body a sea poised to engulf me, my heart aching to be his harbor again.

His grin softened, “No more dreams, love, only us.” He lowered himself, his lips finding hers, hungry yet slow, a kiss deepening with each heartbeat. Her legs tangled with his, the quilt twisting as they moved together. Her hands clutched his shoulders, nails digging in as his kisses trailed lower, caressing her collarbone, cupping her breast. Her breath caught, a gasp escaping as his hand fondled her side, memorizing her curves.

Her gasps are my wind, each one fanning the fire in my blood, her love a storm that knits my broken heart whole.

Her storm gusts fluttered the maps, sending a parchment to the floor. His lips pressed against her skin, igniting sparks. Her fingers tightened in his hair, “Don’t stop,” she whispered, a plea laced with command. His chuckle vibrated, “Never, love,” his hook resting beside her head, brushing her hair as he positioned himself. With a slow, deliberate thrust, Killian entered her, his length filling her slick warmth, tight and pulsing, drawing a sharp, shuddering moan from her lips, the bed’s runes glowing to mend a splinter from his hook’s brace.

Gods, her heat’s a maelstrom, gripping me tight, her pulse a tidal wave drowning my soul, my heart reborn in her love’s depths.

Her storm surged, a crack of thunder splitting the silence outside, the Jolly Roger rocking gently.

His strength floods me, a sea surging through my core, his love a lightning bolt stitching my soul to his forever.

Her hands roamed his back, caressing his scars, fondling his muscles, each touch reclaiming lost time. His breath hitched, “Gods, I’ve missed you,” his voice raw as he kissed her deeply, their lips a clash of need and tenderness.

The air thickened with their heat, the candle flickering wildly as shadows danced across the walls. Her nails grazed his skin, drawing a low growl. His hand fondled her hip, cupping her thigh with possessive gentleness. Her legs tightened around him, pulling him deeper as the quilt bunched beneath them. The sea churned, waves slapping the hull in time with their rhythm, her magic weaving a storm echoing their passion. The window rattled, runes glowing to stabilize, mist swirling as lightning flickered in the distance. The Jolly Roger became their world, its runed walls and enchanted beams bearing witness to a love reclaimed, fierce and unyielding, a tempest born of 46 years apart now unleashed in the sanctuary of their cabin.

Granny’s Diner

The air in Granny’s Diner hung thick with the scent of coffee and fried onions, the low hum of conversation weaving through the clatter of plates and the hiss of the grill as grease popped and sizzled behind the counter. The sky beyond the diner’s fogged windows darkened into a bruised purple as a storm brewed over the harbor, its distant rumble vibrating the panes, a low growl that set the hanging lights swaying faintly.

Grumpy and Smee shuffled in behind Ruby, their boots tracking damp salt from the docks onto the checkered linoleum. Grumpy slid onto a stool at the counter, his bearded face set in a familiar scowl, his flannel shirt rumpled and flecked with beer foam. His heavy boots scuffed the floor as he settled, elbows thudding onto the chipped counter.

Smee plopped down beside him, his stout frame swaddled in a patched coat that smelled of sea brine and tobacco, his hat atop his balding head. He rubbed his hands together, the calluses rasping faintly as he grinned at the warmth of the diner.

Ruby slipped behind the counter with a practiced ease, tying an apron over her jeans. Her red-streaked hair caught the diner’s warm light like a flare, her eyes flicking to the windows as the wind began to howl, rattling the shutters like a restless spirit, the glass fogging further with each gust.

A handful of townsfolk dotted the diner, their presence a quiet counterpoint to the storm's rising voice. Doc nursed a cocoa at a booth near the back, his glasses steaming up as he hunched over the mug, the chocolate's sweet scent mingling with the onions; Granny hunched over a bowl of soup at a table near the jukebox, her gray bun tight and streaked with flour, her spoon clinking against the ceramic as she muttered about the weather; Bashful lingered by the door, peering nervously at the gathering clouds through the glass, his thin frame twitching with each distant rumble. Each oblivious to the tempest's deeper meaning, their chatter a soft murmur beneath the storm's growing roar.

A loud clap of thunder shook the diner, the lights flickering briefly as the windows rattled in their frames, plates clinked on tables, a fork skittered across the counter, and Granny muttered something sharp about leaky roofs, her voice cutting through the din like a whip.

Smee's face split into a wide, knowing grin, his eyes crinkling beneath bushy brows as he leaned his elbows on the counter, his fingers drumming a rhythm on the counter, the sound a faint tap against the storm's chaos. Ruby paused mid-wipe of a coffee mug, her brow furrowing as she caught his expression.

Rain began to lash the glass outside, streaking it with silver trails, and the wind's wail grew sharper, like a siren calling across the sea, "What's with the smile, Smee?" she asked, her voice teasing but curious, setting the mug down with a soft clink. Grumpy snorted, crossing his arms over his chest, his scowl deepening as he shot Smee a sidelong glance, "Yeah, what's so funny about a storm? You ain't that drunk yet."

Smee chuckled, a low, rumbling sound that carried the weight of old memories, and leaned closer, his voice dropping conspiratorially as if sharing a treasure map's secret, "They're together."

Grumpy's bushy brows shot up, his mouth twisting into a skeptical grimace, while Ruby tilted her head, her eyes narrowing as she rested a hand on her hip. Another gust slammed the diner's door against its frame, making Bashful jump and Doc spill cocoa on his sleeve, the brown stain spreading as he fumbled with a napkin.

"Who's together?" Ruby pressed, her tone sharpening as she glanced at the storm, the rain now a torrential sheet that blurred the streetlights into hazy orbs beyond the glass. Grumpy grunted, "Better not be talkin' about some fairy-tale nonsense again."

Smee's grin widened, his ruddy cheeks glowing with a mix of nostalgia and mischief, he tapped a finger against his nose before spreading his hands wide, as if conjuring the past onto the counter, "The Cap'n and his tempest. Killian and Desylva," he said, his voice rich with certainty, "This used to happen every time they hooked up. The winds would blow fierce, the sea'd get rough as a devil's temper, and the Jolly Roger'd rock like it was dancin' a jig. This storm, it means they've reconnected, right here in Storybrooke."

Ruby's eyes widened, a spark of understanding flashing across her face as she leaned forward, her apron crinkling against the counter, "That party tonight was somethin' else," she said, her voice brightening, "That duet they sang, it was perfect, like they were two halves of the same wave crashin' together. They're so perfect together, you could feel it in the air." Grumpy huffed, scratching his beard, "Yeah, perfect if you like sappy shanties and enough mush to sink a ship. I near drowned in it meself," he grumbled, though his tone softened as he recalled, "Still, gotta admit, they've got a spark, kept the whole deck watchin' 'em."

Smee nodded eagerly, "Aye, they used to sing together all the time back in the day, shanties ringin' 'cross the Roger when we weren't fightin' somethin'. And Desylva, she'd weave the weather right into it, lass'd call up thunder or a breeze to match the tune. Tonight, with the lightning flashin' and her mark glowin' like a lantern, it was like old times, brought me right back to when we sailed the wild seas."

Ruby smirked, resting her chin on her hand, "That's wild, her magic mixin' with their voices, no wonder it felt alive. They're a storm and a ship in one, those two." Grumpy rolled his eyes but smirked faintly, "Sure, if you call lightnin' and caterwaulin' a party trick. I'll stick to beer over that racket any day."

Smee chuckled again, his fingers tapping faster, "Oh, but it ain't just tricks, mate, it's them, heart and soul. That party was proof they're still the same Cap'n and tempest, stormin' through life together."

Ruby straightened, her lips curving into a knowing smile. “Of course. Her magic’s connected to her heart. The more passion, the more power, makes sense now,” she mused, her voice soft with realization, tying the party’s duet to the storm outside. Grumpy, still dubious, muttered, “You’re sayin’ this mess outside’s ‘cause those two are… what, sparkin’ up again?”

Smee nodded vigorously, gesturing to the windows, where lightning split the sky in a jagged arc, illuminating the diner in stark white for a heartbeat, casting long shadows across the checkered floor. “Aye, exactly,” he said, “Her powers, her storm magic, tied to her emotions. The more intense she feels, the wilder it gets. And the Cap’n, well… he’s always been the spark to her thunder.”

Grumpy huffed, a flicker of curiosity softening his scowl, he’d seen enough of Storybrooke’s weirdness to half-believe it. Smee’s gaze drifted, his eyes glazing with memory as he settled back on his stool, the storm’s roar punctuating his words like a drumbeat. The diner’s lights buzzed faintly as another clap of thunder rolled through, shaking the sugar shakers on the counter.

“I remember it clear as day,” Smee began, his voice softening, “Back in the Labyrinth of Echoes, when we fought them siren banshees, her lightning lit up that maze like a fireworks show when the Cap’n kissed her after she broke Regina’s despair curse. The winds howled so loud, we near lost the Roger to the cliffs. Jack had to fire the cannons just to keep her steady.” He chuckled, shaking his head, “And in the Fireglass Sea, hoo, that was a scorcher. She doused a fire drake with rain after it singed the Cap’n’s coat, and the sea boiled up a storm so fierce, Tom’s harpoons were flyin’ wild. Took hours to calm down after they, uh, celebrated in the cabin.” Ruby smirked, while Grumpy coughed into his fist, his ears reddening slightly as he shifted on his stool.

Another deafening clap of thunder rocked the diner, the windows shuddering as rain hammered the roof like a thousand tiny fists. Doc yelped, clutching his mug tighter, and Granny shot Smee an exasperated look, muttering, “Keep it down, will ya?” her spoon clattered against her bowl as she resumed eating.

Smee ignored her, his grin unfaltering as he leaned closer to Ruby and Grumpy, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper, “And don’t get me started on the Crimson Abyss. We were divin’ for that blood-red pearl, kraken spawn all over us, and she conjured a tempest to save the Cap’n from a charybdis’s maw. The sea churned so bad, Billy near fell outta the riggin’, and the ship rocked ‘til mornin’ ‘cause they couldn’t keep their hands off each other after.”

Ruby laughed outright, a bright, melodic sound that cut through the storm’s din, while Grumpy groaned, “Spare me the details, Smee, I ain’t here for pirate romance novels,” he grumbled, though his tone lacked its usual bite. The wind shrieked louder, rattling the diner’s sign outside with a metallic clang. Bashful edged closer to the counter, his eyes wide as saucers, as the lights flickered again, casting eerie shadows across the room.

Smee’s expression turned wistful, his fingers tracing an invisible knot on the counter as he continued, “But the worst, or best, dependin’ how you see it, was the Bone Cliffs. We’d just nabbed that phoenix feather, bone golems and all, and they sealed it with a kiss right there on deck. The storm she kicked up near tore the sails clean off. Took me and the lads all night to lash ‘em back, while they were… occupied,” he winked.

Ruby snorted, shaking her head, “Guess some things never change,” she said, her voice laced with amusement. Grumpy muttered, “Yeah, like your yammerin’,” but his scowl softened, a reluctant smirk tugging at his lips as he glanced at the storm-ravaged windows.

A third thunderclap boomed, closer now, the vibration rattling the coffee mugs and sending a spoon skittering off the counter. Ruby caught it mid-air with a werewolf’s reflexes, her grin widening as she set it down, “We may be in for quite the storm tonight,” Smee said, his voice carrying a mix of awe and amusement, “They haven’t been together like this in so long, not since before she got yanked away by that imp’s schemes. All that pent-up passion’s gotta be released, and her magic’s lettin’ the world know it.” He leaned back, folding his arms with a satisfied nod.

The storm outside swelled, the wind howling like a banshee, the rain a relentless drum against the roof, drowning out the jukebox’s faint hum. Ruby’s eyes sparkled with understanding, her voice soft, “Good for them, let it rain,” she said, a hint of warmth threading through her teasing. Grumpy sighed, slumping against the counter, “Great. Just what we need, two lovebirds floodin’ the town ‘cause they can’t keep it in their pants,” he muttered, though his tone held more resignation than anger.

The diner's chatter had quieted, the townsfolk now staring at the windows as lightning flashed again. Granny grumbled about her arthritis acting up, Doc adjusted his glasses with a nervous mutter, and Bashful clutched the doorframe like it might fly away.

Ruby poured Smee a coffee, sliding it across the counter with a wink, "Guess we'll just ride it out, sounds like they're making up for lost time," she said, her grin infectious. Smee took the mug with a grateful nod, his grin unshaken, "Aye, lass, decades apart'll do that to a pair like them. The Cap'n and his tempest, when they're together, the world feels it." Another thunderclap punctuated his words, the storm a roaring testament to Killian and Desylva's union.

"Ye think it's wild here, be glad ye're not on the Roger. Poor girl is prob'ly bein' tossed like a salad," Smee added, with a tint of pride and joy in his voice. Ruby laughed, "I'd like to see that. Maybe we should go back to the harbor and watch the fireworks." Before Smee or Grumpy could respond, a blinding flash of lightning lit up the sky outside the windows. "Don't think that would be wise. This could get real intense."

Granny's Diner stood firm, its warm light a small bastion against the tempest, as the townsfolk settled in, half-annoyed, half-awed, by the love that shook the skies.

Regina's Mansion
(Simultaneous with Granny's Diner scene)

The heavy oak door of Regina's mansion swung open, admitting a gust of wind that carried the sharp scent of rain and ozone as Regina swept inside, her heels clicking against the polished hardwood floor, followed closely by Henry and Emma. The grand foyer glowed faintly under the chandelier's warm light, a stark contrast to the chaos brewing beyond the stained-glass windows, where the sky churned with dark clouds.

Emma shook droplets from her leather jacket, her blonde hair damp and tousled, and glanced back at the storm raging outside. "That got nasty fast. … It just came out of nowhere." Regina paused, shedding her coat with a flick of her wrist, her dark eyes glinting as she countered, "Not nowhere, Swan. This is Desylva." Emma's brow creased, skepticism tugging at her voice, "She's been here for over a month and never whipped up anything like this." Regina turned, fixing her with a knowing stare, "She's never had a reason to before."

The air between them thickened, charged with unspoken questions, until Henry piped up, his voice bright with realization, "They're together, aren't they? They're making love on the Jolly Roger!"

Emma and Regina both snapped their heads toward him, twin looks of incredulity flashing across their faces. Henry, undeterred, clutched his storybook tighter, grinning as he explained, "The book says when they're 'together,' the weather can get wild, sometimes even rough." Emma's eyebrow arched higher, "The book says that?" He nodded eagerly, "Yeah, and Smee confirmed it!" Regina echoed, dryly, "Smee?"

Henry's excitement bubbled over, his words tumbling out in a rush, "It's happening! It's really happening. They're getting back together! True love's gonna win!" and with that, he bounded up the winding staircase, sneakers thudding against the steps, leaving a trail of infectious hope in his wake.

Regina and Emma lingered at the foot of the stairs, watching his retreating figure disappear around the curve, the distant creak of the floorboards marking his path to his room. Regina's gaze slid back to Emma, her expression softening into something almost resigned, "He's right, you know." Emma blinked, caught off guard, "What?"

Regina gestured toward the window, where rain lashed against the panes in relentless sheets, the wind howling like a beast unleashed, "This is Desylva. And if she and Killian are 'together,' then this is only the beginning. It's about to get a lot worse." Emma's shoulders slumped, her voice dropping to a near whisper as she crossed to the window, peering out at the tempest's fury, "Then I've lost him." The glass reflected her pale face, eyes shadowed with a quiet ache as she murmured, "He's made up his mind. He's chosen her." Regina stepped closer, her tone blunt but not unkind, "Of course he has, Swan. They're bound together. Body and soul. I told you that from the start."

Emma turned abruptly, boots scuffing the floor as she headed for the door, her jaw set with a determination that barely masked her hurt. Regina's voice cut through the hum of the storm, "Wait." Emma paused, hand on the knob, and glanced back, meeting Regina's steady gaze. "You can't go out in that," Regina warned, her words edged with rare concern. Emma shrugged, a faint, stubborn smile tugging at her lips, "A little rain never hurt anyone; I'll be fine."

Regina's eyes narrowed, her voice sharpening, "You don't get it. This is Desylva. The more intense she and Killian get, the wilder this weather will turn. And if he hits the right notes… he always knew how to work her up… it could get downright brutal." Emma's grip tightened on the knob, unfazed, "I'll be fine." She yanked the door open, and a fierce gust roared past, whipping her hair and rattling the chandelier. Regina sighed, arms crossing as she called after her, "Don't say I didn't warn you."

The door slammed shut behind Emma, swallowed by the storm's roar, leaving Regina alone in the foyer, the echo of her words mingling with the tempest's unrelenting howl.

Pawnshop
(simultaneous with Granny's Diner scene)

Across town, in the dimly lit clutter of his pawnshop, Rumpelstiltskin stood hunched over a spinning wheel, its rhythmic whir a steady hum beneath the storm's distant roar. The air was thick with the metallic tang of magic and the musty scent of old trinkets, shelves groaning under the weight of cursed relics, dusty books, and glinting baubles that whispered of broken deals. A single lamp cast a sickly yellow glow across the room, its light pooling on the worn wooden floor, illuminating strands of gold that coiled from the wheel like liquid fire. His nimble fingers worked the straw, twisting it into shimmering threads, but his usual smirk faded as a chill crept up his spine, a prickle of unease that tightened his grip on the wheel.

The storm outside rattled the shop's windows, rain streaking the glass in frantic rivulets, lightning flashing in jagged bursts that threw his shadow against the walls. Each clap of thunder reverberated through the cluttered space, shaking vials and charms, a sound he knew too well. He paused, stilling as the wheel slowed, its creak fading into silence. His dark eyes narrowed, glinting with a mix of calculation and dread as he tilted his head, listening to the tempest's voice. He knew what the weather meant, had felt its echo in realms long past. Killian and Desylva had reconnected, their bond reignited, and the storm was her magic's defiant cry, a power he'd once sought to harness and break.

His lips pressed into a thin line, his fingers curling into fists as he straightened, his black suit rustling faintly. The storm's ferocity was no mere coincidence. It was a declaration. A ripple of their unity that threatened the fragile web he'd spun over Storybrooke. He'd taken Desylva for her storm magic almost half-a-century ago, locking her in that tower to siphon her power, her Veyran tempest a prize he'd coveted to fuel his own dark ends. He'd broken Killian for revenge over Milah, shattering the pirate's heart with the lie of her death, a wound he'd twisted deeper with every taunt. And he'd held Desylva to defy his own loneliness, a twisted comfort in her defiance, a mirror to his own isolation. Letting her escape when the Dark Curse was broken had been a calculated move, to sow chaos among Emma, Regina, Belle, and Henry, to fracture their fragile alliance with doubt and division. But now, their reunion, sealed by that damned driftwood ring, with the dragon sapphire, and the new sapphire pendant he'd glimpsed in a vision, loomed like a storm cloud over his game.

He stepped away from the wheel with a deliberate rhythm as he crossed to a cluttered workbench. His fingers brushed a crystal ball, its surface cold and smooth, and with a flick of his wrist, it flared to life, casting a swirling mist across its curve. Images flickered within… Killian and Desylva on the Jolly Roger, their embrace fierce, her storm magic crackling in the air, the pendant glinting at her throat like a taunt.

His breath hissed through his teeth, a low, venomous sound, "Together again," he muttered, his voice a silken rasp laced with menace, "And stronger for it." The ring, that blasted relic of their past, pulsed with a magic he couldn't touch, a vow forged in love, unbreakable by his curses, and the pendant, a new token, hinted at a power renewed, a bond that could unravel his plans. He'd underestimated their resilience, their ability to find each other across realms and time. His revenge had faltered, his chaos stifled by their alliance with Storybrooke's heroes—Emma's resolve, Regina's cunning, Belle's knowledge, Henry's faith—all bolstered by this reunion he hadn't foreseen. The wheel's gold gleamed mockingly in the corner of his eye as he paced, his footsteps striking the floor harder with each step. Time to put a plan in motion, to twist this love into a weapon against them.

He stopped at a locked cabinet, its dark wood carved with serpentine runes. His fingers traced the lock, magic sparking at his touch as it clicked open. Inside, a velvet-lined tray held a shard of obsidian, its edges jagged and glinting with a malevolent sheen, a relic from the Crimson Abyss he'd kept hidden. His smirk returned, cold and

sharp, “Let’s see how their storm fares against a shadow,” he murmured, lifting the shard, its weight heavy with dark promise.

The storm outside roared louder, as if sensing his intent, but he only laughed, a low, chilling sound that echoed through the shop. Killian and Desylva might have found each other, but he’d ensure their love became their undoing, a pawn in the game he’d never let them win.

The Jolly Roger – Killian’s Cabin

Their climax crashed like a rogue wave, Desylva’s cry piercing the cabin as her body trembled, her warmth clenching around Killian in fierce, pulsing waves, a slick, searing tide that gripped him tight, her storm’s fury surging through every shudder, lightning flaring outside in a blinding arc that scorched the fog.

Her pulsing heat consumes me, a tempest swallowing my essence, her love a beacon healing my shattered soul, anchoring me to her forever.

Killian roared, his heat surging into her in torrential, shuddering waves, his length throbbing deep within her, each pulse a fiery flood that shook his frame to its core, the bed’s runes glowing to mend a gouge from his hook’s desperate grip.

His release surges through me, a molten tide flooding my core, his love a thunderclap shattering my heart into joyous fragments, our souls fused in this storm.

Her legs tightened around his hips, her thighs caressing his sides, nails digging into his shoulders as their heartbeats thundered in unison. The Jolly Roger lurched with a wave’s brutal impact, timbers groaning as if echoing their raw ecstasy. Her storm magic peaked, a gust extinguishing the candle, plunging them into darkness lit only by her flaring mark, pressed warm against his chest, its pulse mirroring their frenzied rhythm. Desylva sent a playful current through his hook, its metal tingling against her thigh, enticing a growl from him. “Gods, lass, I’ve missed that spark,” he rasped, his hand cupping her breast, fondling her nipple as he kissed her throat, savoring her warmth.

The cabin pulsed with their quiet storm, its energy crackling faintly as their breaths intertwined. Desylva’s legs hooked around Killian’s, her thighs caressing his with fierce tenderness, her hands fondling his chest, fingers tracing his scars. His hook gripped her hip, anchoring her to him, while his hand cupped her face, thumb fondling her cheek. Her dark hair sprawled across the pillow in wild, tangled waves, strands catching the pendant’s glow like storm-tossed seas against the deep blue quilt, its storm patterns now a chaotic tapestry beneath them.

His lips caressed her throat, tasting the salt of her sweat and sea, a flavor stirring memories of their reckless past. Her sighs blended with his murmurs, “My Des… my heart…” his voice a gravelly whisper vibrating against her flesh. Her storm had flared bright, gusts rattling the window’s glass.

The Jolly Roger rocked as timbers groaned under their passion. The quilt bunched beneath her clutching fingers, nails scraping the fabric, mirroring their love’s chaos. His kisses softened into tender presses, his hand fondling her hair, cupping her shoulder as their world narrowed to skin against skin. Her hands rested on his chest, caressing his heartbeat, a rhythm echoing the fading storm outside, a soft rumble trembling through the cabin’s bones.

Desylva nestled against Killian, her head cradling against his chest, dark hair spilling over his scars like ink across parchment, soft and damp with sweat. Her fingers traced lazy circles where his heart beat steady, caressing his skin with gentle touches. His arm curled around her, his hook resting on beside her. His hand stroked her hair, fondling the tangled strands as his breath slowed, pressing a lingering kiss to her forehead. “Gods I’ve missed you,” he murmured, his voice rough with sated love. Her smile curved against his skin, “And I you,” she replied, her gray eyes half-lidded, shimmering with peace as she met his gaze. The sapphire pendant gleamed between them, its blue heart glowing faintly from their closeness.

The Jolly Roger cradled them in its gentle sway, the sea lapping against the hull in a soothing counterpoint to their slowing breaths. A lullaby woven through the stillness. Outside, the fog thickened, silvery tendrils curling around the masts, cloaking the ship in a private shroud as the stars burned brighter beyond, bearing witness to their love reborn.

They lay entwined for a few precious minutes, limbs heavy with exhaustion, their bodies pressed close in the quilt's rumpled embrace. Desylva's storm simmered beneath her skin, unquenched, a restless hunger still flickering in her veins. She shifted with a fluid grace, rolling onto him and straddling his hips, her dark hair falling forward like a tempest's veil, framing her face as her gray eyes blazed with seductive fire.

His body's my ocean, its heat a siren's call pulsing through my veins, my heart a storm desperate to crash against his shores again.

She leaned down, lips hovering above his, her voice a low, sultry purr, "I need you, Killian, deep inside me. My storm's still raging, and only you can tame it." His grin flared roguish and wild, blue eyes sparking with heat.

Her fire's a gale in my blood, her curves a sea I'd drown in, my soul aching to plunge into her storm's heart.

"Aye, lass, you think I'd leave your seas uncharted?" he teased, his hand caressing her thigh, fondling her skin as his hook rested beside her knee, tingling with her current. She rocked her hips against him, a smirk tugging at her lips, "Then dive in, pirate. Stir my waters 'til I'm wrecked." His chuckle rumbled low, "I'll plunder you 'til the hull cracks, love." His hand cupped her waist, fondling her curves as their innuendos set the air ablaze.

Round two erupted with a wild, rough intensity. Desylva's hands slammed against his chest, pinning him beneath her as she sank onto him, her sharp gasp slicing through the cabin as he filled her, her warmth tight and pulsing.

His strength is a tidal wave, crashing through my core, his heat a lightning strike igniting my soul, my heart bound to his in this storm.

Killian growled, his hand clutching her hip with bruising force, fingers fondling her skin as he thrust up, meeting her press with a powerful surge, the bed's runes shimmering to mend a splinter from his hook's scrape.

Her heat's a vortex, pulling me in, her rhythm a sea pounding my heart, my soul aflame with her love's wild claim.

Her nails raked his chest, leaving red trails, and he bucked beneath her with a guttural snarl, his hook grazing the headboard, its runes glowing to heal a scratch. "Yes, Killian, more!" Her voice broke into a moan as the storm outside roared, her magic unleashing a gale that battered the Jolly Roger, waves crashing against the hull, the window shuddering as lightning split the sky. Her hair whipped around her face as she rode him relentlessly, her gasps sharpening into cries. "Harder, pirate, ravage me!"

He obliged, thrusting up with a primal growl, his hand caressing her lower back, cupping her curves. "Aye, I'll plunder ye 'til ye scream, lass!" The cabin shook, timbers groaning as rain hammered the deck. The candle's absence left them in shadows, lit by lightning's flash.

Their pace grew frenzied, a primal dance of storm and sea. Desylva's thighs tightened, her body arching as she pressed down to meet his relentless thrusts, each one drawing a sharp gasp as he filled her, their rhythm a reckless tangle of moans and motion. Killian's hand fisted in her hair, yanking her down for a bruising kiss, teeth clashing as he thrust up hard, his growl vibrating against her lips. "You're mine, tempest and all!" Her moan muffled against his mouth as she rocked harder, nails digging into his shoulders, her hands caressing his scars.

Her storm peaked with a thunderclap that rattled the sea chest, its lid slamming shut, and she shattered around him, her scream wild as her body convulsed, her warmth clenching him in fierce, pulsing waves, a searing, slick tide that gripped him tight, her essence flooding through every shudder, lightning flaring blinding white, the ship lurching as waves slammed the hull.

Her pulsing storm engulfs me, her love a tide washing away my scars, my heart anchored in her eternal sea.

Killian thrust once more, a hoarse roar ripping from his chest as he released, his heat surging into her in torrential, shuddering waves, his length throbbing deep within her, each pulse a fiery flood that shook his frame to its core, the bed's runes glowing to mend a gouge from his hook.

His fire consumes me, a sea breaking my soul apart, his love a storm surge knitting me whole in ecstasy's embrace.

The storm hit its zenith, wind howling through the rigging, rain flooding the deck in a deafening deluge until the sea itself quaked with their climax. The chaos ebbed slowly, the gale softening to a restless moan, rain tapering to a steady drum as their breaths heaved in the dark, the cabin a wreckage of twisted quilt and scattered maps.

Desylva collapsed atop him, her chest heaving against his, sweat-slick skin pressed close as their heartbeats thundered. Her storm settled into a low hum, the air charged with her magic's afterglow. Killian's arm wrapped around her, his hand caressing her back, fondling her spine as his hook lay beside them, glinting faintly. He pressed a ragged kiss to her temple, his voice a hoarse whisper, "You've wrecked me, lass, and I'd sail into your storm a thousand times over." She chuckled, breathless and sated, her lips caressing his jaw. "And I'd drown in you every time, pirate."

They lay there, tangled and spent, the Jolly Roger rocking gently beneath them as the sea sighed its contentment, fog thickening around the ship like a lover's embrace. The pendant pulsed faintly against his chest, a soft blue glow in the shadows, a quiet testament to their reunion.

Beyond the window, the night settled, stars peeking through the haze as the world stilled, leaving them adrift in the sanctuary of their reclaimed love, the storm within and without finally at peace.

After a quiet stretch wrapped in each other's arms, the quilt a tangled cocoon around their sweat-slick bodies, Killian shifted, his hand cupping Desylva's face, his fingers caressing her cheek with a tenderness forged through decades of longing. His blue eyes locked with her storm-gray gaze, raw and earnest, shimmering with a vulnerability that pierced her heart. "Desylva, my tempest," he began, his voice low and rough, laced with the pirate's roguish charm yet heavy with sincerity, "I don't want to spend another minute apart. Forty-six years was a bloody eternity. Move to the Roger. Share this cabin with me, our sanctuary, once again. Let's sail every sea, chase every storm, together." His thumb fondled her jaw, his hook resting gently on her hip, its cool metal a grounding contrast to the warmth of his touch, his gaze unwavering, pleading, yet fierce with love.

Her warmth is a blazing tide against my skin, her eyes a stormy sea swallowing my soul, my heart thundering with dread of her absence, yet soaring with desperate hope to entwine our lives eternally.

Her breath hitched, her gray eyes sparkling with unshed tears of joy, their depths swirling like a tempest calmed by his words. A beaming smile lit her face, radiant and unrestrained, her voice trembling with delight and love, its sultry edge softened by raw emotion. "Aye, Killian, my pirate!" she exclaimed, her hands cupping his face, fingers caressing his stubble as she leaned closer, her dark hair spilling over the pillow. "You've no idea how my heart's bursting. Nothing could make me happier than this. I prayed you'd ask, dreamed of sailin' with you again, our storms entwined. This ship, this cabin, it's our home, and I'm yours, always."

His words are a lightning bolt scorching my core, his love a tidal surge flooding my heart with euphoric joy, my body quaking with need to sail with him, our love a storm to defy eternity.

Her words carried the cadence of her storm magic, a rhythmic lilt like waves against the hull, fierce yet tender, true to the woman who'd tamed seas and his heart.

Their lips crashed together in a deep, fervent kiss, hungry and reverent, sealing their promise as the Jolly Roger rocked beneath them, the oak timbers creaking softly, as if singing with the warmth of their renewed bond.

Desylva's hands slid into his hair, fondling the dark strands, tugging him closer, while Killian's hand caressed her back, cupping her shoulder, their bodies pressed tight, the quilt slipping to reveal the sapphire pendant glowing faintly against her chest, a beacon of their love. The kiss deepened, a clash of need and joy, his growl vibrating against her lips, "My love, my storm, we'll never part again."

Her lips are a fiery anchor searing my soul, her kiss a tidal wave cleansing decades of agony, my heart swelling with a vow to bind her to me for eternity.

She laughed, a joyous ripple, "Never, my sea, we'll plunder the realms together."

His kiss is a gale igniting my veins, his love a harbor cradling my soul in blissful peace, my heart forever anchored in his sea.

Storybrooke's harbor lay oblivious beyond the window, its fog curling around the masts, but within the cabin, their world was complete, the ship's gentle sway cradling their jubilant reunion, a love reborn to defy time and fate.

Day 35

Henry's Room

Henry sprawled across his bed in the dim glow of his cluttered room, the storybook splayed open before him like a sacred relic, its worn leather cover creased and softened from countless nights of fervent study. Beyond his window, the faint pulse of Storybrooke hummed. A rhythmic crash of waves against the harbor, a soft wind teasing the pines into whispers. The warm light of his bedside lamp spilled across the walls, casting flickering shadows over posters of fairytale heroes pinned among his pencil sketches of knights and dragons.

His brow furrowed as he traced a passage with a grubby finger, the text painting a vivid picture of a wedding ring Desylva had once intended for Killian—a silver band etched with swirling waves, cradling a single sapphire like a captured drop of the sea, a promise forged amid the chaos of storms and pirate oaths. The words pulsed with life, leaping off the page to stir a flicker of recognition deep in his chest, a nagging pull at the edges of his memory like a half-remembered dream.

He squinted, leaning closer. His breath hitching as the description sharpened into focus, familiar, too familiar, a shape he'd glimpsed somewhere in the corners of his world, teasingly out of reach until this moment. His heart thudded, a sudden surge of adrenaline coursing through him as the pieces locked together. He'd seen that ring before, he was certain. The realization struck like a thunderclap, jolting him upright, the storybook tumbling onto the quilt with a muffled thud, its pages fluttering like startled wings. His room, a haven of comics, scattered trinkets, and half-finished homework, blurred into the periphery as his mind raced, sifting through every fleeting memory of Storybrooke's nooks and crannies.

The pawnshop, he thought, *Mr. Gold's cluttered shelves*, *it has to be there!*

He scrambled off the bed, sneakers catching on the frayed edge of a rug as he lunged for his jacket, slung carelessly over a chair buried under a pile of laundry. The floorboards groaned beneath his frantic steps, their creaks reverberating through the silent house as he tore out of his room, a boy on a mission, driven by the unshakable faith that had steered him through every twist of Storybrooke's tangled tales.

Hall/Stairs/Front Door/Town

His breath puffed into the cool air of the hallway, a faint mist of resolve, as he bounded down the stairs two at a time, the ring's image blazing in his mind, a beacon summoning him into the night. The front door slammed shut behind him, the sound swallowed by the town's drowsy murmur, as Henry sprinted toward his fate, heart pounding with the exhilaration of discovery, a hero racing to weave the threads of true love back together.

Pawnshop

The pawnshop stood hushed under the amber glow of its antique lamps, a shadowed sanctuary where light danced across shelves laden with relics of forgotten realms—cracked goblets, tarnished lockets, and dusty talismans murmuring tales of curses broken and courage found. Belle stood behind the counter, a worn copy of *Persuasion* propped open in her hands, her chestnut curls catching the faint sheen of lamplight as she turned a page, lost in the quiet yearning of Austen's prose. The air hung thick with the scent of aged wood and polished metal, a stillness that enveloped the shop like a protective shroud. Rumpelstiltskin was absent, his brooding presence replaced by the gentle ticking of a grandfather clock in the corner, its pendulum swaying with a soothing, metronomic rhythm.

Belle's eyes darted up now and then, sweeping the empty shop, her fingers brushing the counter's worn edge as if anchoring herself in the solitude, a librarian at peace amid the chaos of enchanted clutter. The bell above the door erupted in a wild jangle, shattering the calm, and Henry burst in like a hurricane, sneakers skidding across the polished floor, his jacket askew and cheeks flushed with the urgency of a quest, a whirlwind piercing the shop's tranquil veil.

He darted past Belle without a glance, his focus locked on a display cabinet near the back, its glass panes smudged with time and the ghosts of curious hands. She blinked, lowering her book as he threaded through the maze of shelves, her voice trailing after him, “Henry? What’s got you in such a hurry?”

But he was already there, eyes raking over the jumble of trinkets… a chipped teacup, a rusted compass, a velvet pouch spilling beads like tears. Then he saw it. A silver ring, its wave-like etchings curling around a deep blue sapphire, glinting like a shard of the ocean trapped in metal, resting unassumingly on a faded cushion. A triumphant grin split his face, illuminating the dim corner. “I knew it!” he crowed, fists pumping the air as if he’d unearthed a lost relic of Camelot.

Belle stepped closer, curiosity lighting her eyes as she peered over his shoulder, “What did you find?” Henry jabbed a finger at the ring, breathless with excitement, “This! I need it, Belle, please!” She paused, her gaze lingering on the ring, sensing a weight beyond its silver and stone, a whisper of destiny in its gleam, then nodded with a gentle smile, “Alright, it’s yours.”

She unlocked the cabinet with a delicate key from her pocket, retrieving the ring and nestling it into a small, velvet-lined box, her movements careful, almost reverent, as if handling a piece of living history. Henry fished a crumpled wad of bills from his jeans, thrusting them at her, “Thanks, Belle!” and snatched the box, his grin blazing brighter than the shop’s lamps.

Henry bolted for the door, the bell clanging again as he vanished into the night, leaving Belle staring after him, her book forgotten on the counter. “What’s he planning with that ring?” she murmured, a librarian’s curiosity unfurling amid the shop’s shadowed relics, her fingers tapping absently as the question lingered in the air, the clock’s steady tick her only companion.

Granny’s Diner

The diner buzzed with its late-evening rhythm, a warm refuge against the creeping chill of Storybrooke’s night, where the clatter of plates and the hum of voices wove a comforting tapestry around the rich scent of sizzling bacon and freshly brewed coffee.

Desylva leaned against the counter, her leather jacket creaking faintly as she cradled a steaming mug, trading quips with Ruby over the day’s small-town scandals. Ruby’s red-streaked hair gleamed under the diner’s fluorescent lights, her wolfish grin flashing as she leaned forward, “So, you and Hook, huh?” her elbows propped on the counter, “That was quite the ‘storm’ you conjured up the other night. Spill it, storm girl”, her tone teasing but warm, a glint of mischief in her eyes.

The jukebox hummed a gritty tune in the corner, its melody weaving through the chatter of dockworkers and locals hunched over their meals, while the neon sign outside flickered faintly, casting a rosy glow through the fogged windows, painting the scene in hues of nostalgia. Desylva smirked, swirling her coffee, “He’s still my pirate, Ruby. And he still knows how to break my storm.” Her voice low and fond, a flicker of memory softening her storm-gray gaze, her thoughts drifting to salt-sprayed decks and starlit promises, the weight of the past tugging at her heart.

The door slammed open with a bang, slicing through the diner’s hum, and Henry barreled in, a whirlwind of excitement, sneakers squeaking against the checkered linoleum as he skidded to a halt, his breath puffing in short, eager bursts. “Desylva!” he shouted, voice ringing with triumph, eyes wide and bright as he clutched the ring box in his hands, practically vibrating with anticipation. “I found it!” he declared.

Desylva turned, one brow arching as she set her mug down with a soft clink. “Found what, kid?” Her tone curious, laced with a hint of amusement at his fervor. The diner’s chatter faded to a murmur as eyes turned their way, drawn by his infectious energy. “This,” he said, thrusting the box toward her, his grin stretching ear to ear.

Desylva’s fingers hesitated over the velvet, as she took it from him. “Open it, Desylva, open it!” he begged. Ruby, curious herself, “Yeah, open it. Let’s see what he’s found.” Desylva slowly pried it open, revealing the silver band within, waves etched deep into its surface, a sapphire blazing at its heart like a storm-trapped star.

“Oh my God,” she whispered, her voice cracking as tears welled in her gray eyes. The sight of it unraveling a flood of buried memories, nights on the Jolly Roger, promises whispered under tempest skies, a love she’d thought lost forever.

Henry bounced on his toes, “It’s the ring from the Storybook!” Desylva’s breath hitched, her fingers brushing the ring as she stammered, “I…” Henry cut in, his voice alight with conviction, “It’s a sign, Desylva! Things are aligning. You and Killian are gonna get your happy ending this time, I can feel it!” Her chest tightened, and she pulled him into a fierce hug, arms wrapping tight around his narrow shoulders, “Thanks, kid, this is…” Her words trailed off, dissolving into a silence thick with emotion, no phrase vast enough to hold the gratitude and awe swelling within her.

Henry hugged her back, his excitement a beacon in the diner’s warm glow, his cheek pressed against her jacket as he beamed, “It’s really happening!” Ruby leaned over the counter, smirking softly, “Kid’s got a knack for this stuff,” her eyes flicking to the ring with a knowing nod. Desylva clutched the box close, tears brimming but unspoken, the ring a tangible thread to a future she’d dared not hope for, its sapphire catching the light like a promise reignited.

Day 36

Library Back Room

The back theater room of the library was a haven of weathered charm, its oak-paneled walls lined with sagging bookshelves, heavy with dusty tomes and yellowed nautical charts curling like waves frozen in time, their edges frayed like sea-worn sails. The air carried the rich scent of aged paper, polished wood, and a faint briny whisper, as if the nearby harbor had seeped into the room. Dim lanterns swung gently overhead, their amber glow casting warm pools across mismatched chairs arranged in a loose semicircle around a small, enchanted projector—Regina’s magic, rigged for Henry’s delight—its lens now dark after a marathon of the four *Pirates of the Caribbean* films. A scarred wooden table bore the remnants of their revelry. Empty popcorn bowls, chipped mugs of cooling cocoa (Henry’s choice), and tankards of grog (Killian’s insistence), their surfaces sticky with crumbs and amber rings. Moonlight streamed through a high, arched window, weaving silver threads through the room’s haze, while a restless breeze, Desylva’s storm magic, stirred loose papers, her cursed mark sparking faintly beneath her sleeve, a blue glyph pulsing like a distant star.

Henry perched cross-legged on a cushioned chair, his notebook splayed across his lap, pages crowded with sketches and notes, his eyes blazing with a mix of boyish wonder and the sharp confidence of a lad who’d faced a few curses here in this town. “That was incredible! Four pirate movies. Sword fights, sea monsters, curses! You guys are real pirates, except Grumpy, of course.” He flashed a grin at Grumpy, who slouched in a creaky chair, arms crossed, his beard bristling like a storm cloud. “You totally remind me of Pintel, though!”

Pintel/Grumpy

Grumpy snorted, his bushy brows knitting into a scowl, the lantern light glinting off his face. “Pintel? That scruffy, connivin’ pirate? I ain’t that shifty, kid. Maybe I’ve got his squint, and knack for stirrin’ up trouble, but I’d swing an axe harder than he swings a blade.” The room burst into laughter, Smee nearly spilling his grog. Grumpy’s scowl softened, a reluctant smirk tugging his lips. “Alright, Pintel’s got a bit of my charm and grit, but I’m better-lookin’, and my axe’d make him cry.”

Smee wiped his chin, his ruddy face flushed, his voice high with glee. “He’s got yer squint, alright, but you’re twice as ornery! Pintel’s sneaky, sure, but you’d scare him off with one glare.” He raised his tankard, grog sloshing onto the table, adding to the sticky rings.

Killian lounged in a chair, his black leather coat open, his hook catching the lantern’s glow like polished metal, a roguish grin curving his lips. “Aye, dwarf, you’ve got Pintel’s look but a heart fiercer than his. I’d wager you’d best him in a brawl.” His blue eyes flicked to Desylva, softening with a playful spark as he leaned closer, his voice a teasing murmur. “What say you, love? Does our dwarf outshine that pirate rabble?”

Desylva, curled beside him, her dark hair spilling over her shoulders like a midnight tide, smirked, her storm-gray eyes catching the moonlight as she nudged his arm, her fingers brushing his hook, sending a faint spark through

her mark. “Grumpy’s got more fire. Pintel’s all talk. Our dwarf’s got steel in his scowl.” Her voice was warm, laced with a tempest’s edge, a gust swirling the room, rustling charts. She leaned closer, her lips grazing his ear, whispering, “You’re the only rogue who stirs my storm.” Killian’s grin widened, and he stole a quick kiss, her lips tasting of cocoa and defiance, the air humming with her magic.

Jack The Monkey/Cotton The Parrot

Henry scribbled eagerly, his pencil scratching like a ship’s creak, then looked up, eyes wide with curiosity. “Okay, Jack the Monkey was the best. Stealing coins, shooting cannons! And Cotton’s parrot, always squawking stuff like ‘don’t eat me’, ‘pieces of eight’ or ‘fire in the hole.’ And bossing people around. Were parrots and monkeys really on pirate ships, or is that just movie flair?”

Killian’s hook tapped the table, a sharp clink, his grin sly. “Parrots, aye, lad. Sailors kept ‘em for company, their chatter breakin’ the monotony of endless seas. Saw a few in my day, squawkin’ orders as bold as any quartermaster. One old mate had a bird that’d curse in three tongues. Cotton’s parrot, has spirit. Warnin’ of krakens and dodgin’ Blackbeard’s tricks. Jack the Monkey, is a rogue, a proper pest, like some imps we’ve faced, scamperin’ through chaos like he owned the seas, causing mischief wherever he goes. Got more wit than half of Sparrow’s crew, quicker than a shadow and twice as troublesome. No parrot, or monkey, could match our Roger’s crew, though. Our family has heart no beast could match.” His voice carried pride for the ship’s enchanted legacy, his hand finding Desylva’s, their fingers entwining. Desylva leaned closer, her hand brushing his. “That monkey’s a devil, Killian, stirrin’ trouble. Always where he shouldn’t be, like some of our own foes. Cotton’s parrot, got spirit, but he’s no match for a real storm.” Her voice was fierce yet warm, her cursed mark sparking as a faint gust swirled the room, rustling the charts on the walls.

Smee nodded, his stool wobbling, grog splashing. “Aye, lad! Knew a mate with a bird that sang shanties better’n him. Cotton’s parrot got pluck, squawkin’, yelling orders, warnin’ ‘bout the kraken, rallyin’ the lords, even dodgin’ Blackbeard’s tricks. Jack the Monkey? Proper menace, that one! Scamperin’ about, pinchin’ coins, causin’ chaos with that cursed crew. Nickin’ hats, bitin’ fingers, drivin’ Sparrow mad. Shootin’ cannons in the maelstrom, bold as you please! Climbin’ rigging, dodgin’ mermaids. Never a dull moment with that beast!” His eyes twinkled, his loyalty shining through. “We faced creatures fiercer than any monkey or bird, like them shadow-beasts we outran, thanks to Miss Desylva’s thunder!”

Grumpy kicked the table leg, the wood groaning. “Monkeys, parrots? Just noisy nuisances. Ravens in the Enchanted Forest had more sense, and less chatter. Jack’s thievin’ ways are like mine pickpockets, only with a tail. Cotton’s parrot squawkin’ orders? I’d rather hear my axe sing. They did give the films some bite, I’ll admit.” His scowl eased, a grudging nod to Henry. Henry grinned, flipping a page in his notebook, the pencil’s scratch a soft counterpoint to the room’s quiet. “Jack the Monkey and Cotton’s parrot were so cool, but your stories are wilder.”

Curses

Henry’s pencil flew, sketching a monkey with a coin. “The movies felt alive, like your adventures. Those curses… coins, moonlight… aren’t like ours, though. True love or a kiss breaks curses here, like Mom and Emma’s magic. How do the movie curses stack up to yours?”

Desylva’s eyes sparked, her mark flaring, a breeze swirling the room, fluttering Henry’s pages. “Their curses are too neat, Henry. We’ve faced enchantments, dark spells that claw at your heart and soul, dark as a starless sea. Some, like you said, need a kiss or true love’s fire to break. The films make it simple, lackin’ the ache we’ve known. Our fights with shadowed magic were never that simple.” She leaned into Killian, her voice softening, her hand squeezing his. “Our love’s the gale that shatters any hex.” She tilted her head, stealing a kiss, her lips warm against his, a spark crackling between them.

Killian’s gaze softened, his thumb tracing her knuckles, his voice low. “Aye, love, their curses are mere shadows. We’ve battled enchantments that grip like damp rot, broken only by our bond.” He kissed her fingers, his hook glinting. “Your lightning, my heart. That’s the magic no film could capture. Our foes weaved nastier spells, but you broke ‘em with a spark, and I’d catch you when the storm faded.”

Smee nodded eagerly, nearly spilling his grog, his eyes wide with loyalty. “Aye, too simple! We’ve dodged spells from a certain gold-skinned trickster,” he lowered his voice, as if Rumpelstiltskin might lurk in the shadows, “that’d

make their coins look like child's play. Cap'n and Miss Desylva's love, that's the real magic, breakin' curses with a spark and a kiss!"

Grumpy crossed his arms, his scowl softening slightly. "Agreed. Too neat. Back in the Enchanted Forest, we dealt with Regina's dark magic. Nasty stuff, not some shiny trinket. I've seen true love break a spell or two. Your lot's got that in spades." He nodded grudgingly at Killian and Desylva, his beard twitching with reluctant respect. He turned to Henry, grinning. "What's first, kid? *Black Pearl*?"

Curse of the Black Pearl

Henry flipped a page, "Yeah," his grin infectious. "Those skeleton pirates glowing under moonlight were so creepy! And Sparrow, always slipping out of trouble. What did you think of it?"

Killian leaned back, his boots shifting on the stool, his hook catching the lantern's glow. "A fine tale, lad. Those skeletons had a chill, like cursed shores we've sailed, where bones whispered, and shadows hissed. Sparrow's a slippery rogue, clever, his tongue and wit as sharp as my blade, dodgin' foes with a quip, much like our own dances with danger. But their seas? Tame compared to ours, where no moon lit our path, only my lass's storms." He winked at Desylva, his hand squeezing hers, pulling her closer for a quick kiss, her hair brushing his cheek, warm and soft.

Smee raised his tankard, his hat tipping. "Them skeletons gave me shivers, lad! But that crew talked too much… Parleyin' when they should've fought. Cap'n would've sliced through the lot faster than you could say 'cursed coin'!" His chuckle was nervous, his eyes darting to Killian, admiration clear.

Grumpy grunted, scratching his beard, the lantern light glinting off his scowl. "Gimme an axe, and I'd have smashed 'em to dust. Pintel and Ragetti? Funny, but they ain't got my fire. The movie had grit and those sword fights weren't half bad." His smirk was grudging, his boot tapping the floor.

Henry laughed, scribbling in his notebook. "Sparrow's hilarious, always one step ahead, even when he's tripping over himself, talking his way out of trouble." He glanced at Killian, "You think you're smoother and cooler than him, don't you?"

Killian raised an eyebrow, his hook tapping the table with a clink. "Smoother, lad? I'm Captain Hook, scourge of seas that'd make Sparrow quake. I've steered our enchanted Roger through storms and tempests no film could conjure, with my lass's thunder lightin' the way." Desylva caresses his hook, "Oh, you'd love to think you're Sparrow's match, Killian, but you've got more steel in your spine." Killian smiled and kissed her, then looked back at Henry, "Sparrow's got tricks, aye, but I've got my tempest at my side." He slid an arm around Desylva, his voice dropping to a playful murmur. "And my charm's won a storm's heart, which is more than Sparrow can claim."

Desylva rolled her eyes, but her smile betrayed her, a faint gust stirring the room as she nudged him. "Flatterer." Her mark sparked a faint gust that rustled the charts. "Sparrow's wit and tricks do remind me of you. Talkin' circles round a foe before strikin'. The Pearl had spirit, with its cursed crew and moonlit bones." She leaned into him, her fingers tracing his hook, her voice a playful murmur. "You'd have charmed that curse away, pirate." She kissed his jaw, her lips lingering, a spark dancing in her eyes as he grinned, stealing another kiss, their noses brushing.

Henry scribbled, his eyes bright, "Sparrow's awesome, but you guys are tougher. What about *Dead Man's Chest*?"

Dead Man's Chest

Henry flipped a page, his pencil paused, his grin widening. "That kraken was huge and awesome and terrifying. But it died too quick. I wanted to see more of it. And Davy Jones, all gross and slimy with that tentacle face? Creepy but awesome. What did you think?"

Smee's eyes widened, his mug tilting dangerously. "Davy Jones was a proper terror, lad. Heart locked in a chest, playin' that organ like a storm's wail. Gave me chills, it did." He lowered his voice, wary of naming Rumpelstiltskin. "Reminds me of a certain schemer we've dodged, all tricks and malice." He leaned forward. "That kraken, though? Swallowin' ships whole! We faced and defeated beasts just as fierce, thanks to Cap'n's quick thinking and Miss Desylva's lightning."

Desylva smirked, her mark flaring, a breeze swirling the room, stirring popcorn crumbs. “The kraken had teeth, Henry, like monsters we’ve battled in deeper seas, but my gales would’ve sent it divin’. Their ocean felt too small, not wild enough for our blood.” She leaned against Killian, her hand on his chest, her voice softening. “Will and Elizabeth? Too much mopin’. Our love’s got fire, no sighs when we face the dark.” She tilted her head, kissing his cheek, her lips warm, his grin widening as he tucked a strand of her hair behind her ear.

Smee nodded in agreement. “Aye, too sappy.” Grumpy nodded in agreement and Smee continued. “Cap’n and Miss Desylva’s love’s got fire, like them times when her thunder’d save us. None o’ that mopin’ nonsense. Ain’t that right, Cap’n?”

“Aye, Smee,” Killian said, his grin softening, his hook glinting as he pulled her close. “No mopin’ for us. Our love’s a storm. Wild, fierce, unyielding.” Killian gazed into Desylva’s eyes for a moment, then looked back at Henry, “Davy Jones was a villain with weight, his heart a curse we’d know too well. But their seas lack our fury. We’ve fought creatures that’d make that kraken flee, with your thunder, love, lightin’ our way.” He kissed her temple, his lips lingering, the scent of rain in her hair filling his senses. “I’ll give Will Turner credit, though, his swordplay’s not half bad, but I’d have him disarmed in a blink. … The battles were grand, but our Jolly Roger’s faced darker tides, her runes glowin’ through any storm.”

Grumpy huffed, his boot scuffing the floor. “Davy Jones was nasty, alright, all slime and schemes. Reminds me of Enchanted Forest warlords, but with worse hygiene. The kraken? Impressive, but I’d take it down with one swing. Too much romance nonsense, Will and Elizabeth need to toughen up.” His scowl softened, a nod to Henry. “Still, those ship chases weren’t bad.”

Henry jotted notes, his pencil flying. “The kraken and Davy Jones were so cool, but your stories are wilder. What about *World’s End*? That maelstrom battle was insane!”

<u>At World’s End</u>

Henry flipped another page, his eyes sparkling. “What did you think? It had that huge maelstrom fight. Ships spinning, swords clashing, cannons roaring! And the Pirate King and lords, all scheming. Was that Pirate King stuff real? Did you ever meet Calypso?”

Killian leaned forward, his hook tapping the table, his grin sly. “The movie had fire, lad. That maelstrom was a beast, like storms we’ve sailed through, cannons blazin’ as Des’ lightning split the sky.” He glanced at Desylva, his blue eyes warm, pulling her closer to kiss her forehead, her hair soft against his lips. “The Pirate King and lords? Aye, there were councils of rogues in my day, squabblin’ over codes and seas, but no true king ruled us. The Enchanted Forest had its own pirate gatherings, fierce captains barterin’ power, but the Jolly Roger bowed to no one, save my love’s storms.” He winked, his hand squeezing hers. “Calypso? I crossed paths with a sea witch once, wild as the deep, her eyes like the ocean’s heart. Might’ve been her, might not. Her magic felt like yours, love, but less… fiery.” He stole another kiss, her lips curving into a smile against his.

Desylva’s eyes flashed, her mark sparking as she recalled their own battles. A gust swirling the room, fluttering Henry’s notebook. “That maelstrom had spirit, Henry, like my own storms brewin’. But they made it too pretty, too tame. Real storms bite, with winds that tear at your heart and soul, and waves that crush your will. My gales could’ve ripped their sails to shreds. The Pirate King? A fancy title for schemers like Barbossa, playin’ lords while we fought real battles. Calypso’s power, bindin’ Davy Jones, felt true. Her sea magic’s like mine, but wilder, untamed. I’d have faced her, storm to storm, and won.” She smirked, leaning into Killian, her fingers tracing his jaw, her voice a playful murmur. “You’d have charmed her too, pirate, but I’m the only tempest you keep.” She kissed him deeply, her lips fierce, a spark crackling as their noses brushed, his chuckle low and warm.

Smee raised his mug, grog sloshing. “That maelstrom was grand, lad! Ships spinnin’, swords clashin’. Like our fights against beasties! Cap’n, you’d have spun the Roger through that storm twice as fast! … The Pirate King stuff? Heard tales of pirate councils, but Cap’n never bent the knee. Too much talkin’ we’d have settled it with steel. … Calypso? Blimey, her magic’s like Miss Desylva’s, but scarier, turnin’ into crabs? We’ve dodged worse, thanks to Cap’n’s hook!” His grin was earnest.

Killian leaned forward, his hook glinting. “The maelstrom battle stirred my blood, lad. Ships spinnin’ in chaos, like nights we’ve fought through seas that roared like beasts. But their ships?” Killian raised an eyebrow, “Too clean.

Should have more scars, like a proper fightin' vessel. The Roger's enchanted, sleek as the day she was born. She has runes keepin' her pristine, their ships didn't. The Roger has faced tempests no film could dream."

Desylva, smirked, "I liked the chaos, the cannons, Sparrow and Turner fightin' side by side. Reminds me of us, you with your hook, me with my lightning, facin' down what comes." She leaned into Killian, her voice softening. "No film could match us, you and me against the dark."

Grumpy crossed his arms, his scowl deepening. "The movie had guts. Big fight, pirate lords. But too much parley. I'd have taken an axe to it and been done. Maelstrom was decent, but too much talkin' among those lords. Pirate King? Sounds like Regina with a fancier hat. Calypso's magic had bite, but I'd take an axe to her crabs. The movie had heart, those battles were worth watchin'." His smirked and his boot tapped, a grudging nod to Henry.

Henry scribbled, his grin wide, "The maelstrom was epic, and Calypso was wild. I loved how Elizabeth became a pirate king. But, yeah, the curse stuff was kinda easy to fix. What about *Stranger Tides*? Blackbeard, mermaids, the Trident?"

On Stranger Tides

Henry scribbled in his notebook, the pencil's scratch a fervent rhythm against the library's hushed air, his eyes blazing with excitement as he leaned forward and looked up, the lantern light catching the eager glint in his gaze. "Those mermaids were super creepy, luring sailors to drown. Are real mermaids like that? And that Fountain of Youth stuff? Eternal youth sounds wild! I know Neverland has that youth magic, and we've all been there, but are there places like that fountain? And what about Barbossa, back all fancy as a privateer? And that Trident of Poseidon they mentioned… You ever see anything like it? Oh, and Blackbeard he was cool but also scary with that magic sword and zombie crew! Was he really that tough?"

Everyone glared at Henry, surprised that he finally remembered to breathe. Desylva smiled at him, "That's a lot of questions, kid. Let's take'em one at a time, shall we." Henry nodded and eagerly waited for her to continue.

Mermaids

Desylva's cursed mark glowed faintly beneath her sleeve, "Those mermaids… vicious, with songs that drag you under? Aye, we've met their kind, lurin' sailors to doom in fog-shrouded seas, their voices like knives in your heart. Their songs were close to the real thing. Lured my heart a bit, till I remembered yours." She glanced at Killian and squeezed his hand, her gray eyes softening, her mark flaring brighter, a faint gust rustling the nautical charts pinned on the walls. She looked back to Henry, "But not all are cruel. I've heard mermaids sing soft, guidin' us through reefs when we were lost, their melodies like my rain, healin' wounds." She turned Killian, "Remember that lagoon, where their song lit our way?" Her storm-gray eyes softened, meeting Killian's, her hand squeezing his, a gust swirling around them, carrying the scent of ozone.

Killian's grin was sharp, his hook glinting as he pulled her closer, his arm around her shoulders, his lips brushing her temple, the scent of rain in her hair. "Aye, love." He looked at Henry, "There were mermaids, like in the movie, fierce, with voices pullin' at your soul till your lungs screamed. In Neverland, one nearly sank the Jolly Roger. Ursula, her song pullin' me, Smee, and the lads into a trance, nearly smashin' us on rocks till she stopped short, sparin' us. Later, I heard her sing in a tavern, her voice easin' the ache of Milah's loss for a moment. She'd defied her father, Poseidon, stealin' a bracelet to walk on land, dreamin' of Glowerhaven. I offered her passage, but Poseidon ambushed me on my own ship, wavin' his trident, demandin' I steal her voice with an enchanted shell to keep her in the sea, offerin' squid ink to kill the Crocodile in return. I refused at first… her voice was her mother's memory, and I've a code. We planned to steal the ink together, but when Poseidon took it, I…" his voice softened, a shadow of regret crossing his features, "damn my soul… I took her voice to spite him, a choice that haunts me still." He paused, then glanced at Desylva, "But that lagoon night, stars above, your rain fallin' as kind mermaids sang, guidin' us to safe waters… no film could capture that grace, nor the way your lightning kept us free." He paused for a moment, "Jack, Tom, Billy. Gone now. They loved that night. Their laughter still echoes on the Roger's deck when the wind's right."

Smee piped up, nearly toppling his mug, as he leaned forward, grog sloshing onto the table, leaving sticky rings on the scarred wood. "Blimey, Cap'n, Ursula's song in Neverland had us all reeling'… nearly wrecked us till she spared us! Her voice was like a dream, and I was there when Poseidon boarded the Roger, all trident and fury, tryin' to

make you steal her voice for that ink. Broke my heart when she lost it, Cap'n, her eyes so betrayed. Kind mermaids saved our hides once, singin' us through a cursed tide, soft as a lullaby. Jack, Tom, Billy, they were there, cheerin' as Miss Desylva's thunder lit the way. The vicious ones, all teeth and treachery, we outran 'em, thanks to Cap'n's steerin' and," he looked at Desylva, "her lightning!"

Grumpy grunted, scratching his beard, the lantern light glinting off his scowl as he slouched deeper into his chair. "Mermaids? Bah, all trouble, singin' or not. Never met one proper till one washed up in Storybrooke while you lot were off in Neverland rescuin' Henry. Didn't catch her name. Just red hair, bright eyes, talkin' fast about needin' to see Belle for some mission. I was guardin' the docks, makin' sure no one messed with things. She seemed decent, not like those drownin' sirens you're talkin' about, but I didn't trust her. Mermaids don't just show up in Storybrooke, you know."

Henry's eyes widened, his pencil froze mid-stroke, the half-finished curve of a mermaid's tail suspended on the page. "Wait, a mermaid in Storybrooke? That's crazy! Why was she here for Belle?" Grumpy shrugged, his beard twitching. "Beats me, kid. She didn't say much, just that she had to see Belle, somethin' about a mission. I didn't ask. Too busy keepin' an eye on the harbor. She took off quick, like she was in a hurry."

Killian's brow furrowed, his hook tapping the table with a soft, irritated clink that cut through the cozy room. "A mermaid seekin' Belle? In Storybrooke?" His voice dropped, edged with disbelief. "And I'm only hearin' of this now? Months after it happened?" Grumpy's scowl deepened as he crossed his arms. "Look, I forgot, alright? Things happen in this town every blasted day. Curses, monsters, portals, people dyin' and comin' back. … Hard to keep track. Half of it I'd rather forget anyway."

Killian leaned forward, the lantern light catching the sharp line of his jaw. "This is somethin' you should've mentioned, dwarf. A mermaid showin' up in Storybrooke isn't exactly a Tuesday occurrence." Grumpy huffed, waving a hand as if swatting away the reprimand. "Well, I'm mentionin' it now."

Killian's gaze lingered on him, thoughtful and troubled, the tap of his hook falling silent as the implications settled like a weight between them, "What business would a sea lass have with the Crocodile's love?" Grumpy crossed his arms, his scowl deepening. "Like I said, I didn't get details. She was gone before I could figure it out. Just thought you should know mermaids are pokin' around our town too."

Henry nodded, his pencil flying across the page, sketching a mermaid's tail with jagged fins. "Good and bad mermaids! Ursula, and one in Storybrooke! What about the Fountain? Neverland's got that eternal youth thing. I was only there briefly, but you guys spent time a lot there, right?"

Fountain of Youth/Neverland

Killian's grin turned wistful, his hook tapping the table again, stirring a faint echo off the bookshelves. "Aye, lad, Neverland's a place where time stalls, youth clingin' like mist. I spent more years than I can remember there, chasin' vengeance, my heart heavy as lead, the island's magic keepin' me young but trappin' my soul in its endless twilight. Smee was there too, ageless but weary," Killian glanced at Smee, "weren't you, mate?" Smee nodded. Killian kissed Desylva's knuckles, his voice low. "The fountain in the movie? A pale trinket compared to Neverland's dark enchantment. Youth at a cost, bindin' you to a place where time mocks you." He glanced at Desylva, his voice softening, a spark of love in his blue eyes. "But my lass's storm woke me from that cage, and I'd take her thunder and the Roger's deck over any fountain's lie. Jack, Tom, Billy, they felt it too, their spirits bound to the Roger despite Neverland's pull."

Desylva laughed, a sound like distant thunder, her mark sparking faintly, stirring a breeze that fluttered the edges of Henry's notebook. "I tasted Neverland's magic, Henry, but only briefly… sailin' its starlit waters, feelin' its eerie youth cling like mist. It was strange, keepin' me ageless, but heavy, like a storm that won't break. Worse was when Rumpelstiltskin held me captive for forty-four years, his cell laced with Neverland's magic, haltin' my aging like a frozen gale. Then the Dark Curse hit, and that stopped time too. No wrinkles, but no freedom either." Her gray eyes flashed, meeting Killian's, a fierce warmth in her gaze. "I'd rather age with my pirate, fightin' our battles, than chase a fountain's empty promise. Neverland's wilder, darker than anything in the movie. The Fountain? A pretty lie. Our seas hold darker magic, our battles have more soul, and my storms would've drowned their tricks." She leaned closer, kissing his cheek, her lips warm, whispering, "You'd have sailed us through, pirate."

Smee raised his mug, his grin wide but tinged with nostalgia. “Aye, lad, all that time in Neverland with the Cap’n, stayin’ young but feelin’ the weight of it, like a ship stuck in doldrums. It was eerie. Jack and Billy would spin tales over grog, but it was the Cap’n that kept us grounded then. That fountain? Bah, a shiny trick! We’d gladly take the Roger’s deck and Miss Desylva’s storms any day.”

Henry scribbled, his eyes wide. “Wow, that’s intense!” Grumpy grunted, kicking a chair leg. “Too much huntin’ for fountains. I’d rather smash a barrel and fight than chase eternal youth.”

Barbossa

Henry’s pencil paused, his eyes flicking up, his voice eager. “Okay, what about Barbossa? He was a villain in the first movie, then kinda helped in the next two, and now he’s all proper as a privateer. Did you like him better as a pirate or a privateer?”

Killian leaned back, his boots shifting on the stool, his hook glinting as he gestured, the lantern light casting a sharp shadow across his roguish features. “Barbossa’s a crafty one, lad. A proper villain when we first meet him. Cunning, ruthless, leadin’ that cursed crew with a sneer, his greed for gold near matchin’ our own gold-skinned foe. *Dead Man’s Chest* and *At World’s End* showed his grit, schemin’ with Sparrow, fightin’ Davy Jones in that maelstrom. He’s got a pirate’s heart, even if it’s a slippery one. But now as a privateer, all dolled up in a wig, servin’ the king? Lost his edge, tradin’ a ship’s freedom for a fancy coat. I’d take the Barbossa who sailed the Pearl, his blade sharp and his will sharper, over that polished turncoat.” He smirked, his eyes flicking to Desylva. “What say you, love? Did his privateer strut fool you?”

Desylva’s smirk was sharp, her fingers drumming on the table, a faint spark crackling in the air, her mark pulsing. “Barbossa’s best when he’s a pirate. Schemin’ in *Black Pearl,* stealin’ the show with that cursed crew, or holdin’ his own in *World’s End*’s chaos. His privateer act in this movie felt hollow, like a storm with no bite. He’s got cunning, I’ll give him that. But he’s no match for our Jolly Roger’s fire. He’d have crumbled under the tempests we’ve faced.” Her voice carried a fierce warmth, her hand brushing Killian’s, their fingers entwining.

Smee nodded, his mug raised high, grog sloshing over the rim, dripping onto the table. “Aye, Cap’n! Barbossa started out as a proper rogue, stealin’ the ship, cursin’ the crew. Gave me chills! He was sly in *Dead Man’s Chest*, helpin’ just enough to save his skin, and in *At World’s End,* he fought like a true pirate in that maelstrom. But now? All fancy, no spine! You’d have gutted him in a heartbeat, Cap’n, no parley nonsense!”

Grumpy grunted, kicking the table leg, the wood creaking under his boot, his scowl deepening. “Barbossa? Slimy. Only in it for himself in the first three movies. And now a privateer? Just a sellout in a wig. I’d rather swing an axe at him than watch him prance for the king. He’s no dwarf, that’s for sure. Too much schemin’, not enough honor.”

Blackbeard

Henry scribbled again, his eyes wide. “And Blackbeard? He was so intense with that sword and his zombie crew! But I heard his name in the other movies too, like he was a legend. Was he really that scary, or was he all show like Barbossa’s privateer act?”

Killian’s grin turned sly, his hook glinting as he leaned forward, the lantern light casting sharp shadows across his chiseled features, his voice low with a pirate’s edge. “Blackbeard’s name carried weight in the first three movies… whispers of a pirate so fierce, sailors quaked, said to wield dark magic and command the seas themselves. A terror no one dared cross. In this movie, he steps into the light. Wieldin’ that cursed sword to bind ships in ropes, turnin’ men to ash with a flick, his zombie crew shufflin’ like death itself. I had a few run-ins with the real Blackbeard, back in the Enchanted Forest’s waters. Cunning as a shark, his blade quick and his crew loyal, but always chasin’ his own legend. A rival, aye, mockin’ my ways, but no match for my hook or your lightning, love” He stole a deep kiss, her smile fierce against his lips, the air crackling with her magic. “He’s got menace, that one, with a cruel streak to match our own trickster.” He paused, his eyes narrowing, a smirk tugging his lips. “But tough? I’ve faced darker souls, and I’d have sent Blackbeard’s ship to the depths before he could draw that blade. He’s fierce, but more flash than heart. Unlike our Roger’s crew, with Jack, Tom, Billy fightin’ beside us.”

Desylva’s eyes flashed, a spark crackling in the air, her mark glowing brighter as a gust swirled the room, fluttering the charts and sending a stray popcorn kernel skittering across the table. “Blackbeard’s legend loomed in *Black*

Pearl and beyond, a devil who'd burn the seas for power, a name to fear. In this movie, he's all theatrics. Wieldin' that sword to share ships, sacrificin' men for the fountain, his zombie crew a grim jest. He's got a tyrant's cruelty, like some sorcerers we've faced, but he lacks menace and soul. His magic's showy, not deep, not like the tempests I've called or the foes we've outwitted. I'd have struck him down with lightning before he could swing that blade." Her voice was fierce, her hand tightening on Killian's, a smile curling her lips like a breaking wave.

Smee scratched his chin, his mug tilting dangerously, grog threatening to spill again. "Aye, Blackbeard's name chilled us in the previous films. Tales of a pirate who'd sell his soul for power! In this movie, he's fearsome, sure, with that sword lashin' ropes like snakes, burnin' men to cinders, and them zombie sailors glarin' like ghosts. But he ain't no Cap'n Hook! Too much magic, not enough grit. You'd have outsteered and outsmarted him, Cap'n, run him through and taken the ship without all the fuss, and Miss Desylva's thunder'd scatter his crew like leaves. Jack and Billy would have laughed at his tricks, spinnin' yarns over grog 'bout our real fights."

Grumpy crossed his arms, his scowl deepening, the lantern light glinting off his beard. "Blackbeard? All talk in the first three films, just a name to scare sailors. In this movie, he's all show with that fancy sword and creepy crew, burnin' folks and chasin' fountains, but he's no match for real grit. Reminds me of Enchanted Forest warlords… big boasts, weak hearts. I'd take an axe to his ship and be done with it. He's no dwarf, that's for sure."

Trident

Henry's eyes flicked up again, his pencil poised. "Okay, and the Trident of Poseidon? They talked about it controlling the seas. Have you seen anything like that, like a weapon that powerful?"

Killian's grin sharpened, his hook glinting as he leaned closer, the lantern light catching the mischief in his eyes. "The Trident, lad? A fancy bauble in the movie, promisin' to tame the seas. We've seen artifacts with power… blades and charms that hum with magic, like the curses we've broken. I faced Poseidon again, huntin' a shard of his trident, its teal glow promisin' dominion over the tides. … He rose from the depths, all rage and seaweed beard, wavin' that shard like a god's wrath, summonin' a coral beast to crush us. But with Des's storms and my blade, we took it, leavin' him vowin' vengeance. … That shard's power was real, heavier than the film's toy, but our Roger, with her runes and my lass's lightning, answers to no trinket. … I've sailed seas that'd laugh at such a toy, fightin' beasts no Trident could tame." His voice carried a pirate's pride, his hand tightening on Desylva's, their fingers laced like anchor chains.

Desylva's eyes sparked, a crackle of energy stirring the air, her mark glowing brighter, sending a faint breeze through the room, fluttering Henry's notebook. "The Trident's a myth in their world, Henry. That shard we took? Its oceanic pulse could bend waves, but it came at a cost. Poseidon's fury, his leviathan risin' from the abyss. I called gales that'd shred their sails, bent waves to my will with my own magic, stronger than that film's toy. Rumpelstiltskin's enchantments, even Neverland's power, felt heavier than the movie's Trident. Our battles had more heart. No artifact could match the storm in our souls." Her voice softened, her fingers weaving tighter with Killian's, a smile curling her lips.

Smee scratched his chin, his mug tilting, grog dripping onto his coat. "Aye, that Trident sounded grand, but it's nothin' compared to the Cap'n's steerin' or Miss Desylva's lightning! We've faced dark magic. Beasties and spells that'd make that Trident look like a fishin' pole. … That shard we hunted? Blimey, Poseidon came at us with it, roarin' like the sea itself, callin' up a monster of coral and foam! We nabbed it, thanks to Cap'n's sword and Miss Desylva's storms, but he swore he'd hunt us. Jack, Tom, Billy, they'd have laughed at the movie Trident, spinnin' tales over grog 'bout our real fights," his grin wide with pride.

Grumpy crossed his arms, his scowl deepening as he grunted, his boot scuffing the floor, the wood creaking. "Trident? Just a prop. Sounds like a shiny trick to me. That shard you fought for? Maybe it's got power, but I'd take an axe over it any day. … Poseidon may be a sea god, but sounds like Regina with a bad temper. … Just another movie gimmick puffed up bigger."

Desylva laughed, leaning into Killian, her hair catching the lantern's glow, the room's air humming with her magic. "Blackbeard, Barbossa, that fountain, the Trident, even Poseidon's shard… all pale next to our seas. I'd have called a proper gale, made those waves roar, sent Blackbeard's ship to the depths. Their magic had too much flash and not enough weight. Our battles had more heart and soul than any film could hold."

Killian nodded, pulling her closer, kissing her temple, her hair warm against his lips, the scent of rain and leather filling his senses. “Aye, love, our seas are wilder, our fights fiercer. The movie had Sparrow’s quips and swordplay, but it lacked a true crew’s heart and soul. … Our lot were family. We fought gods and beasts, with your storms, love, lightin’ the way.” He kissed Desylva’s lips, lingering, her mark sparking as she melted into him. “No fountain, no Trident, no Blackbeard or sea god, could capture what we’ve sailed through. Our seas laugh at their toys, our love stronger than any film’s magic. " He kissed her temple again. “A storm-lass and her pirate, sailin’ through any hell.”

Wrap Up

Henry closed his notebook with a triumphant snap, his pencil tucked behind his ear, his grin wide as the harbor. “You guys are way cooler than the movies! Sparrow’s fun, but you’ve got real mermaids… Ursula’s tricks, that one Grumpy met here in Storybrooke, and the ones guiding you through reefs. Real storms, real curses, and a love that breaks them! I’m adding it all to my book, ‘Killian, Desylva, and crew, the ultimate pirates’, with Smee and even Grumpy’s mermaid tale. Oh, and that trident shard you fought Poseidon for? Epic!” He leaned forward, his eyes sparkling with boundless curiosity, his voice bubbling with excitement. “Think they’ll make a fifth one? What would you want in it? More Jack Sparrow? Bigger battles? Maybe a storm like Desylva’s or a mermaid like Ursula?”

Killian leaned back, his hook glinting, his grin roguish as he draped an arm around Desylva, pulling her close, his lips brushing her hair. “A fifth film, lad? Aye, I’d wager they’ll spin another yarn. Sparrow’s too slippery and crafty to stay docked. I’d want a battle to shake the seas. Ships clashin’ under a sky as black as pitch in a tempest’s roar, cannons echoin’ your lightning, love.” He kissed her cheek, his voice warm with mischief and adoration. “No flimsy trinkets.” He stole another kiss, her lips soft, his hand cupping her face. “Give me a villain with real menace, like Poseidon, ragin’ as he did when we stole his shard, or our old Crocodile. A crew with a heart like ours, and a mermaid with a song like Ursula’s, but one who doesn’t lose it to a pirate’s folly. Sparrow could use our Roger’s grit, and I’d show him how to outwit a real Blackbeard, not that showy pretender” His voice carried a hint of regret for Ursula, tempered by pride in their victories.

Desylva smirked, her dark hair spilling over her shoulders, catching the lantern’s glow like a storm cloud lit by lightning. She leaned into Killian, her gray eyes flashing, her cursed mark sparking faintly, sending a soft gust through the room that fluttered Henry’s notebook. “A fifth film? They’d need a storm to rival mine, Henry, waves crashin’, swallowing ships, skies splittin’, not their tame squalls. A villain with soul, not Blackbeard’s flash or Barbossa’s schemes. Maybe a sea beast, with a crew that loves like we do, breakin’ curses with fire and steel. Or a mermaid, singin’ hope.”

She leaned into Killian, kissing his jaw, her voice teasing. “And a captain as charmin’ as you, pirate.” Her fingers traced his chest, their eyes locked, a spark dancing between them. “What do you say, Henry? What’s your next movie look like?”

Henry grinned, scribbling a quick note, his pencil scratching eagerly. “A huge battle! Sparrow and a new crew fighting a giant sea monster, maybe a beast like you fought with Poseidon! A real curse, one that needs true love to break, like you guys. And a mermaid. Maybe like that one who came to Storybrooke, helping instead of drowning people, or one with a voice like Ursula’s but not stolen. And Jack the Monkey, stealing stuff and causing chaos! And maybe a storm like yours, Desylva, with lightning and wind that feels alive!” He paused, looking at Smee and Grumpy. “What about you guys?”

Smee raised his grog mug, nearly sloshing it over the table, his grin wide and earnest. “More of that monkey, Jack, swingin’ through rigging, pinchin’ gold! I’d want a proper pirate tale. Ships racin’ through a tempest, cannons blazin’, no fancy privateers like Barbossa. A villain like Poseidon, roarin’ with his trident, one the Cap’n could outwit with a flick of his hook. And a mermaid, like those reef singers, not like Ursula losin’ her voice to our mistake.” His voice softened, tinged with guilt for Ursula, his eyes glinting with memories of lost mates. “And a crew like ours was back in the day. Laughin’ over grog and good rum, fightin’ as one.”

Grumpy snorted, kicking a chair leg, the wood creaking under his boot, his beard twitching with irritation. “Another movie? Bah, only if they cut the sappy stuff. I want a fight, no parley nonsense. Axes, not swords, and none of Blackbeard’s flashy magic or that Trident nonsense. Sparrow’s alright, but too mouthy. Give me a villain with grit, not some wig-wearing privateer/schemer like Barbossa, or a show-off like Blackbeard. That mermaid I saw here? She’d fit, helpin’ out, not singin’ folks to death. And that monkey? A pest, but I’d rather see him than more of Pintel’s

mug." He smirked, grudgingly amused, his scowl softening as he glanced at Henry. "You're writin' this down, kid? Better not make me sound like Pintel."

Henry laughed, scribbling. "You're grumpier than Pintel, Grumpy! I'm addin' it all. Axes, grog, hooks, storms, mermaids, shards. Another movie night soon?" The group nodded, their laughter warm, as Killian and Desylva shared a lingering kiss, her mark sparking, the air humming with her magic. Smee raised his mug higher, grog sloshing onto his coat. "I'm in, lad! But next time, more grog and a tale with real pirate heart!" His chuckle echoed, warm and bumbling.

Killian stood, offering Desylva his hand, his coat swishing as he pulled her up. "Time to douse the lanterns, lad." He and Smee moved to the lanterns, their flames flickering out, plunging the room into moonlight. Desylva rose, her hand in his, her smile fierce. "To the seas, then," she murmured, kissing him softly, their fingers entwined.

The group gathered their things, chairs creaking as they stood, and filed out of the back room, the library's hush settling behind them, their stories echoing in the air.

Outside Library

The group stepped from the library's warmth into the crisp night, the moon high above, casting silver light across the cobblestone streets, the air sharp with the tang of salt from the nearby harbor.

The town slept quietly, its shop windows dark, the distant lap of waves a soft lullaby. The library's oak doors thudded shut behind them, their footsteps echoing in the stillness, the night wrapping them in a cool embrace, stars glinting like scattered coins above.

Grumpy Smee and Henry

Grumpy adjusted his jacket, his breath puffing in the chilly air, his beard bristling as he clapped Henry's shoulder. "Pintel wishes he had my charm, kid, bad teeth and all. Let's get you to Regina's before she hexes us for keepin' you out late." His grumble carried a rare warmth, his boots scuffing the cobblestones as he led the way.

Smee trotted beside Henry, his mug still clutched, grog sloshing as he chattered. "Aye, lad, next movie night, I'm bringin' more grog! Them film pirates got nothin' on our tales! Reckon we'll tell Regina 'bout that maelstrom, eh?" His laughter bounced off the quiet streets, his eyes twinkling with tales of battles past, his steps lively despite the late hour.

Henry grinned, his notebook tucked under his arm, his voice bright. "You guys are the best! I'm gonna add every story. Skeletons, storms, even your axe, Grumpy! Maybe mom'll like the monkey part." His laughter rang out, clear and joyous, as the trio wound through the sleepy lanes, the mansion's lights glowing faintly ahead, a beacon in the night.

Killian and Desylva

Killian and Desylva strolled toward the harbor, his arm draped around her shoulders, pulling her close, her dark hair catching the moonlight as she leaned into him, her cursed mark sparking faintly, a soft gust swirling around them. The Jolly Roger's silhouette loomed at the dock, waiting like a shadowed queen, her enchanted hull gleaming, runes pulsing teal like a heartbeat under the stars. Their steps were unhurried, their banter a warm current in the cool night, the sea's whisper calling them home.

"Fancy a sail, love?" Killian murmured, his voice a playful growl, his blue eyes glinting as he tightened his arm around her, his hook resting at her waist. "The Roger's waitin', and I'd wager your storms could light the seas." He kissed her temple, his lips lingering, the scent of rain and leather in her hair stirring his heart.

Desylva's smile was fierce, her storm-gray eyes meeting his, her hand tracing his chest. "Holdin' you to that, pirate. Let's take her out under a wild moon, my lightning chasin' your helm." She tilted her head, kissing him deeply, her lips fierce and warm, a spark crackling as their breaths mingled, the air humming with her magic. "No film could hold us, Killian. Our love's the wildest storm."

Their laughter floated on the breeze, their silhouettes fading toward the harbor, the Jolly Roger's masts swaying gently, her runes glowing brighter as they neared. The stars gleamed above baring witness to their tale, the sea whispering their names, their love a fire to outshine any screen, written in thunder and tides.

Day 38

Regina's Mansion

In the quiet of Regina's grand mansion, Henry sat cross-legged on his bed, the setting sun filtering through gauzy curtains, casting golden streaks across his cluttered bedroom. The air smelled faintly of polished wood and the lingering tang of Regina's enchanted apple cider, a pitcher of which sat untouched on his nightstand. His storybook lay open before him, its pages alive with fresh ink as he scribbled notes about the *Pirates of the Caribbean* marathon from two days prior, his pen racing to capture Killian and Desylva's tales of real storms and curses. The room hummed with the soft creak of floorboards and the distant chime of a grandfather clock echoing through the mansion's halls.

A sharp buzz broke his focus. A text from Smee lighting up his phone, "*Lad, come to the Jolly Roger! Cap'n's got somethin' grand planned*!" Henry's face split into a grin, his heart leaping with the thrill of adventure. He texted back, *"On my way!"* and scrambled to his feet, shoving his notebook, a pencil, and a battered flashlight into his backpack. His sneakers thudded against the hardwood as he bolted out of his room, the door swinging wide in his wake.

He barreled down the sweeping staircase, nearly colliding with Regina, who stood at the bottom, arms crossed, her sleek black blazer and arched brow exuding her usual regal authority. "Henry!" Regina's voice was sharp but laced with concern, her dark eyes narrowing as she steadied herself. "Where are you racing off to in such a hurry?" Henry skidded to a halt, his backpack bouncing against his shoulder. "The Jolly Roger!" he yelled, already halfway to the front door, his voice echoing with excitement. "Killian and Desylva need me for something!"

The heavy oak door swung open, and he darted out into the crisp evening, leaving Regina standing in the foyer, her eyebrow raised higher, a mix of exasperation and faint amusement flickering across her face. The door slammed shut behind him, and the mansion fell silent, save for the ticking clock and Regina's soft sigh as she shook her head, muttering, "Pirates."

Granny's Diner

The air buzzed with the clatter of plates and the rich aroma of fresh coffee, burgers sizzling on the grill, and the faint sweetness of pie cooling on the counter. Ruby sat at a corner table, her red-streaked hair catching the neon glow of the diner's sign through the window, her leather boots propped on an empty chair. She sipped a milkshake, her wolfish grin softening as she scrolled through her phone, the chatter of patrons a lively hum around her. The diner's warmth wrapped her like a familiar blanket, its checkered floor scuffed from years of comings and goings.

Her phone pinged with a text from Desylva, "*Ruby, come to the Roger. Got a surprise for you."* Ruby's grin widened, her eyes glinting with curiosity. She typed back, *"On my way, storm-lass!"* and swung her legs down, her boots hitting the floor with a purposeful thud. She strode to the counter where Granny stood, wiping her hands on her apron, her sharp eyes tracking Ruby's movement.

"Off somewhere, Ruby?" Granny asked, her voice gruff but warm, a tray of steaming pies balanced in her hands. Ruby flashed a wolfish smile, tossing her hair back. "Jolly Roger. Desylva's got something up her sleeve. I'll be back later, Granny!" She didn't wait for a reply, her leather jacket swishing as she pushed through the diner's glass door, the bell jingling behind her.

The evening breeze greeted her, carrying the faint salt of the harbor, and her steps quickened, her heart racing with the promise of adventure.

Jolly Roger

The Jolly Roger swayed gently, her enchanted hull gleaming under the fading sun, runes etched along the timbers pulsing faintly with protective magic. The harbor's briny tang mingled with the scent of rope and polished wood, the

sails catching the last rays of daylight. Gulls wheeled overhead, their cries sharp against the rhythmic lap of waves against the pilings.

On the main deck, Smee bustled about, sweat beading on his brow as he fiddled with a makeshift sound system, wires and speakers cobbled together with a touch of Regina's magic, their cables snaking across the planks.

Killian stood on the quarterdeck, resplendent in full pirate attire. His black leather coat billowing in the breeze, his cutlass sheathed at his hip, its hilt glinting. His hook caught the light, a sharp gleam of menace and charm, his dark hair tousled by the harbor wind. Desylva stood beside him, her own pirate garb a vision of fierce elegance, dark leather trousers, a flowing blouse cinched with a corset, her dagger sheathed at her hip, its blade a trusted companion through countless battles. Her dark hair whipped free, a storm cloud against the twilight sky, her gray eyes sparking with anticipation, her cursed mark glowing faintly beneath her sleeve.

Killian tossed her a sword, its blade catching the lantern light with a soft shimmer, its hilt wrapped in worn leather. Desylva caught it deftly, her fingers curling around the grip as she admired its balance, the steel singing faintly under her touch. "Where'd you get this beauty?" she asked, her voice warm with curiosity, a faint gust swirling around her as her magic stirred.

Killian's roguish grin flashed, his blue eyes glinting with mischief. "A spoil from a forgotten raid, love, tucked away in the Roger's hold for a day like this. Forged in the Enchanted Forest, sharp enough to split a storm." He stepped closer, his hook brushing her arm. "You should use it. I know that dagger's your heart's blade, and you wield it like the tempest that you are, but this sword'll suit what we're plannin'."

Desylva twirled the sword, testing its weight, her smile fierce and playful. "My dagger's seen me through krakens and curses, pirate. It's my soul's edge." She paused, meeting his gaze, her gray eyes softening. "But you're right. This blade's got a fire to it. Let's see how it dances." She sheathed the dagger, keeping the sword in hand.

Killian gave her a look and flashed a smile. They unfurled the sails and then settled on the quarterdeck steps, the wood creaking under their weight as they waited, the ship's gentle sway a rhythm beneath them.

Moments later, Henry burst onto the dock, panting, his backpack bouncing, his face flushed with excitement. "I'm here!" he called, as he scrambled up the gangplank staircase, his sneakers thudding against the metal. Ruby followed, her strides confident, her leather jacket catching the breeze as she sauntered aboard, her wolfish grin gleaming.

Killian and Desylva stood, their silhouettes striking against the ship's rigging, the lantern light casting long shadows across the deck. Killian's voice carried a playful edge, his hook gesturing grandly. "You must be wonderin' why we asked you here, aye?"

Ruby tilted her head, her red-streaked hair glinting. "I'm curious, yeah. What's with the full pirate get-up?" Her eyes flicked to their weapons, a spark of intrigue in her gaze.

Henry, catching his breath, noticed their attire. Killian's cutlass, Desylva's sword and dagger. His eyes widened. "Are you planning a duel?" he asked, his voice brimming with excitement, his notebook clutched tight.

Killian's grin widened, and he exchanged a look with Desylva, their shared mischief electric. "Aye, Henry," Desylva said, her voice rich with storm-born fire. "We know how much you loved the sword fights in those films the other night. Thought we'd show you a real pirate's duel, right here on the Roger's deck."

Henry's face lit up, his grin as wide as the harbor. "Awesome!"

Killian strode to the helm, his coat billowing, his hand steady on the wheel. "But first, let's take the Roger out a bit to set the atmosphere." Killian raised the anchor, the chains clanking as they coiled. The Jolly Roger glided smoothly from the dock, her enchanted hull cutting through the harbor's indigo waves, the horizon glowing with the last embers of sunset. A mile out, Killian eased the ship to a stop, letting her drift gently, the anchor left unmoored as the sea sighed around them. He descended the quarterdeck steps, his boots thudding softly, and joined Desylva on the main deck, his eyes locked on hers, a spark of challenge and love in his gaze.

Killian turned to Henry and Ruby, his voice a low rumble, laced with pirate flair, his black coat swirling in the harbor breeze. “You lot better sit back. This’ll be a show to rival any storm.” Henry plopped onto a coil of thick, salt-crusted rope, his notebook open across his knees, pencil clutched eagerly, while Ruby perched on a barrel, her leather jacket catching the lantern’s glow, her grin sharp and eager. Their seats on the port side creaked under the Roger’s gentle roll, the deck’s polished timbers gleaming under swaying lanterns, the sea’s rhythmic lapping a heartbeat beneath them.

Killian faced Desylva, drawing his cutlass with a flourish, the blade flashing like quicksilver in the starlight, its edge honed from battles across realms. “Ready, love?” he asked, his roguish grin blazing, his hook gleaming with a promise of mischief and steel, his blue eyes locked on hers with a spark of challenge.

Desylva’s smile was a storm breaking, her gray eyes blazing like lightning over the sea as she raised her sword, its blade singing faintly in her grip. “Always, love,” she replied, her voice a heady mix of fire and defiance, her cursed mark sparking faintly beneath her sleeve. “Let’s see if your steel can match my tempest, pirate.”

Killian shouted over his shoulder, his coat flaring, “Whenever you’re ready, Mr. Smee!” Smee, stationed by the cobbled-together sound system, gave a nervous nod, his fingers fumbling over the wires before the iconic *Pirates of the Caribbean* extended theme erupted through the speakers, its soaring strings and pounding drums echoing across the water, stirring the night with the pulse of adventure.

The duel ignited with a clash of steel, Killian’s cutlass striking Desylva’s sword in a shower of sparks that danced like fireflies on the deck. They moved like a whirlwind, weaving through the Jolly Roger’s maze of ropes and rails. Killian leapt onto the starboard rail, his boots balancing with a pirate’s grace, his coat billowing as he parried Desylva’s swift thrust, his hook flashing to block a second strike. “Not bad, love,” he teased, his voice a playful growl, “but you’ll need more than that to best Captain Hook!”

Desylva laughed, a sound like rolling thunder, and swung from a rigging rope, her boots skimming the deck as she landed on a crate, her sword arcing in a deadly crescent. “Keep dreamin’, pirate!” she shot back, her blade clanging against his, the impact vibrating through her arms. She darted forward, vaulting over a coil of rope, her hair whipping like a storm cloud as she drove him toward the mainmast. Killian countered, his cutlass a blur, forcing her back with a grin, his hook catching a lantern’s chain to swing himself onto the quarterdeck, his boots thudding against the wood.

Henry whooped, leaping to his feet, his pencil bouncing on his notebook. “Go, Desylva! Get him!” Ruby’s voice cut through, sharp and wild, “Show her what you’ve got, Killian! Swing that hook!” Their cheers fueled the duel, the music swelling as the ship rocked, the lanterns casting wild, flickering shadows across the deck’s runes.

Killian ducked under a boom, his cutlass slashing upward, nearly catching Desylva’s sleeve. She spun, her sword parrying with a screech of steel, and leapt to the ratlines, climbing a few rungs before launching herself back to the deck, her blade grazing Killian’s coat as he dodged with a laugh. “Too slow, love!” he called, lunging to trap her against a barrel, but Desylva twisted free, her foot hooking his ankle, nearly toppling him. Their blades locked, faces inches apart, their breaths mingling in the salty air, eyes blazing with love and rivalry.

As the theme’s final notes thundered, Killian surged forward, his hook pinning Desylva’s wrist to the mainmast, her sword clattering to the deck with a dull thud. His cutlass hovered at her throat, its tip grazing her skin, his chest heaving, his eyes gleaming with triumph and adoration. “Got you, my tempest,” he murmured, his voice low and warm, a roguish spark in his gaze.

Desylva’s smile was undaunted, her gray eyes locked on his, fierce and unyielding. “Not for long, pirate,” she purred, grabbing his collar with her free hand and pulling him into a fierce, hungry kiss, her lips tasting of rain and defiance. Killian’s cutlass fell, forgotten, clanging against the deck as he melted into her, his hand cradling her face, the sea’s rhythm pulsing around their entwined forms.

Henry and Ruby erupted in wild applause, Henry clapping so hard his hands stung, shouting, “That was epic! Like Sparrow versus Barbossa, but better!” Ruby whistled, her wolfish grin blazing, “Hell of a finish, you two! That kiss was hot” Their cheers echoed over the water, the lanterns swaying in time with their excitement.

Killian and Desylva broke apart, breathless, their foreheads touching, their laughter soft and shared. Henry bounced to his feet, eyes wide with awe. “Can you do another one? Please? That was too cool!”

Killian chuckled, retrieving his cutlass, his hook brushing Desylva’s arm, the cool metal sparking against her warmth. “What say you, love? Shall we give the lad another?” His grin was pure pirate, his eyes daring her to match him.

Desylva’s grin was fierce as she picked up her sword. The sword glinting as she raised it, her cursed mark flaring brighter. “Aye, pirate. Let’s make the sea itself jealous.” She nodded to Smee, who scrambled to the speakers, restarting the *Pirates of the Caribbean* extended theme, its notes soaring once more, bold and untamed.

Henry, sensing a shift as the sky darkened overhead, clouds swirling like ink in water, felt a prickle of anticipation, as if the Roger herself was bracing for something grand. “Whoa, something big’s coming,” he muttered, quickly tucking his notebook into his backpack, zipping it tight to shield it from whatever storm Desylva might unleash. He settled back on the rope coil, eyes wide, ready for the spectacle.

Desylva’s storm magic erupted, her cursed mark blazing blue as the heavens churned, heavy clouds rolling in to blot out the stars. Waves crashed against the Roger’s hull, spray misting the deck like a fine veil, the wind howling through the rigging, tugging at Killian’s coat and Desylva’s hair. Thunder rumbled, a deep growl shaking the planks, and a jagged bolt of lightning split the sky, bathing the ship in stark silver light. Rain fell gently, kissing their skin, the droplets catching the lantern glow like scattered diamonds. The duel began with a clash that echoed like a cannon shot, Desylva’s sword meeting Killian’s cutlass in a burst of sparks, the storm amplifying their every move.

“Think you can keep up in my gale, love?” Desylva taunted, her voice cutting through the wind as she swung from a rope, her boots skimming the slick deck, her blade arcing toward Killian’s shoulder. He parried, his hook deflecting her strike with a metallic clang, and vaulted over a barrel, his cutlass slashing in a wide arc. “I’ve danced in worse storms, lass!” he shot back, his grin fierce as he ducked a boom, his boots sliding on the wet planks.

Desylva leapt to the quarterdeck, her sword a blur as she drove him back, lightning flashing to illuminate her silhouette, her hair whipping like a tempest’s banner. Killian countered, climbing the ratlines with agile grace, his hook catching a rope to swing across the deck, landing with a thud and thrusting at her side. She spun, her blade blocking his, the impact sending a shock through her arms, her laugh wild as the wind. “You’ll have to do better, pirate!” she called, vaulting to a crate, her sword slashing downward, narrowly missing his arm. They danced across the ship, blades flashing. The storm amplifying their ferocity. Desylva’s lightning crackling, Killian’s steel unwavering.

Henry and Ruby watched, awestruck, Henry cheered, his voice rising over the storm, “Go, Desylva! Hit him with that lightning!” Ruby, her hair whipping in the gusts, stomped her boots, her shout sharp and wild, “Come on, Killian, show that storm who’s captain!” Their encouragement fueled the duel, the music’s rhythm pulsing with the crashing waves, the deck slick and treacherous underfoot.

Desylva’s magic surged, a gust knocking Killian off balance, his boots skidding as she pressed her advantage, her sword a streak of steel. He recovered, his hook blocking a strike, and lunged, his cutlass grazing her sleeve, tearing the fabric. “Careful, love, I like that blouse,” he teased, dodging her riposte, his coat flaring as he leapt to the rail. Desylva pursued, her blade locking with his, their faces close, rain streaking their skin. “Then don’t ruin it, pirate,” she shot back, her eyes blazing, a smile curling her lips.

As the music crescendoed and faded, Desylva spun, her sword knocking Killian’s cutlass aside with a deft twist. He stumbled, his boots slipping on the wet deck, and fell to one knee, his hook steadying him. Desylva pounced, straddling him, her sword flashing to his throat, the blade’s edge glinting in the fading lightning. Her gray eyes burned into his, her wet hair clinging to her face, a triumphant smile curling her lips. “Yield, pirate,” she purred, her voice a low thunder, her breath warm against his rain-slicked skin.

Killian’s grin was unyielding, his blue eyes sparkling through the rain. “Never, love,” he murmured, his hook resting gently on her hip, conceding her victory, “but you’ve earned this round,” his voice rich with admiration, his hand reaching to brush her cheek, raindrops trailing under his touch.

Henry and Ruby roared with applause, Henry jumping up, his backpack bouncing, shouting, “That was unreal! Better than the first one. Desylva, you’re a storm goddess!” Ruby’s whistle pierced the air, her grin wide, “Killian, you held

your own, but Desylva owned that storm! Best duel ever!" Their cheers echoed over the calming sea, the clouds parting to reveal a star-flecked sky, the rain easing to a soft drizzle.

Desylva rose, offering Killian her hand, and pulled him up, their laughter mingling as the storm faded and the clouds parted.

The Roger's deck glistened under the returning starlight, her enchanted runes glowing faintly, a testament to her enduring magic. The lanterns casting a warm, amber glow over the damp planks, their light dancing on the wet ropes and polished timbers as the group gathered near the mainmast. The air carried the sharp tang of salt and the lingering ozone of Desylva's storm, the sea's gentle lapping a soft counterpoint to the fading hum of the duels' energy.

Henry bounced on his toes, his soaked hoodie clinging to his frame, his backpack slung over one shoulder, the notebook safely tucked inside. His eyes shone with uncontained excitement, his voice bursting. "That was awesome! Way better than the movie fights! The way you used the ship…ropes, mast, quarterdeck… and Desylva, that storm was insane! Lightning, wind, rain. It was like the maelstrom, but real and so much cooler!"

Ruby leaned against the rail, her leather jacket slick with rain, her red-streaked hair plastered to her cheeks, her wolfish grin wide and infectious. "You two are something else. Those duels? Like something out of a legend, all steel and storm. Desylva, those weather effects… thunder cracking, lightning flashing, that gentle rain kissing the deck? Gave me chills. You made the Roger a battlefield and a stage, all in one go."

Desylva sheathed her sword, the blade sliding smoothly into its scabbard, her dark hair dripping wet, curling against her leather-clad shoulders. Her cursed mark glowed faintly beneath her sleeve, a blue ember pulsing with her heartbeat. "Glad you enjoyed the show, Ruby. A storm's only as good as the heart behind it." She glanced at Killian, her gray eyes softening, a smile curling her lips like a breaking wave. "And this pirate makes my heart thunder."

Killian's roguish grin flashed as he sheathed his cutlass, the hilt clinking against his belt. His hook brushed a wet strand of hair from Desylva's face, his touch tender despite the steel. "Aye, love, and your storm sets my soul ablaze. … Sparrow and Turner? They've got nothin' on us." He turned to Henry, winking, his black coat dripping as he leaned casually against a crate. "What say you, lad? Our duels outshine Hollywood's?"

Henry nodded vigorously, unzipping his backpack to pull out his notebook, his pencil scribbling. "Totally! The movies had cool swordplay, but you guys were real. Swinging from ropes, jumping on the mast, Desylva's lightning making the sky roar. It was like the Jolly Roger came alive. I'm writing this down. '*Killian and Desylva, the ultimate pirate duelists.'*"

Smee, wiping down the sound system with a sodden rag, piped up, "Aye, lad, that's the Cap'n and Miss Desylva! No film pirate could match 'em. Reminds me of old days, when they'd spar on deck, their laughter ringin' over the waves."

They talked for a while, the deck alive with laughter and stories under the star-flecked sky. Henry compared Killian's rope-swinging to Sparrow's chaotic escapes, Desylva's lightning to the maelstrom's fury, and their kiss to Will and Elizabeth's romance, "but way less sappy," he insisted.

Ruby teased Killian about dropping his sword for Desylva's kiss, earning a playful glare, while Desylva recounted a past duel where her dagger fended off a sea wraith. Her storm magic sparked faintly as she spoke, stirring a gentle breeze. Smee shared a tale of a drunken sparring match with One-Eyed Jack, Black Tom, and Billy, his voice thick with nostalgia for nights when the Roger was their world, the sea their only master.

Eventually, Killian returned to the helm, his coat dripping as he took the wheel with practiced ease, his hook glinting in the lantern light. "Time to bring our lady home," he said, guiding the Jolly Roger back towards the harbor.

The ship glided smoothly, her enchanted runes glowing faintly along the hull, the waves parting as if in reverence to her magic. She pulled alongside the metal gangplank staircase on the dock. Killian dropped the anchor, its chains rattling into the dark depths below.

Ruby stretched, her boots scuffing the wet deck, her eyes gleaming with wolfish excitement. “That was a blast, you two. We gotta do this again. Maybe take the ship out for a real spin. … Out where the sea’s wild and the stars burn bright.” Henry zipped his backpack, nodding eagerly, his damp hair falling into his eyes. “I’d love that. Can we, please?”

Killian chuckled, his hook resting on the helm, his blue eyes warm. “Aye, lad, we’ll take you out one day, show you how the Roger dances with the sea. You too, Ruby. Bring that wolf’s fire.” Desylva grinned, her hand on Henry’s shoulder, her voice rich with promise. “A proper sail, under a storm’s sky. You’ll see what real pirates do, Henry.”

Ruby and Henry climbed down the staircase, waving as they vanished into the night, their laughter fading into the harbor’s salty breeze. Smee bustled about, packing up the sound system, his off-key humming mingling with the creak of the ship’s rigging.

Killian and Desylva leaned against the rail, the Jolly Roger’s deck quiet now, the stars above mirroring the sea’s gentle ripples, their light catching the sapphire in the driftwood band on Desylva’s finger. Killian’s hand found hers, his fingers entwining tightly, the warmth of his touch grounding her against the cool night air. He kissed her softly, his lips warm with the taste of salt and storm, her scent of rain and leather filling his senses. “You fought like a tempest tonight, love,” he murmured, his hook brushing her waist, cool metal against her warmth. Desylva’s gray eyes sparkled like the sea under moonlight, her smile fierce yet tender. “And you, my pirate, wield steel like a song. She leaned into him, her cursed mark glowing softly, the sea sighing their names in a gentle lullaby as they kissed.

Smee glanced over, his hands pausing on the speaker wires, a wistful smile crossing his face. *Just like the old days*, he thought, memories of One-Eyed Jack, Black Tom, and Billy, dancing on the Roger’s deck under starlit skies, their laughter mingling with Killian and Desylva’s fire. He longed for those nights, when the crew was whole, and the sea was their only master. Shaking his head, he resumed packing, the Jolly Roger’s gentle sway a comfort, her captain and his storm-lass a beacon in the night.

Day 39-40

Day 39

Granny’s Diner

Granny’s Diner hummed with the familiar pulse of the town’s heart, its checkered floor worn smooth by years of footsteps, the air rich with the sizzle of burgers on the grill, the dark aroma of fresh-brewed coffee, and the sweet warmth of apple pie cooling on the counter. Neon signs buzzed softly, casting pink and blue streaks across chrome-edged tables, where patrons laughed over clinking plates. The jukebox crooned a low melody, weaving through the chatter, while a salty breeze from the harbor slipped through the cracked door, blending with the diner’s cozy glow.

Henry sat in a corner booth, his notebook sprawled open, pages bursting with sketches of swords and lightning bolts, his pencil racing as he recounted the previous night’s duels on the Jolly Roger to Snow and David. His eyes sparkled with excitement, his voice rising above the clatter. “You should’ve seen it! Killian and Desylva were unreal. Swinging from ropes, swords clashing, Desylva’s storm magic making lightning crack the sky! It was like *Pirates of the Caribbean,* but alive, the Roger’s deck practically singing under them!”

Snow leaned forward, her dark hair catching the neon’s shimmer, a warm smile softening her face as she sipped her tea, steam curling like a charm in the air. “That sounds like quite a spectacle, Henry. Those two know how to steal the show.” Her eyes glinted with mischief, her hand resting on David’s, their fingers entwined on the table. “But you know, David and I had our own battles in the Enchanted Forest. Bandits, trolls, even a dragon or two. We’re no strangers to a fight.”

David chuckled, his broad shoulders at ease, his eyes flashing with a shepherd’s grit and a prince’s confidence. He sliced into a stack of pancakes, syrup glistening under the diner’s lights, his fork catching the glow. “Snow’s right, kid. She’s deadly with a bow, and I’ve crossed swords with knights and warlords. Those duels on the Roger sound incredible, but I’d bet we could match Killian and Desylva blow for blow.” He winked at Henry, his grin bold, memories of old skirmishes lighting his gaze.

Henry's pencil froze, his eyes widening, a grin breaking across his face like dawn over the sea. "You guys should spar with them, on the Jolly Roger! It'd be a fairy-tale pirate showdown!" His voice rang out, turning heads at nearby tables, his excitement a spark in the diner's hum.

Snow laughed, her tea mug clinking on the table, her brow arching playfully. "A duel on a pirate ship? That's ambitious, Henry. I'm not sure the Roger's ready for us." Her tone was teasing, but a spark of challenge lit her eyes, the bandit-princess within her stirring, her fingers tightening on David's hand.

David leaned back, wiping syrup from his chin, his grin sharpening. "I like the idea, Henry, but let's make it fair. The Jolly Roger's their turf. Open ground, no advantage for pirates." His voice carried a warrior's challenge, his eyes glinting with strategy, his hand squeezing Snow's, their bond a steady anchor. "What do you say, Snow?" his gaze warm but daring, the promise of a fight igniting his spirit.

Before Snow could respond, the diner's bell jingled, and Killian and Desylva swept in, a gust of harbor air trailing them. Killian's black leather coat swished, his hook gleaming like burnished steel under the neon lights, his roguish grin sharp as a cutlass. Desylva moved beside him, her dark hair cascading like a midnight tide, her leather-clad figure radiating fierce grace, her cursed mark pulsing faintly beneath her sleeve, a blue ember in the diner's warmth.

Their presence crackled, like a storm brewing in the cozy space, drawing eyes from every corner.

Henry waved them over, sliding to the booth's edge, his notebook forgotten. "Killian! Desylva! Over here!" His voice cut through the diner's buzz, and the pair sauntered over, Killian's boots clicking on the checkered floor, Desylva's dagger glinting at her hip.

"What's got you so fired up, now?" Killian asked, sliding into the booth beside Henry, his hook resting on the table, catching the neon's glow. Desylva settled next to him, her shoulder brushing his, a sly smirk curving her lips as her fingers grazed his arm, her mark sparking faintly, stirring a breeze that fluttered a nearby napkin.

Henry's words spilled out, his hands waving wildly. "You guys have to duel Snow and David! Last night on the Roger was epic, but picture you two against them! It'd be the ultimate fairy-tale pirate fight. On the Jolly Roger!" David raised a hand, his grin steady but firm. "Hold on. The Roger's your playground, Hook. All those rigging tricks gives you the upper hand. Let's take it to the forest's edge. Neutral ground, just blades and skill." His tone was light but pointed, his eyes locked on Killian's, a challenge simmering.

Killian's hook tapped the table, a sharp clink, his grin unfazed, his blue eyes glinting with mischief. "Location makes no difference, mate. My lass and I are just as deadly on land as we are at sea. The forest's edge? Fine by me. We'll dance circles round you, Charming." He turned to Desylva, his voice dropping to a playful murmur. "What say you, love? Shall we show them our steel's just as sharp on solid ground?" He stole a quick kiss, her lips tasting of salt and defiance, a spark crackling as their noses brushed.

Desylva's laugh was like rolling thunder, her gray eyes flashing as she leaned forward, her mark flaring, a gust ruffling the menus on the table. "I'm game, My storms don't need a ship to bite, and my blade's just as fierce on land. You and Snow better bring your best." She nudged Killian, her lips grazing his ear, her voice a teasing whisper. "Let's make the forest tremble, pirate." Her fingers traced his hook, her smile fierce, the air humming with her magic.

Snow arched an eyebrow, her smile sharp and intrigued, her tea mug paused mid-air. "Neutral ground or not, don't underestimate us, Desylva. We've faced worse than pirates and storms." Her tone was playful, but her eyes burned with a bandit's fire, her hand tightening on David's. Henry clapped, his grin wide as the harbor. "It's on! Snow and David versus Killian and Desylva, tomorrow at the forest's edge! Everyone can watch!" His pencil scribbled the plan, pages crinkling, his excitement sparking like a flint in the diner's glow.

Killian's arm slid around Desylva's waist, pulling her close, his hook resting at her hip, cool against her warmth. "Tomorrow, then, Charming. We'll give the lad a show to rival any tale." He kissed Desylva's temple, her hair soft against his lips, her scent of rain and leather stirring his heart. "Ready to make the trees bow, love?"

Desylva's smile was a storm breaking, her fingers weaving with his, her mark sparking as a breeze swirled the diner, fluttering curtains. "Always, pirate. Let's show them what a real tempest looks like." She kissed his jaw, her lips lingering, a spark dancing in her eyes as their laughter mingled, warm and wild.

David nodded, his grin matching Snow's, their hands entwined. "Bring it, Hook. We'll be ready." The diner's warmth sealed their pact, the promise of a duel crackling in the air like lightning waiting to strike.

Day 40

Edge of the Forest

The forest's edge hummed with anticipation, the towering pines casting long shadows across the grassy clearing, their needles rustling in the crisp afternoon breeze. The harbor's briny scent drifted inland, mingling with the earthy tang of moss and pine sap, the sun high overhead, its golden light glinting off the dew-kissed grass.

A crowd of townsfolk gathered in a loose semicircle. Grumpy muttering beside Smee, Ruby leaning against a tree with a wolfish grin, Regina standing regal with arms crossed, her eyes glinting with curiosity. Henry perched on a fallen log, his notebook open, pencil poised, his face alight with excitement as he sketched the scene, the air buzzing with the crowd's murmurs and the distant crash of waves.

Snow and David stood ready in the clearing's center, their Enchanted Forest grit shining through. Snow wore a leather tunic, her bow slung across her back, a short sword at her hip, her dark hair tied back, her eyes sharp with a bandit's focus. David, in a simple tunic and boots, gripped a broadsword, its blade catching the sunlight, his stance steady, a shepherd's strength tempered by a prince's resolve.

Across from them, Killian and Desylva stood side by side, a vision of pirate prowess. Killian's black coat billowing, his cutlass drawn, his hook gleaming like a crescent moon; Desylva's leather-clad form taut, her sword raised, its blade singing faintly, her cursed mark pulsing blue, a faint breeze swirling around her, stirring the grass at her feet.

Henry cupped his hands, his voice ringing out. "Let the duel begin!" The crowd erupted, cheers splitting the air. Grumpy bellowing for Snow and David, Smee waving his hat for Killian and Desylva, Ruby's whistle piercing the din. The townsfolk's shouts mingled, some chanting "Charming! Snow!" others roaring "Hook! Storm-lass!" the clearing alive with their fervor.

The duel ignited with a clash of steel, Killian's cutlass meeting David's broadsword in a shower of sparks, the sound sharp against the forest's hum. Desylva darted toward Snow, her sword arcing in a deadly crescent, but Snow parried with her own blade, her movements swift and precise, a bandit's grace honed by years of survival. "Not bad, storm-lass!" Snow called, her voice bright with challenge, dodging a thrust and drawing her bow, an arrow nocked in a blink.

Desylva laughed, her gray eyes blazing, her mark flaring as a gust whipped through the clearing, rustling the pines. "You'll need more than arrows, Snow!" She spun, her sword blocking Snow's strike, her boots digging into the earth as she pressed forward, her hair whipping like a storm cloud. A faint rumble of thunder echoed above, her magic stirring the sky, clouds gathering like a promise of rain.

Killian and David circled, their blades clashing in a rhythm like waves on a hull, Killian's hook flashing to block a swing, his grin roguish. "Come now, mate, I thought shepherds had grit!" he teased, lunging with his cutlass, the blade grazing David's sleeve. David countered, his broadsword a blur, forcing Killian back toward a tree. "Keep talking, Hook, I'll have you on your knees!" David shot back, his eyes fierce, his stance unyielding.

The crowd roared, Ruby stomping her boots, shouting, "Go, Snow! Show her that bandit fire!" Smee waved his hat wildly, grog sloshing from a flask he'd snuck along, yelling, "Cap'n! Miss Desylva! Show 'em the Roger's heart!" Henry scribbled furiously, his pencil scratching as he captured every move, his cheers joining the cacophony, "This is awesome!"

Desylva's magic surged, a bolt of lightning cracking above, illuminating the clearing in stark silver light, the air humming with ozone. She vaulted over a log, her sword locking with Snow's, their faces inches apart, breaths heaving. Snow twisted free, firing an arrow that Desylva deflected with a gust, the projectile spinning into the grass. "Clever, but my storms bite harder!" Desylva taunted, her blade slashing downward, forcing Snow to roll aside.

Killian leapt onto a boulder, his coat flaring, his hook catching David's sword and twisting it aside with a screech of steel. He lunged, his cutlass a streak, but David ducked, sweeping his blade low, nearly tripping Killian. "Not today, pirate!" David grinned, his sword arcing upward, only for Killian to parry with his hook, the metal clanging like a bell. Killian's laugh was wild, his eyes glinting with admiration. "Well played, Charming!"

The duel surged on, blades flashing, the clearing a whirlwind of steel and magic. Desylva's mark flared brighter, a gust knocking Snow off balance, her arrow flying wide. Killian seized the moment, his cutlass disarming David with a deft twist, the broadsword clattering to the ground. Desylva spun, her sword pinning Snow's blade to the earth, her boot resting lightly on the steel, her grin fierce. The crowd fell silent for a heartbeat, then erupted in cheers, Smee's shouts loudest.

Killian offered David a hand, pulling him up with a roguish grin. "Good fight, mate. You've got a warrior's heart." He clapped David's shoulder, his hook glinting in the sunlight.

Desylva stepped back, sheathing her sword, her mark dimming as the clouds parted above, sunlight spilling through. She nodded to Snow, her smile warm but triumphant, "You're a storm in your own right, Snow. Not many can match my lightning." She winked, her hair catching the breeze, a faint spark dancing in her eyes.

David dusted off his tunic, his grin undaunted, his breath steadying. "That was one hell of a duel, you two. But don't get cocky. I want a rematch. We'll be ready next time." His eyes sparkled with determination, his hand finding Snow's, their fingers entwining.

Killian's laugh was rich, his hook gesturing grandly. "Whenever you want, Charming. We're always ready for a scrap." He slid an arm around Desylva's waist, pulling her close, his lips brushing her temple, her scent of rain and leather stirring his senses. "What say you, love? Shall we school them again?"

Desylva's laugh was like thunder, her hand resting on his chest, her lips grazing his jaw. "Anytime, pirate." Their eyes locked, a spark crackling between them, the crowd's cheers fading into the background.

Snow smiled, squeezing David's hand. "We'll take you up on that. For now, let's head back to town. Granny's got hot cider waiting."

The townsfolk began to disperse, their chatter lively, Grumpy muttering about needing an axe next time, Smee already recounting the duel to anyone who'd listen, Ruby's laughter ringing out as she jogged ahead. Henry scrambled to his feet, tucking his notebook away, his grin wide as he joined the group, his voice bubbling with plans for the next duel.

Jolly Roger (Later That Night)

The Jolly Roger swayed gently at her dock, her enchanted hull gleaming under a canopy of stars, the runes etched along her timbers pulsing teal, a soft heartbeat in the night. The harbor's briny tang mingled with the scent of polished wood and damp rope, the sea's gentle lapping a lullaby against the pilings. Lanterns hung from the rigging, their amber glow casting warm pools across the deck, the masts casting long shadows like silent sentinels. The sky above was clear, stars glinting like scattered coins, the moon a silver crescent cradling the night.

At the stern, Killian stood behind Desylva, his arms wrapped around her waist, his hook resting lightly against her hip, cool metal against the warmth of her leather-clad form. She leaned back against him, her dark hair spilling over his shoulder, catching the moonlight like a storm cloud lit by silver. Her cursed mark glowed faintly beneath her sleeve, a blue ember pulsing in time with her breath, the air humming with a soft breeze she couldn't quite contain.

The Roger's gentle sway rocked them, their bodies pressed close, the sea's rhythm a quiet echo of their shared heartbeat.

Killian nuzzled her neck, his lips brushing her skin, warm and tasting faintly of salt, his breath stirring the loose strands of her hair. "You were a vision today, love," he murmured, his voice a low growl, rich with pirate charm. "That lightning of yours set the forest ablaze, and your blade danced like a storm. The Charmings never stood a chance." His hook traced a gentle arc along her side, sparking a faint shiver, his blue eyes glinting with adoration in the lantern light.

Desylva's smile was fierce yet tender, her gray eyes catching the stars as she tilted her head, her cheek brushing his. "You weren't so bad yourself, pirate," she teased, her voice warm with storm-born fire. "The way you disarmed David with that hook? Pure poetry." She turned in his arms, her hands sliding up to rest around his neck, her fingers tangling in his dark hair, the sapphire in her driftwood band glinting. "But it's this heart of yours that keeps my tempests burning." Her lips hovered near his, her breath warm, a faint gust swirling around them, stirring the lantern flames.

Killian's grin softened, his hand cupping her face, his thumb tracing her jaw, the touch grounding her against the sea's sway. "And your storms, love, are the fire in my soul." He leaned in, capturing her lips in a deep, hungry kiss, her taste of rain and defiance flooding his senses, her mark flaring brighter, a soft breeze tugging at his coat. She melted into him, her arms tightening around his neck, their kiss a dance of fire and steel, the Roger's deck humming beneath them as if the ship herself approved.

They broke apart, breathless, their foreheads touching, their laughter soft and shared, the stars above bearing witness. His hook brushed her waist, his blue eyes sparkling like the sea under moonlight. "You, me, and the Roger, together forever."

Desylva's eyes blazed, her smile a breaking wave, her fingers tracing his chest, lingering over his heart. "Aye, pirate, forever." She kissed him again, softer this time, her lips warm and lingering, the air humming with her magic.

The Jolly Roger's runes glowed brighter, as if echoing their love. The sea sighed below, a gentle lullaby, their silhouettes entwined against the starlit night, a tale written in thunder and tides.

Day 45

The Town Square

The twilight air shimmered with a rare, otherworldly magic, as if the veil between realms had thinned, casting the town square in a dreamlike glow. Lanterns floated like fireflies above the cobblestones, their golden light pulsing softly, weaving through a delicate fog that clung to the ground like a gossamer cloak, its tendrils curling around lampposts and shopfronts, softening their edges into a hazy mirage.

The square hummed with anticipation, its air thick with the scent of autumn leaves, spiced cider drifting from Granny's Diner, and the faint crackle of enchantment from fairy-touched ivy that climbed the clock tower, its leaves shimmering with flecks of silver under the crescent moon.

Townsfolk bustled in preparation for the Enchanted Ball, their voices a lively murmur—vendors arranging stalls with velvet-draped tables, offering crystal flutes of sparkling cider and trays of honey-dusted pastries, while children darted through the fog, chasing orbs of light conjured by fairy magic, their laughter echoing like chimes. The cobblestones, worn smooth by years of footsteps, gleamed under the lanterns' glow, reflecting flickers of gold and violet, as if the square itself were alive, pulsing with the promise of the night's celebration. A rare moment of unity in a town scarred by curses and battles, its heart beating in rhythm with the magic woven into its stones.

Montage

The preparations for the Enchanted Ball unfolded across Storybrooke, each corner of the town alive with the rustle of finery and the hum of anticipation, as its heroes readied themselves for a night of rare revelry.

Jolly Roger – Below Deck

Killian adjusted his black velvet coat in a mirror that hung on the cabin's enchanted oak wall, its runes pulsing faintly to mend a splinter from a recent storm. His hook gleamed, polished to a mirror sheen, catching the lantern's amber glow as he smoothed his dark hair, a roguish grin tugging at his lips. Smee bustled nearby, wrestling with a navy suit that strained at his stout frame, as he fumbled with a tie. "Cap'n, this knot's trickier than tyin' a bowline in a gale!" Smee grumbled, his ruddy face flushed as he yanked at the fabric.

Killian chuckled, stepping over to adjust the tie, his voice warm with camaraderie. “You’ll outshine the lot of ‘em, Smee. Give those landlubbers a taste of pirate charm.” Smee beamed, “Aye, but it’s you and Miss Desylva who’ll steal the night, mark my words!” he said, clapping Killian’s shoulder, the ship’s timbers creaking as if in agreement, a faint gust from Desylva’s lingering magic stirring the air.

Charming Loft

Emma stood before a full-length mirror, her silver gown shimmering like moonlight on water, its fabric catching the soft glow of fairy lights strung across the ceiling. She twisted her hair into loose waves, her eyes sparkling with a mix of excitement and nerves. “Think I can pull off ‘*princess’* for one night?” she asked David, her voice teasing as she adjusted a hairpin. David, in a dark suit tailored to his prince’s frame, his sword hilt glinting at his hip, grinned as he buttoned his cufflinks, their silver etched with shepherd’s knots. “You’re already a hero, Emma, princess is just the icing,” he said, his eyes warm as he offered her a crystal flute of cider from a nearby tray. “To tonight. Family and magic,” he toasted, clinking her glass, their laughter filling the loft with a warmth that rivaled the ball’s promise.

Regina’s Mansion

Regina’s mansion gleamed with polished elegance, its marble floors reflecting candlelight as she stood before a gilded mirror, her black gown sleek and commanding, its sequins glinting like obsidian shards under the chandelier’s glow. She adjusted her regal updo, her dark hair woven with silver threads, her eyes sharp but softened by pride as Henry bounded in, his navy suit slightly rumpled, storybook tucked under his arm. “Mom, you look like you’re ready to rule the ball!” he said, his voice bright with awe as he sketched her gown’s hem in his book. Regina’s lips curved, her tone dry but fond. “And you, Henry, look like you’ve been wrestling ogres instead of dressing up.” She smoothed his collar, her touch gentle despite her smirk. “Let’s make this night one for your book, not just your sketches.” Henry grinned, flipping a page. “Operation Tempest needs a chapter on this, Mom. Epic!” he said, their shared glance a quiet vow of unity.

Pawnshop

In the dim quiet of his back room, Rumpelstiltskin stood before a cracked mirror, his tailored burgundy suit a stark contrast to the cluttered shelves of relics and potions. His fingers traced the Dark One’s dagger, hidden beneath his vest, its weight a reminder of his power and his chains. He sighed, his golden-flecked eyes clouded with doubt, torn between attending the ball for Belle’s sake and avoiding the inevitable tension with Killian and Desylva. “Belle wants this… but that pirate and his storm-witch,” he muttered, his voice a low hiss, his fingers tightening on the dagger’s hilt. “One wrong word, and it’s a war I don’t need right now.” He adjusted his tie, the silk trembling under his grip, then set the dagger in a locked drawer, its runes flaring briefly. “For her, I’ll go. But I’ll keep my distance,” he resolved, his voice firm but weary, the shop’s shadows deepening as he turned away, the weight of his past heavy in the air.

Archie’s Office

Archie’s cozy office glowed with lamplight, the scent of polished wood and old books mingling with the crisp night air through an open window. He adjusted his tweed suit, its tie slightly askew, his red hair neat but his glasses slipping as he knelt to tie a burgundy bow on Pongo’s collar.

“You’re gonna steal the show, boy,” he said, chuckling as Pongo’s tail wagged, thumping against a stack of psychology journals. “Let’s keep the peace tonight, huh? No chasing fairies.” Pongo barked softly, as if in agreement, his eyes bright as Archie grabbed his coat, the warmth of community beckoning beyond the door.

Grumpy’s Apartment

Grumpy’s cramped apartment was a chaos of ale bottles and mining gear, the dwarf muttering as he wrestled into a dark green suit, its shoulders straining against his broad frame. “Fancy nonsense,” he grumbled, glaring at his reflection in a smudged mirror, his beard barely tamed with a comb.

He adjusted a brass pin shaped like a pickaxe, his scowl softening as he glanced at a photo of the dwarves on his table. “Better not hear any ‘prince charming’ cracks tonight,” he muttered, grabbing a flask of ale for courage, his boots scuffing the floor as he headed out, the ball’s promise tugging at his gruff heart.

The Town Hall

Outside

The Enchanted Ball, a rare celebration born of Storybrooke's restless spirit, transformed the town hall into a fairy-tale spectacle, its arched windows spilling silver light that danced across cobblestones draped in a delicate fog, as if the realm itself exhaled magic. Lanterns floated like golden fireflies, their warm glow weaving through ivy and starbloom vines that curled up the stone facade, their petals, pale as moonlight and flecked with gold, pulsing with a soft, magical hum that resonated like a distant harp, casting intricate shadows that swayed with the gentle autumn breeze. The hall's spire pierced the twilight sky, its copper weathervane gleaming under the crescent moon, etched with runes that shimmered faintly, whispering of old enchantments. Townsfolk gathered at the entrance, their breath visible in the crisp air, their finery—velvet cloaks, silk gowns, and brocade vests—catching the lantern light in flashes of emerald, sapphire, and gold. The air carried the scent of roasted chestnuts from a vendor's cart, mingling with the sweet tang of fairy-dusted cider and the earthy musk of the starbloom vines, their roots cracking the cobblestones as if claiming the night. Laughter and murmurs rose like a tide, children chasing glowing orbs that bobbed through the fog, their giggles blending with the faint trill of a flute drifting from inside, the hall's magic a beacon drawing Storybrooke's heart together, a fleeting truce against the shadows of their past.

Upstairs Room

An upstairs room was transformed into a makeshift salon, its walls draped with velvet curtains that muffled the ball's distant hum, fairy lights strung along the ceiling casting a soft, golden glow that flickered like a captured sunset. A cracked mirror leaned precariously on a table, reflecting the room's warmth, its tarnished silver frame etched with faded roses. The vanity overflowed with tools of transformation. A pearl-handled brush, combs tangled with stray hairs, a cracked powder box spilling shimmering dust that caught the light like stardust, a sapphire hairpin glinting like a shard of the sea, and a tarnished silver mirror reflecting the dance of candlelight from a dozen tapers, their flames swaying as if enchanted. A wooden chair, draped with a sapphire silk shawl, stood in the center, its legs scuffed from years of use, the air thick with the scent of lavender oil and rosewater from a steaming teapot on a side table.

Desylva stood in the room's heart. Her dark hair spilled in wild, wind-tangled waves over her shoulders, its strands catching the candlelight like a midnight tide. Her leather jacket scuffed from countless battles, its sleeves creased with the memory of realms. Her boots, crusted with Storybrooke's dust and the salt of distant shores, scuffed the wooden floor, their soles gritty from dockside wanderings. Her cursed mark, a swirling sigil of blue flame beneath her sleeve, pulsed faintly, a restless hum of storm-born magic that stirred a breeze, rustling the curtains and tipping a candle's flame. "This is a terrible idea," she muttered, her voice husky with unease, her fingers brushing the driftwood ring on her left hand, its sapphire glinting like a piece of the ocean. "I'm no good at this… finery," she added, her gray eyes darting to the vanity's clutter, her jaw tight as she crossed her arms, the mark's glow flaring brighter, betraying her discomfort.

Belle, her chestnut curls pinned loosely with a pearl clip, wore a soft blue dress that hugged her slender frame, its hem brushing the floor with a whisper of silk, her eyes sparkling with enthusiasm as she stepped forward, her voice warm and coaxing. "Nonsense, Desylva, you've faced wyverns and wraiths in realms that would break most. You can handle a bit of pampering. Let us spoil you tonight."

Ruby leaned against the wall, her crimson dress clinging to her curves like a flame, its fabric catching the fairy lights in a blaze of red, her red-streaked hair falling in wild waves, her eyes glinting with mischief as she popped her gum with a sharp snap. "Time to shine for that pirate of yours, storm queen," she teased, sauntering closer, her heels clicking on the wood. "Killian won't know what hit him when he sees you. Bet he'll trip over his own hook." Her laughter rang out, bright and infectious, easing the tension in Desylva's shoulders as she tossed a playful wink, her voice dropping conspiratorially. "Come on, you've stormed through the Labyrinth of Echoes. This is just a different kind of battle."

Snow, her dark hair swept into an elegant updo, her cream gown flowing like fallen snow, framed her kind smile with a pixie-cut fringe, her eyes warm with a motherly glow that stirred memories of Lysara's gentle touch in Desylva's heart, tightening her throat. "You and Killian deserve this moment," she said softly, stepping closer, her voice carrying a quiet strength. "You've fought across realms, saved each other from curses and beasts. Let us help you dazzle

him tonight, not just as a warrior, but as you." She rested a hand on Desylva's arm, her touch grounding, the air shimmering faintly with her hope.

Desylva shed her leather jacket, draping it over the armchair, its familiar weight a shield now set aside. Her storm-gray eyes flickered with unease as she shifted in her scuffed boots, her fingers clenching as a faint gust rattled the curtains, tipping another candle flame, het sapphire pendant at her neck, glowing like a piece of the ocean against her skin. The Enchanted Ball loome, and Belle, Ruby, and Snow's persistent encouragement was a tide she couldn't outrun. "I'm not built for this," she said, her voice rough like gravel stirred by wind, her fingers twitching toward the dagger strapped to her thigh, a reflex from years surviving Veyra's cliffs and realms like the Shattered Peaks. "Silk and frills? I'm better with a blade and my own skin." Her mark flared brighter, a gust swirling through the room.

Belle held up a gown of deep indigo silk, its fabric shimmering like the midnight sea under starlight, threaded with silver embroidery mimicking crashing waves, each stitch alive with a faint magical hum that echoed Desylva's storms. "This is perfect for you," Belle said, her voice brimming with excitement, her eyes sparkling as she draped the gown over her arm, tracing the embroidery with a delicate finger. "The color's bold, like your lightning, but elegant. It'll make you shine tonight, like the tempest you are. These waves," she added, her smile widening, "they're practically alive, just like you on the Jolly Roger."

Desylva tugged at her plain cotton shirt, its hem frayed from dockside brawls, her jaw tight as she eyed the gown warily. "I feel strange without leather," she muttered, her gray eyes darting to her discarded jacket, its scuffs a map of battles fought beside Killian. "This isn't me. Dresses don't fit a storm." Her fingers brushed the pendant, its sapphire warm against her skin. "I'd rather face a kraken than this," she added, half-joking, her mark pulsing as a breeze tipped a vial of powder, its shimmer dusting the air.

Ruby flashed a wolfish smile, her eyes glinting as she popped her gum again, the sound sharp in the quiet room. "Thought you'd say that, storm girl, lucky for you, I know your style." She reached into a canvas bag by the side of the armchair, pulling out a blue leather corset, its breast cups tailored to hug the form, the leather extending to the hips, its stitching gleaming like polished steel, a zipper at the front and laces at the back for a snug fit. "This is your armor," Ruby said, twirling the corset, her grin widening as she held it out. "No frills, just fierce. Try it on. Killian's gonna lose his mind when he sees you in this." She tossed Desylva a wink, her laughter easing the knot in Desylva's chest as she leaned closer, her voice teasing. "Bet he'll forget how to swagger for once."

Desylva's eyes lit up, a rare smile breaking through as she ran her fingers over the corset's smooth leather, its cool surface grounding her like the deck of the Jolly Roger. "Now that's more like it," she said, her voice warming, her mark's glow softening as she nodded at Ruby. "You know me too well, wolf." She shed her cotton shirt, letting it fall to the floor with a soft thud, and stepped forward. Belle unzipped the corset, Desylva slipped it on, and Belle zipped it back up, the leather molding to her curves like a second skin. Ruby's deft fingers laced it at the back, pulling the laces tight, the corset accentuating her form, its hip-length design empowering, like armor reborn. "It's perfect," Belle said, stepping back, her chestnut curls bouncing, her blue dress brushing the floor. "Bold, like your storms, and it'll look stunning under the gown."

Ruby smirked, sauntering over with a playful glint in her eyes. "One more thing, storm girl. You can't go half-hearted." She pulled a pair of blue silk panties from the bag, their fabric shimmering like a calm sea. "These are non-negotiable," she said, handing them to Desylva with a teasing grin. Desylva raised an eyebrow, but her lips twitched as she stepped behind Belle, quickly swapping her worn cotton underwear for the silk, the fabric cool and smooth against her skin. "You're relentless," she muttered, but her tone held a grudging amusement, her mark's glow steadying as Ruby chuckled.

Snow held up the indigo silk gown again, its silver embroidery catching the candlelight like waves under moonlight. "The corset and gown together. You'll be unstoppable," she said, her eyes warm as she handed the gown to Belle. They guided Desylva into the silk, the fabric sliding over the corset with a whisper, cool and fluid like the sea's embrace, hugging her frame, the embroidery rippling as if alive. Snow's fingers brushed Desylva's shoulder, her voice soft but firm. "Tonight, let them see the beauty in your power. You're not just a fighter. You're a force, Desylva, and Killian knows it." Her words carried a motherly warmth that stirred Lysara's memory, making Desylva's throat tighten again.

Belle gestured to the vanity, where the pearl-handled brush, shimmering powder, and sapphire hairpin gleamed, the mirror reflecting their eager faces. "Let's tame that hair and make you a vision," she said, her smile bright, nudging

Desylva toward the chair. Ruby stepped behind, gathering Desylva's wild hair, her fingers deft as she brushed out tangles with the pearl-handled brush. "You've faced many monsters. A little silk over leather's nothing," Ruby teased, weaving Desylva's locks into loose waves like a midnight tide, pinning strands with silver crescent-moon clips that glinted like stars. "Tonight's about magic, not monsters. You're gonna own that ball, storm-girl," she added, stepping back, her grin fierce, easing Desylva's tension as she gave her a playful nudge.

Belle knelt to adjust the gown's hem, smoothing the indigo silk over the corset, her fingers careful as she tucked a stray thread. "You're not losing your strength," she said, glancing up, her eyes resolute. "The corset's your armor, the gown's your storm. Tonight, you'll wield both. You'll walk into that ball like a tempest made flesh, and everyone will feel it." She stood, guiding Desylva to the mirror, her blue dress glowing softly in the candlelight. Desylva's breath caught as she saw herself, wildness tamed into elegance, yet untamed at the core. The indigo gown flowed like liquid night, the corset's leather a hidden defiance beneath, her hair a cascade of dark waves, the sapphire pendant a beacon of her sea-bound heart. Her cursed mark glowed faintly above the sleeve, a reminder of her power, softening as she exhaled, a faint gust lifting the gown's hem, the candle steadying. "I look…" she murmured, her voice thick with awe, her fingers brushing the pendant, "like I could command a room, not just a storm."

Ruby tossed the brush onto the vanity with a clatter, her smile triumphant. "That's all you, storm girl, leather and silk, ready to knock 'em dead." Snow stepped forward, her cream gown shimmering, "One more thing," and pulled a pair of flat blue leather shoes from a bag, her eyes twinkling, "no boots at the ball," she said, handing them to Desylva. "These will keep you grounded but elegant." Belle and Ruby knelt, gently removing Desylva's scuffed boots, their salt-crusted leather set aside, as Snow slipped the shoes onto her feet, their soft leather hugging her comfortably. "Perfect," Snow said, her voice warm, her hand squeezing Desylva's gently.

Belle and Snow exchanged a smile, their hands resting on Desylva's shoulders. "You're ready," Belle said, her voice bright with pride. Snow nodded, her eyes soft, "We'll see you downstairs. Make that entrance count." They slipped out, their dresses whispering against the floor, leaving Desylva with Ruby.

Ruby gathered Desylva's clothes, boots, and dagger, and tucked them into a small suitcase, its brass clasp clicking shut with a satisfying snap. "Smee stopped by earlier," Ruby said, zipping the case and setting it by the door. "He'll swing by to grab this and make sure it gets back to the Jolly Roger. Your pirate gear's safe, don't worry." She adjusted the sapphire hairpin in Desylva's hair, her fingers quick and sure, then nodded, guiding her toward the door. "Let's show Storybrooke what a storm can do," she said, her tone firm but warm, her eyes glinting. "Take the staircase, not the elevator. Grand entrance, storm queen." Desylva nodded at Ruby, who winked and slipped out, leaving the suitcase for Smee by the door.

Desylva's lips curved into a small smile, her nerves easing as she took a deep breath, glancing at the mirror one last time. Her reflection a warrior cloaked in elegance, ready to face the night. She exhaled, her mark pulsing softly, and stepped into the hall, the ball's music a distant call below.

Ballroom

The grand ballroom was a spectacle of enchantment, its vaulted ceiling lost in a haze of starlight conjured by fairy magic, chandeliers of crystal and flame hovering without chains, their amber glow dancing across polished oak floors, casting shadows that flickered like waves on a moonlit sea. Tables lined the walls, draped in white linen embroidered with silver runes, laden with silver trays of cinnamon-dusted tarts, their flaky crusts crumbling at a touch, honey-glazed pastries glistening like amber, and ruby-red apples gleaming with a sheen that hinted at Regina's past, their crisp scent mingling with bowls of sugared plums and roasted chestnuts, their warmth cutting through the autumn chill. Crystal flutes held sparkling cider, bubbles catching the light like tiny stars, while carafes of spiced wine added a rich, clove-heavy aroma to the air, blending with the faint tang of rosewater from enchanted bouquets woven into the ivy that draped the walls, its leaves pulsing with a soft green glow. A quartet of harps, flutes, and violins played an enchanted melody from a raised dais, their notes shifting with the dancers' steps, swelling from a gentle waltz to a lively reel, the music weaving through laughter and chatter, a vibrant tapestry alive with celebration. Townsfolk filled the room in a kaleidoscope of finery—emerald gowns sweeping the floor, sapphire suits tailored sharp, gold-trimmed vests catching the light—spinning in pairs or clustering in animated groups, their joy a pulse that matched the ivy's glow. Dwarves in tailored vests, their beards combed smooth, fairies in gossamer dresses that shimmered like dew, and locals in brocade and velvet, their voices a tide of warmth against the night's chill, the air rich with scents of magic and festivity.

Regina stood near a table, her black gown sleek and commanding, its sequins catching the chandelier light like shards of obsidian, her dark hair swept into a regal updo woven with silver threads, her eyes scanning the crowd with a mix of pride and wariness, her lips curling into a faint smile as she spotted Granny. She lifted a cinnamon tart, its scent warm and spicy, and took a delicate bite, her voice smooth but dry. “You’ve outdone yourself with these, Granny. Almost makes up for that sludge you call coffee at the diner.” Granny, in a burgundy dress with a lace shawl, her gray hair pinned with a ruby clip, snorted as she adjusted her glasses, her sharp eyes glinting with amusement. “Keep talking, Your Majesty, my coffee’s kept this town awake longer than your spells ever could,” she retorted, her tone sharp but warm, a grin tugging at her lips as she nudged a tray of pastries toward Regina. “Try the honey-glazed ones. Might sweeten that tongue of yours.” Regina’s smirk deepened, a spark of camaraderie passing between them as she reached for another tart, the hall’s energy softening her usual edge.

Grumpy leaned against a pillar, his dark green suit straining at the shoulders, a cider flute clutched in his hand, his scowl softening as he watched the dancers swirl, “This ball’s too fancy for my taste,” he grumbled to Archie, who stood beside him in a tweed suit, his red hair neat but his tie slightly askew, Pongo weaving through legs with a wagging tail, his burgundy bow gleaming. “Give me a pint at the Rabbit Hole over this nonsense any day,” Grumpy added, his voice rough but his eyes twinkling as a fairy’s gossamer gown caught the light nearby. Archie adjusted his glasses, his smile gentle and knowing. “It’s about community, Grumpy. Look at everyone, together, happy. Even you’re almost smiling,” he teased, his voice calm, his hand scratching Pongo’s ears. Grumpy huffed, sipping his cider, but his scowl cracked into a grudging grin. “Don’t push it, Doc. Takes more than sparkles to win me over,” he muttered, his gaze softening as he spotted Henry sketching at a table, the boy’s focus a quiet anchor in the chaos.

Emma and David mingled near the center, Emma’s silver gown shimmering like moonlight on water, its fabric flowing with each step, her blonde hair loose and glowing under the chandeliers, a sapphire hairpin catching the light. David, in a dark suit that nodded to his prince’s roots, his sword hilt glinting at his hip, stood tall, his posture regal but relaxed, his eyes warm as he surveyed the crowd. “This place looks like it’s straight out of Henry’s book,” Emma said, her eyes bright as she raised a flute of cider to David, its bubbles sparkling. David chuckled, clapping a hand on her shoulder, his cufflinks glinting with shepherd’s knots. He clinked her glass, their smiles a shared promise as they nodded to passing townsfolk, their presence a beacon of hope.

Henry sat at a table, his navy suit slightly rumpled, his storybook open as he sketched the chandeliers with a pencil, its tip flying across the page to capture their crystal flames. “This is gonna be a whole chapter in Operation Tempest,” he said to Smee, who hovered nearby in a navy suit, his ruddy face beaming as he adjusted his tie, its knot still crooked despite Killian’s earlier help. “Aye, lad, this ball’s got magic to rival the Enchanted Forest,” Smee said, his voice cheerful, his eyes darting to the grand staircase. “Wait’ll you see the Cap’n and his lass. They’ll steal the show, mark my words.” Henry grinned, flipping a page. “They’re gonna look epic. Desylva’s storms, Killian’s hook, it’ll be like a fairy tale come alive!” he said, his enthusiasm infectious as Smee chuckled, clapping his shoulder.

Belle and Snow stood at the foot of the grand staircase, its polished oak gleaming under the chandelier’s glow, its banister draped with ivy that pulsed faintly with fairy magic. Belle’s blue dress glowed softly, its hem whispering against the floor, her chestnut curls catching the light. Snow’s cream gown flowed like fresh snow, her updo elegant, her eyes warm with anticipation. Ruby joined them, her crimson gown blazing like a flame, her red-streaked hair a wild cascade, her heels clicking as she scanned the staircase. “She’s gonna knock ‘em dead,” Ruby murmured, her eyes glinting with pride, her voice low to avoid spoiling the moment.

Desylva appeared at the top of the staircase, pausing as her indigo gown caught the chandelier light like a wave cresting under moonlight, its silver embroidery rippling as if alive, the sapphire pendant at her neck glowing like a piece of the sea. Her dark hair cascaded in loose waves, pinned with crescent-moon clips that shimmered like stars, her storm-gray eyes flickering with a mix of nerves and resolve. Belle, Snow, and Ruby gave her reassuring glances, their smiles a silent chorus of encouragement. Desylva’s gaze swept the room below, the crowd blurring into a sea of velvet and twinkling jewels, their murmurs weaving into the quartet’s soaring waltz. Her eyes found Killian at the bar, his black velvet coat tailored sharp, his hook glinting as he chatted with Archie, whose tweed suit was dusted with mist, Pongo curled at his feet, tail thumping softly.

Killian’s blue eyes flickered upward, catching Desylva at the top of the staircase. His breath snagged, a visible hitch as his posture straightened, his mug of spiced rum forgotten on the bar, its amber liquid sloshing faintly as he stared, transfixed. Her hair a dark cascade, her storm-gray eyes a radiant storm, the gown molding to her like the sea itself had woven it. “Bloody hell,” he breathed, his voice a low rasp, barely audible over the music as he crossed the room

in swift strides, his boots thudding softly against the polished floor, the crowd parting like waves before him, their murmurs fading as they sensed his focus.

Desylva descended the staircase, her gown rippling with each step, her leather shoes silent but steady, her cursed mark pulsing faintly, a soft breeze stirring the ivy on the banister. Belle, Snow, and Ruby noticed Killian approaching and slipped into the crowd, their smiles knowing as they left the staircase clear. Killian reached the base, his eyes never leaving her, his velvet coat swaying as he offered his hook, its steel gleaming under the chandeliers. She took it, her fingers warm against the cool metal, descending the last few steps with a grace that belied her unease. “You’re a vision, a tempest wrapped in starlight,” he said, his blue eyes wide with adoration, a rare vulnerability softening his pirate’s edge. “I’m half-tempted to fall to my knees, love.” His hand brushed her cheek, fingers trembling slightly against her rose-gold dusted skin, the warmth of his touch grounding her.

Desylva’s lips curved, a spark of mischief in her storm-gray eyes as she tilted her head. “Careful, Captain, you’re gawking like a sailor lost at sea,” she teased, her voice warm with their shared history, her hand resting on his chest, her driftwood ring glinting against his velvet coat, its sapphire a quiet vow. He laughed, a rich sound like rolling waves, pulling her closer as the waltz swelled, his arm slipping around her waist, the silk of her gown cool under his touch. “I’ve faced sirens, but none steal my soul like you,” he murmured, his lips brushing her temple, his voice thick with emotion. “Dance with me, my compass.” She nodded, her eyes shimmering as he led her to the dance floor, the crowd’s murmurs fading into the music’s embrace.

Their steps synced effortlessly, a pirate and his tempest gliding through the throng, her gown rippling like a tide, his hook a metallic gleam at her back as they spun, their waltz a vow reborn under the hall’s enchanted glow. “You clean up better than I expected, pirate,” Desylva quipped mid-twirl, her smile playful as she leaned into him, her mark pulsing softly. “Aye, and you’re a storm I’d chase across any realm, Shattered Peaks, Crimson Abyss, all of ‘em,” he shot back, his grin wide, their laughter a bright thread in the music as the crowd’s eyes lingered on their radiant harmony.

The dance floor pulsed with life, the quartet shifting to a lively gavotte, its tempo quickening like a racing heartbeat, the hall alive with swirling couples and the clink of crystal goblets. Killian and Desylva danced with a seafarer’s grace, her indigo gown flaring with each turn, his velvet coat swaying as he guided her, their steps a seamless tide, their laughter weaving into the melody like a lighthouse’s call. Regina approached, her black gown shimmering, her smile sly but lacking its usual venom. “Not bad, storm-witch,” she said, her tone softened by the night’s magic. “You might actually belong here tonight.” Desylva met her gaze, her voice steady, a spark of respect in her gray eyes. “You’re not half bad either. Ruling this room like it’s your court.” A rare moment of understanding passed between them, the ball’s enchantment easing old rivalries.

Emma and David danced up, Emma’s silver gown catching the light, her grin teasing but kind. “You two look like you stepped out of Henry’s book,” she said, her eyes warm. “Not bad for a pirate, but she’s outshining you, Hook.” David chuckled, his dark suit sharp, his sword hilt glinting as he nodded to Desylva. “She’s got you beat, mate.”

Killian smirked, his hook tapping her waist gently. “Aye, and I’m glad of it. She’s my queen, always,” he replied, his eyes locked on Desylva, his voice thick with pride. Desylva smirked, her storm-gray eyes flashing. “He’s just keeping up with me,” she shot back, her voice carrying a teasing lilt as Killian twirled her, his grin widening. Emma leaned in, whispering, “You’re both stealing the show. But don’t let Regina hear me say that,” her eyes glinting with a playful challenge.

Snow approached, tapping Emma’s shoulder, her cream gown shimmering as she smiled softly. She looked to Desylva, “You two are making the rest of us look tame,” she said, laughing gently as David took her hand, dipping her with a prince’s grace, her words warm with admiration for their fierce harmony. Emma stepped back, letting David and Snow dance, her silver gown trailing as she joined the crowd, her eyes lingering on Killian and Desylva’s effortless rhythm.

The crowd shifted, and Ruby swept onto the floor, her crimson dress swirling like a flame as she tugged Smee from a corner where he’d been nursing a goblet of spiced wine, his round face flushed, his navy suit rumpled from nerves, his red hat slightly askew. “Come on, Smee, you’re not hiding all night!” Ruby teased, her wolfish grin infectious as she pulled him into the gavotte, his clumsy steps drawing chuckles from Grumpy, who leaned against a pillar, his beer mug foam-flecked, his green suit creased. “I-I’m no dancer, Miss Ruby!” Smee stammered, his boots scuffing the polished floor, his hands fumbling as he tried to match her pace. Ruby laughed, her red-streaked hair flaring as

they spun, her hand guiding his with a firm grip. “You’re a sailor, Smee. Find your sea legs and follow the beat! You’ve faced krakens, this is nothing!” she encouraged, her voice bright, her eyes sparkling with mischief. Desylva caught Smee’s eye, offering a nod, her voice warm as she called over the music, “You’re braver on this floor than facing a wyvern, Smee! Show ‘em what the Jolly Roger’s made of!” Smee’s nervous grin widened, emboldened as he stumbled through the steps, muttering, “Aye, Miss Desylva, but wyverns don’t spin ya dizzy like this!”

The crowd laughed, the hall’s energy wrapping them in shared revelry, the music a pulse binding their spirits, a fleeting escape from the battles of their past.

A Few Hours Later

The ballroom thrummed with life, the chandeliers casting their amber glow over swirling couples, the quartet’s melody a lively reel that echoed the pulse of Storybrooke’s heart. Killian and Desylva sat at a linen-draped table, their plates scattered with crumbs of cinnamon tarts and honey-glazed pastries, crystal flutes of sparkling cider glinting in their hands, the air rich with the scent of spiced wine and roasted chestnuts. Desylva’s indigo gown shimmered, its silver embroidery catching the light like waves under moonlight, her sapphire pendant glowing softly against her skin. Killian’s black velvet coat was unbuttoned, his hook resting lightly on her hand, his blue eyes warm as he watched her laugh, a rare lightness in her storm-gray gaze.

Henry bounded up, his navy suit askew, his storybook tucked under his arm as he grinned, his face flushed with excitement. “You guys look like you sailed right out of my book!” he exclaimed, flipping open the storybook to a sketch of them under a crescent moon. “This is perfect for Operation Tempest!” Desylva’s laugh was a clear note, her gray eyes softening as she ruffled his hair, a faint gust swirling the table’s linens. “You’ll write us into legend yet, kid,” she said, her voice playful yet weighted with promise, her hand brushing Killian’s, the driftwood ring glinting. Killian nodded, his eyes glinting as he leaned closer to Henry. “Keep that book close, lad. It’s got more pages to fill with tales of storms and seas,” he said, winking, drawing a giggle from Henry. Regina approached, her black gown shimmering, her smirk softened by the night’s magic. “Don’t let it go to your head, pirate. Storybrooke’s seen bigger tales,” she said, her voice dry but lacking its usual bite, a spark of respect in her eyes. Archie, nearby with Pongo, adjusted his glasses, his tweed suit dusted with mist from the open windows, his voice calm but warm. “It’s a rare sight, this kind of magic,” he said, nodding at their table, Pongo’s tail thumping in agreement as he nuzzled Desylva’s hand.

Henry began sketching Desylva’s gown, his pencil flying to capture its rippling embroidery. “You’re like an Enchanted Forest queen!” he exclaimed, his enthusiasm bright. “This is epic!” Desylva smiled, her mark pulsing softly as she leaned over to see his work. “Make us sound legendary, Henry. No half-measures,” she said, her voice teasing as she ruffled his hair again. Henry set down his pencil, his eyes bright with a sudden idea. “Will you dance with me, Desylva?” he asked, standing and offering his hand, his suit jacket flapping slightly. Desylva’s smile widened, her gray eyes sparkling. “I’d love to, kid,” she said, rising gracefully, her gown flowing. Killian gave Henry a playful look, his hook tapping the table. “I want her back, lad. Don’t steal my tempest for too long,” he teased, his grin wide as Henry laughed, leading Desylva to the dance floor. Their steps were light, Henry’s enthusiasm making up for his lack of skill, Desylva guiding him with a gentle hand, her laughter ringing as they spun, the crowd smiling at the boy and the storm-witch dancing like family. Killian watched, his blue eyes soft, his hand resting on his cider flute, the sapphire in Desylva’s ring catching the light like a shared vow.

The dance ended, and Henry returned Desylva to the table, his grin wide as he picked up his storybook. “Thanks for the dance. That was awesome! See you guys later,” he said, bounding off to join Regina, his pencil already flying again. Desylva sat, her gown settling around her, and reached for a sugared plum, her fingers brushing Killian’s as they shared a quiet smile. She glanced around the room, her gaze catching on Rumpelstiltskin near a shadowed corner, his burgundy suit sharp but his eyes wary, his presence a stark reminder of their past. Her body tensed, her cursed mark flaring a vivid blue beneath her sleeve, a faint gust rustling the table’s linens, her gray eyes narrowing with a spark of old fire. Killian sensed the shift, his hand tightening on hers as he followed her gaze, spotting Rumpelstiltskin.

“Don’t, Des,” he said softly, his voice steady but urgent, his blue eyes locking on hers. “Look at me, love.” She turned to him, the fire in her eyes meeting his calm resolve. He kissed her hand, his lips warm against her knuckles, the driftwood ring glinting. “This isn’t the time or place. I know it’s hard but ignore him.” He kissed her hand again, his touch grounding her, her mark dimming as she exhaled. “You’re right,” she said, her voice low, glancing at

Rumpelstiltskin one last time before softening. “I won’t ruin this night for Belle. Or us.” Her fingers squeezed his, a quiet vow to hold the peace.

Killian smiled, his eyes bright with relief and love. “Another dance, my tempest?” he asked, rising and offering his hand, his hook gleaming. Desylva’s lips curved, her gray eyes sparkling as she stood, her gown rippling. “Always,” she replied, her voice warm with their shared history. They returned to the dance floor, his hand firm on hers, his hook guiding her waist, her gown swirling like water, his coat a shadow beside her light. “You move like the sea,” he whispered, his breath warm against her ear, “wild and unstoppable.” She smirked, her eyes glinting as they spun. “You’re my anchor, keeping me steady,” she replied, their steps fluid, a storm and sea entwined under the chandeliers’ glow, the music wrapping them in a moment of pure harmony, their bond a beacon amidst the revelry.

A Few Hours Later

The quartet struck a final, resonant chord, the crowd erupting in applause as the gavotte ended, their cheers mingling with the clink of goblets and the laughter of dancers catching their breath. Desylva and Killian stepped back, their hands entwined, her indigo gown catching the chandelier light, his black velvet coat swaying as they shared a quiet smile, the hall’s enchantment a radiant backdrop to their unbreakable bond. The air hummed with the night’s magic, the ivy on the walls pulsing faintly, the chandeliers casting amber waves across the oak floor, the scent of spiced wine and roasted chestnuts lingering like a warm embrace.

Smee, his navy suit rumpled from his dance with Ruby, slipped through the crowd, as he made his way toward the staircase, a determined glint in his eyes. “Gotta grab Miss Desylva’s gear,” he muttered to himself, adjusting his tie as he dodged a fairy’s gossamer wings. He paused by Grumpy, who leaned against a pillar, his beer mug nearly empty, his green suit creased. “Off to play errand boy, Smee?” Grumpy teased, his voice gruff but his eyes twinkling. Smee chuckled, his ruddy face flushing. “Aye, someone’s gotta keep the cap’n’s lass ready for battle. Ball or no ball,” he replied, clapping Grumpy’s shoulder, “But I’ll be back,” he added before heading upstairs.

Upstairs

At the top, he retrieved the suitcase by the door, its brass clasp glinting, “Back to the Roger with you,” he murmured, hefting the case with a sailor’s ease, his boots echoing softly as he descended, the music swelling behind him.

Downstairs

Ruby stood with Snow, their dresses glowing under the chandeliers, their voices soft as they watched the dancers in the crowd. “She’s something else, isn’t she?” Ruby said, her dress shimmering as she nodded toward Desylva, who twirled with Killian on the dance floor. Snow smiled, her cream gown flowing. “Like a storm made human. Killian’s lucky to keep up with her.” Ruby laughed softly, her eyes warm. “They’re a fairy tale come to life, those two.”

Their conversation drifted to the crowd, their admiration for Desylva and Killian’s harmony a quiet thread in the hall’s vibrant tapestry, the music a lingering echo as Smee slipped back into the crowd, the suitcase secure in his grip, and headed for the exit.

A Few Hours Later

The Enchanted Ball pulsed on, the dance floor alive with swirling couples under the golden glow of hovering chandeliers, their crystal facets scattering light like captured stars across a sea of velvet gowns and tailored suits.

Killian and Desylva sat at a linen-draped table near the edge of the dance floor, sharing a quiet, intimate moment. Killian fed Desylva a honey-glazed pastry, his fingers lingering at her lips as she took a slow bite, her storm-gray eyes locked on his with a playful, heated spark. She returned the favor, offering him a sugared plum, her fingers brushing his with deliberate slowness, both of them smiling softly, lost in their own world amid the revelry.

Laughter and music wove together in a vibrant hum, the air rich with the scents of spiced wine, roasted chestnuts, and sweet honey-glazed pastries. Smee had returned from the Jolly Roger, the suitcase safely stowed, and now slipped through the crowd toward the musicians with a determined glint in his eye. He whispered something to the lead violinist, who nodded with a knowing grin. Moments later, the song shifted into the sultry, rhythmic strains of a tango, its passionate notes cutting through the chatter like a spark in dry tinder.

Killian and Desylva exchanged a heated look across the table, the challenge clear in their eyes. Without a word, Killian rose and offered his hook. Desylva took it, her indigo gown shimmering like midnight waves as she stood, the silver embroidery rippling with every movement. The lights dimmed dramatically, a single spotlight flaring to life and bathing them in a warm, intimate glow. The crowd hushed, then parted, clearing the floor as all eyes turned to the pirate and his storm.

They began to dance.

The tango was raw, magnetic, and utterly commanding. The music throbbed with a deep, sensual rhythm—violin strings crying out like a lover's plea, the steady pulse of the bass drum echoing the rapid beat of hearts.

Killian pulled Desylva flush against him, his body a heated wall of muscle and velvet, one leg sliding boldly between hers as he led her into the first sharp, stalking steps, his black velvet coat swaying like a shadow. His hand splayed possessively across the small of her back, fingers pressing into the curve of her spine through the silk, while his hook rested possessively at her hip, the cool metal a thrilling contrast to the heat of his palm. Every movement was deliberate, predatory — a slow, powerful glide followed by a sudden, explosive turn that made her gown flare dramatically, the silver embroidery flashing like lightning across dark waves.

Desylva matched him with fierce grace, her body fluid yet powerful, hips rolling into each step with unapologetic sensuality, the indigo silk of her gown flaring dramatically with each turn, the fabric whispering against his trousers like a secret. She arched back in a deep dip, her dark hair cascading like a midnight waterfall as Killian's strong arm supported her, his face hovering inches above hers, their breaths mingling hot and ragged.

The crowd gasped as he pulled her upright with a sharp snap, her chest pressing flush against his, the heat of their bodies radiating through fabric. Her storm-gray eyes locked on his with smoldering intensity, a spark of challenge and desire burning between them. She spun away only to be yanked back, her leg hooking boldly around his thigh for a heartbeat, the silk of her gown sliding against his trousers with a whisper that promised more.

The air around them crackled — faint static from her cursed mark dancing along her skin, raising goosebumps where his fingers gripped her. Killian's hand slid lower, fingers digging into the curve of her hip with bruising need as he dipped her again, slower this time, his lips brushing the line of her throat. Desylva's breath hitched audibly, her nails digging into his shoulder through the velvet, leaving faint crescents as she arched into him, her body molding to his like a storm meeting the sea. They moved as one — sharp, sensual, almost primal — each step a silent claim, each turn a spark that threatened to ignite the entire hall. The spotlight followed their every motion, casting dramatic shadows that danced across the floor like living things, the music rising to a fever pitch as they circled each other, eyes locked, bodies yearning.

The crowd watched in rapt silence at first, then erupted into murmurs of awe.

Emma, standing near David and Snow, let out a low whistle. "Holy hell… they're on fire," she murmured, her silver gown shimmering. David chuckled softly, his arm around Snow's waist. "That's not dancing. That's a declaration."

Regina, watching from the edge of the floor with a glass of spiced wine, arched a perfectly sculpted brow. "Well, well… the pirate and his tempest…" she said dryly, though a hint of genuine admiration colored her tone. "If they keep that up, they'll set the floorboards ablaze."

Ruby grinned wolfishly from beside Snow, her crimson dress blazing under the lights. "Now *that's* how you tango. Look at her move—pure storm in silk. Killian's barely keeping up, and he's loving every second of it."

Snow smiled warmly, her cream gown flowing as she swayed slightly with the music. "They're beautiful together. Like they were made for this kind of fire."

Granny, standing near a refreshment table with a tart in hand, chuckled. "Those two could start a storm just by looking at each other. Mark my words, that dance is going down in Storybrooke legend."

As the final, passionate notes of the tango faded, Killian pulled Desylva into a deep, searing kiss, his hand cupping her face while his hook rested at the small of her back. The spotlight flared brighter for a heartbeat.

The clock struck midnight, its deep, resonant tolls echoing through the grand hall like a solemn heartbeat, each chime vibrating through the floor and mingling with the dying notes of the music. Then the spotlight softened as the crowd erupted into thunderous applause, cheers, and whistles echoing through the grand hall.

Killian broke the kiss slowly, his forehead resting against hers, both of them breathing hard, eyes locked in a private world amid the noise. “Time to head back to the ship, love?” he murmured, voice rough with promise. Desylva smiled, flushed and radiant. “Lead the way, pirate.”

The crowd continued to applaud as they slipped toward the exit, her indigo gown shimmering with every step, his black velvet coat swaying, their hands entwined, their steps light but purposeful, the night’s magic clinging to them like a second skin.

As they reached the door, Emma raised her cider flute, her silver gown gleaming. “Don’t vanish too soon, you two! Save some of that magic for the rest of us!” she called, her grin teasing but warm. Desylva smirked, glancing back over her shoulder. “No promises, Swan,” she shot back, her voice playful as she leaned into Killian, her sapphire pendant glinting. Killian chuckled, his hook tapping her waist lightly. “Goodnight. Don’t let David outdance you,” he teased, nodding to David, who spun Snow nearby with a laugh. “Keep dreaming, Hook!” David called back, his suit sharp and his smile bright.

Smee and Ruby noticed them leaving. Ruby flashed Desylva a wolfish grin. “Night, storm queen! Don’t let that pirate keep you up too late!” she shouted, her crimson dress flaring as she waved. Desylva laughed, a playful gust swirling the hem of her gown. “No promises, wolf,” she replied, her tone bright and teasing. Smee gave a cheerful salute, nearly tripping over his own feet. “Sleep well, Cap’n, Miss Desylva!” he called, his voice earnest, earning a nod from Killian. Ruby leaned in and softly whispered to him with a wicked grin, “Don’t think they’ll be sleeping anytime soon, Smee.” Smee smiled, cheeks flushing as he whispered back, “Aye, they’ll definitely be whippin’ up a storm.”

Granny raised a tart in mock salute from her table. “Get some rest, you two. Ball’s not over, but you’ve earned it,” she said, her glasses glinting in the light. Desylva’s smile softened, her hand squeezing Killian’s. “Goodnight, Granny. Save us some tarts,” she called, her voice warm as they stepped into the cool night air, the door closing on the hall’s golden glow and leaving the music a faint, lingering hum behind them.

Town Street/Harbor/Docks

The night wrapped around them like a velvet cloak as they walked toward the harbor, the Enchanted Ball’s magic still sparkling in their eyes and the memory of their tango burning like embers between them.

Killian and Desylva stepped onto the quiet streets of Storybrooke, the cool night air sharp with the scent of salt and fallen leaves, the Enchanted Ball’s music fading to a distant hum behind them. The town’s lights twinkled like scattered stars, casting soft shadows across the cobblestones as they walked hand in hand toward the harbor, the glow of the crescent moon guiding their path. Desylva’s indigo gown shimmered under the streetlamps, its silver embroidery catching the light like waves, her sapphire pendant glowing faintly against her skin. Killian’s black velvet coat swayed, his hook glinting as he matched her stride, his blue eyes stealing glances at her, a roguish smile tugging at his lips.

“You’re a bloody vision tonight, love,” he said, his voice low and warm, his hand squeezing hers gently, the driftwood ring glinting between their fingers. “Never thought I’d see the day my tempest would outshine the stars themselves.” His tone carried a playful lilt, but his eyes held a depth of adoration, the memory of their waltz under the chandeliers still vivid.

Desylva’s lips curved, a spark of mischief in her storm-gray eyes as she nudged his shoulder, her gown rustling softly. “Flatterer,” she teased, her voice husky but light, a faint gust stirring her hair as her cursed mark pulsed softly. “You’re not half bad yourself, Captain. Cleaned up like a proper prince. Almost fooled me into thinking you’re not a pirate.” She tilted her head, her smile widening as she leaned closer, her fingers brushing his velvet lapel, the sapphire pendant catching the moonlight.

Killian laughed, a rich sound like rolling waves, pulling her closer as they reached the harbor, the scent of brine and tar growing stronger. “A prince, eh? I’ll take that, but only if you’re my queen,” he murmured, his hook grazing her

waist, sending a shiver through her. “Though I reckon no crown could match the storm in you, love, not even in the Enchanted Forest.” He paused by the dock, the Jolly Roger looming ahead, its blackened hull a dark silhouette against the starry sky, sails furled, masts swaying gently as waves lapped at the enchanted oak timbers with a rhythmic sigh.

Desylva smirked, stepping onto the dock, her leather shoes steady despite the gown’s elegance. “Keep talking like that, and I might start believing you,” she said, her voice playful as she turned to face him, the moonlight illuminating her face, her gray eyes sparkling with a mix of challenge and affection. “But you know I’m no queen. Just a storm with a ship and a stubborn captain.” She reached up, brushing a strand of dark hair from his brow, her touch lingering, the warmth of her fingers grounding him.

He caught her hand, kissing her knuckles, his lips warm against her skin. “My stubborn tempest,” he corrected, his voice a low rumble, his blue eyes burning with love as he pulled her against him, his hook resting lightly on her hip. “And I wouldn’t have you any other way, not in the Crimson Abyss, not here.” Their lips met in a soft, lingering kiss, tasting of cider and the night’s magic, the dock creaking beneath them as a gentle breeze swirled, her mark’s glow softening. They continued to the ship, their steps light, their banter a quiet dance of love under the stars.

Jolly Roger

The Jolly Roger welcomed them with the familiar creak of her enchanted oak deck, lanterns hung from the rigging casting flickering amber shadows across planks, the air thick with the scent of salt, tar, and the faint musk of aged wood, mingling with the damp chill of the harbor. The ship rocked gently, its masts swaying under the starry sky, the waves’ rhythmic sigh a soothing counterpoint to the fading hum of the ball. Desylva’s indigo gown shimmered in the lantern light, its silver embroidery rippling like waves under moonlight, her sapphire pendant glinting as she climbed aboard, her leather shoes steady despite the gown’s flowing hem. Her storm-gray eyes flickered with discomfort, her cursed mark pulsing faintly beneath her sleeve, a soft breeze stirring the rigging as she tugged at the silk, her fingers twitching with restless energy. “I can’t wait to get out of this dress,” she muttered, her voice low and rough, her fingers grazing the fabric as if it were a foreign skin. “It’s like wearing a net. Feel I’m trapped, out of place.” Her mark glowed brighter, a gust rustling her hair, the ropes creaking as her magic stirred, betraying her unease on the familiar deck.

Killian followed, his black velvet coat swaying, his hook gleaming as he offered his hand, guiding her to the helm with a sailor’s ease. His blue eyes softened, a smile tugging at his lips as he took in her gown, its elegance a stark contrast to the ship’s rugged charm. “You look like a princess in it, love,” he said, his voice warm with admiration, stepping closer, his hand brushing her arm. “A vision of the sea itself. Bold, wild, like the storms we faced in the Shattered Peaks.” His fingers lingered on the sapphire pendant.

Desylva’s gaze sharpened, a smirk breaking through her discomfort as she leaned against the helm, the wood cool under her touch. “I’m no princess, Killian,” she retorted, her tone firm but playful, her hand brushing his, the driftwood ring glinting. “Never was, never will be. I’m a storm, not a fairy tale.” Her eyes sparkled with defiance, her mark pulsing as a breeze tugged at the sails above, the ship’s timbers humming faintly with enchantment.

He chuckled, his eyes glinting with mischief as he swept her off her feet, lifting her effortlessly into his arms, the gown’s hem trailing like a wave over the deck. “Maybe not a typical princess, my tempest,” he said, his voice a low rumble, his hook resting lightly on her waist as he carried her toward the companionway. “But you’re a pirate princess, fierce, untamed, and mine.” His gaze locked on hers, blue meeting gray in a spark of love, his boots steady as he descended, her laughter soft against the creaking timbers, a sound that warmed the night.

“Let’s get you out of that silk and back to yourself,” he murmured, his voice thick with tenderness as they slipped below, the lanterns casting their shadows long and entwined, the ship humming with their bond. The Jolly Roger rocked gently, her enchanted oak steady, the night wrapping them in its quiet embrace as the stars burned above, a silent witness to their love.

Companionway

Killian carried Desylva down the companionway, the oak walls glowing faintly with runes, their silvery veins pulsing like a heartbeat, the air thick with the tang of tar and salt, a cool breeze swirling as Desylva’s cursed mark flared softly on her arm.

Killian & Desylva's Cabin

They entered the cabin, its oak walls humming with a faint magical resonance, the stern window's enchanted glass casting a soft, silvery glow across the polished floor, its runes shimmering to mend a faint crack from a harbor gust stirred by Desylva's restless magic. The door clicked shut behind them, its carved runes flaring briefly to seal their solitude, the crimson wool rug softening their steps, its fibers catching the amber glow of lanterns hung from iron hooks. The bed was draped in crimson linens, The suitcase with Desylva's clothes, boots, and dagger sat in the corner, its brass clasp glinting, a quiet reminder of her warrior's heart.

Desylva slipped off her blue leather shoes, setting them beside the desk. She removed her hairpins and unclasped her sapphire pendant, placing them on the oak desk cluttered with charts and a quill, its ink dried from disuse. Her storm-gray eyes glinted with relief as she turned to Killian, the Jolly Roger rocking gently beneath them, timbers creaking in rhythm with the harbor's waves. "Help me out of this dress, pirate," she said, her voice a playful growl, her fingers tugging at the silk, her cursed mark pulsing brighter as a gust swirled, rustling the charts and tipping the quill.

Killian stepped close, his hook deftly unlacing the gown, his fingers brushing her bare shoulders, sending a shiver through her as the silk slipped to the floor, pooling like liquid night at her feet. The blue leather corset remained, its breast cups hugging her curves, the leather extending to her hips, its stitching gleaming in the lantern light, taut against her skin. She stood before him in the corset and silk panties, her dark hair cascading over her shoulders, her cursed mark glowing like a storm's heart, a breeze stirring the air, lifting the crimson linens. "I needed something leather," she said, her smirk fierce, her hips swaying slightly as she met his gaze. "Frilly's not my thing. Like it?"

Killian's eyes darkened, his breath catching as he drank her in, the corset's blue leather a bold contrast to her skin, its edges accentuating her form, her wild hair framing her like a tempest unleashed. "What's not to like, love?" he rasped, his voice thick with desire, his hook tracing the air near her hip, his smile roguish but tender, his blue eyes burning with hunger.

She grinned, stepping to the bed, her movements fluid as she laid back on the crimson linens, the mattress yielding softly, the bedframe's runes glowing faintly. "Stop staring and join me, Captain," she teased, slipping off the silk panties with a deft motion, and tossing them to him, her gray eyes sparkling, her mark pulsing in time with her heartbeat, a gust swirling around the cabin, flickering the lanterns.

Killian kicked off his boots, the leather thudding against the floor. He removed his belt and pants, his arousal evident as they hit the floor. He shed his black velvet coat and shirt, the fabrics sliding to the floor in a soft heap, revealing the taut lines of his chest. His muscles flexing as he moved to join her on the bed, the enchanted oak frame creaking softly, its runes shimmering to heal a fresh nick from his hook's edge.

Their bodies pressed close. Her corset's cool leather brushing his skin. His hand cupping her face as he kissed her, deep, slow, tasting of spiced rum and salt. His lips firm yet yielding, a vow in every press. She kissed him back, her hands sliding over his shoulders, fingers digging into his back, tracing the ridges of old scars, her nails grazing lightly, drawing a low groan from his throat.

The ship rocked harder, waves slapping the hull as Desylva's magic stirred, a distant rumble of thunder echoing her rising pulse, the stern window's glass glowing brighter, its runes pulsing to mend a hairline crack from the storm's vibration.

His hook traced the corset's edge, cool metal grazing her ribs, sending sparks through her nerves, while his hand caressed her thigh, fingers splaying to feel her warmth, his touch both gentle and possessive. She arched into him, her hands roaming his chest, palming the hard planes of muscle, her lips finding his neck, kissing the pulse there, tasting salt and heat. "My tempest," he murmured, his voice a husky rumble, his hand sliding to her breast, cupping it through the leather, his thumb brushing the corset's stitching, teasing her skin beneath. She gasped, her mark flaring, a gust swirling the cabin, rustling the charts, the bed's runes glowing as they sealed a nick.

Their kisses deepened, tongues tangling, her teeth grazing his lower lip, his hook slipping beneath the corset's laces, loosening them slightly, the leather yielding to reveal more of her curves. He unzipped the corset, his fingers

deft and sure, sliding his arm under her to lift her gently, removing the corset and placing it carefully on the ledge behind the bed, its leather gleaming in the lantern light.

He shifted, his body aligning with hers, the moment of entry slow and deliberate, his blue eyes locked on her gray ones, sea meeting storm in a silent vow. She opened to him, her legs wrapping around his hips, her breath hitching as he filled her, a deep, steady thrust that drew a moan from her lips, her mark pulsing wildly, a gust shaking the lanterns, their light flickering.

The ship swayed, timbers groaning as if echoing their rhythm, the waves outside surging, a faint rain pattering against the stern window, its runes shimmering to heal another crack. Their movements were unhurried, a dance of passion prolonged by years of trust.

His hand caressed her side, fingers tracing her curves. Her hips rose to meet each thrust, her nails raking his back, leaving faint red trails that faded under her touch. They kissed fiercely, lips bruising, his hook resting on her hip, guiding her rhythm, her hands clutching his hair, pulling him closer, their breaths mingling in gasps and whispers.

Desylva's release built like a storm, her body tensing, her mark blazing a vivid blue, casting electric shadows across the cabin, the air crackling with her magic. Her back arched, her thighs tightening around him, Killian watched her, his breath ragged, "That's it, love, let the storm break," his heart pounding as he drove her through the peak, he whispered softly, "Let it go, love, break for me." His lips kissed her neck, his voice a low growl. A cry, "Killian!", tearing from her throat as waves of pleasure crashed through her, her fingers gripping his shoulders, nails biting into skin, her chest heaving, her gray eyes fluttering shut in ecstasy. A gust roared through the cabin, scattering charts across the desk, the ship lurching as waves pounded the hull, rain lashing the window, its enchanted glass glowing to seal a new crack.

His release followed, spurred by her trembling beneath him, his thrusts deepening, a guttural groan escaping as he spilled into her, his body shuddering, muscles tensing, his hand gripping her hip, fingers digging into her skin, his hook braced against the bed, leaving a faint scratch the runes instantly healed. His blue eyes burned, locked on hers, a raw intensity in their depths as he rode the wave, his chest heaving, sweat beading on his brow, the ship rocking violently, waves crashing outside, thunder rumbling in sync with his pulse.

The stern window's glow intensified, runes pulsing to mend a splintered crack from the storm's force, the cabin's oak walls humming as if alive with their passion.

They collapsed together, breathless, her bare skin warm against his, the crimson linens tangled beneath them. They snuggled close, her head resting on his chest, his heartbeat steady under her cheek, her dark hair spilling over his shoulder, her mark's glow softening to a gentle pulse. He wrapped his arm around her, his hook tracing lazy circles on her back, her fingers entwining with his, brushing the driftwood ring. He kissed her forehead, his lips lingering, the ship settling into a gentle rock, waves calming outside, the rain easing to a soft patter.

The timbers creaked softly, the enchanted oak walls glowing faintly, runes shimmering as they mended a final scratch on the bedframe, the stern window's glass clear and whole, casting a silvery light over their entwined forms. The night wrapped them in its quiet embrace, the stars gleaming through the window, the ship a refuge where their love burned brighter than any storm, beneath sails that had carried them through countless realms.

Day 47

Harbor

The harbor stretched before Killian, a vast expanse of deep indigo kissed by the crescent moon's silver glow, its surface shimmering like molten glass under the star-flecked sky. The air hung thick with the briny tang of salt, mingled with the faint musk of wood from the docks, carrying whispers of the sea's restless heart. Gulls wheeled overhead, their piercing cries a haunting refrain that echoed the realms he and Desylva had once roamed. The Jolly Roger bobbed gently at its moorings, her hull creaking softly, her furled sails catching the moonlight like a promise tucked into the night's tender embrace, a steadfast companion through their trials.

Killian stood on the pier, his boots scuffing the salt-bleached planks, the cool breeze tugging at the hem of his black coat, its leather worn from battles across realms. A spark of resolve flared within him, warming his chest like a ember kindled after days of restless yearning, his heart steady despite the ache of lost years tempered by the fire of their enduring love. In his hand, he held a simple silver band, forged in secret during the quiet hours of sleepless nights, its surface etched with swirling waves carved by the precise tip of his hook, each line a testament to his unwavering love, a vow shaped in metal. as unyielding as his heart.

Desylva stood to his left, a vision of untamed beauty illuminated by the harbor's flickering lanterns, their orange glow casting soft shadows across her face. Her dark hair cascaded free, swirling in the wind like storm clouds unfurling across a twilight sky, each strand catching the moonlight in a dance of shadow and silver. Her gray eyes blazed with a fierce radiance, a tempest's heart mirrored in their depths, sparking with the same wild energy that had summoned lightning in the Shattered Peaks and thunder in the Bone Cliffs. She stood tall, her leather-clad form both fierce and graceful, her cursed mark glowing faintly through her sleeve, a blue ember pulsing with her heartbeat. The pier creaked beneath them, its salt-worn planks groaning under the weight of their shared history, each step a reminder of the battles fought and loves reclaimed.

Grumpy was wandering the pier's edge, drawn by a nagging prickle in his gut that something big was about to happen. He caught the glint of the ring in Killian's hand under the lantern light. His eyes narrowed, a familiar prickle running down his spine. "Bloody hell," he muttered under his breath, already pulling out his phone. Fingers moving fast, he fired off a text to the group chat. *Hook's got a ring on the pier. Right now. Get down here.* He pocketed the phone and stepped back into the shadows, arms crossed, waiting.

Killian turned to Desylva, his breath hitching in his throat as he met her gaze, his voice dropping to a raw, reverent whisper that bared decades of guarded longing, weathered by loss yet unyielding in its truth. He extended the silver band, its etched waves glinting in the lantern light, his hand steady despite the tremor in his heart and spoke, "Marry me, love, here beneath this sky, by the sea that's carried us through every hell we've faced, krakens, wraiths, curses, and voids. Let's reclaim what was stolen, make it ours again, here, now, forever." His words trembled with the weight of their shared saga, each syllable a vow to defy the fates that had once torn them apart. his blue eyes shimmering with a vulnerability that mirrored the moon's glow on the water.

Ruby and Henry, drawn by the alert, reached the pier first, slipping out of the diner in a hurry. Ruby's red-streaked hair catching the lantern light as she stepped silently onto the pier, her eyes wide with quiet awe. Henry's sneakers soft on the planks, clutching his storybook to his chest like a talisman, eyes already wide with anticipation. his face lit with wonder as he took in the scene. They watched from the shadows, staying hushed.

Smee, ever the first to follow a summons, arrived moments later, breath coming in short, anxious puffs from the hurried jog, his stout frame trembling slightly as he rounded the corner, a half-empty mug still clutched in his hand. He froze beside Ruby and Henry, wide eyes like saucers, glistening under the lantern glow as they landed on Killian and Desylva standing together under the moonlight. His lower lip quivered; he pressed a meaty hand to his chest as though to steady his racing heart, tears already welling in the corners of his eyes, as he realized what was about to happen. "Oh, Cap'n…" he whispered hoarsely, voice cracking with a raw, paternal tenderness that rarely broke through his usual bluster. He wiped his eyes with his sleeve, a soft sniff escaping, "He's gonna to do it. He's finally claimin' his harbor again." He swallowed thickly, blinking rapidly, then gave a small, shaky nod to himself, pride and overwhelming love shining through every line of his ruddy face as he joined the silent vigil, one hand still clutching his half-empty mug like a lifeline.

Desylva's storm-gray eyes locked with Killian's, flaring with a brilliance that rivaled the lightning she'd once wielded, and a fire that burned through the shadows of their past. Her breath catching as she stepped closer, the wind stirring her hair like a banner of defiance. She nodded, her lips parting in a smile that trembled with joy, "Aye, Killian," she said, her voice steady as iron yet soft as the breeze that rustled the nets around them, "I'll marry you. I'm yours. Always have been, always will be, through every tide and trial."

Her hand reached into her pocket, fingers brushing the worn velvet of the ring box Henry had given her days before, its edges frayed from her restless touch, a secret she'd carried close. She opened it with a gentle flick, revealing the silver band etched with waves, crowned with a sapphire its deep blue facets catching the moonlight like a fragment of the sea itself. "Let's not wait a moment longer," she said, her gray eyes bright with unshed tears. "Here, now, with the sea as our witness." she said, her smile widening, fierce and radiant, as she slid the ring onto his finger, the sapphire glinting against his skin, a perfect mirror to the driftwood ring he'd given her so long ago.

Killian's gaze softened, a roguish grin tugging at his lips as he lifted her hand, his fingers warm and steady despite the tremor in his chest, a spark of mischief tempering the raw emotion in his eyes. "Aye, love, here, now, beneath the stars that watched us spar and love,"" he murmured, his voice a low lilt of the sea. He slid the silver band onto her finger, nestling it atop the driftwood ring with its sapphire heart. Twin vows shimmering in the lantern light like stars reflected on the water. "Two rings, one heart," he whispered, his hook brushing her wrist, cool metal against her pulse, sparking a shiver that danced up her spine.

Their bands nestled together, silver and wood entwined, a symbol of their unbreakable bond, their edges catching the moon's glow as if blessed by the sea itself. They turned to face each other, the sea lapping at the pilings with a soft, gentle, rhythmic sigh, the wind carrying the faint tang of salt and the promise of rain. The harbor's lanterns swayed in the breeze, casting flickering shadows across their faces.

Snow and David arrived quietly. Snow's left hand flew to her mouth, while her right pressed to her heart. Her eyes glistening. David put his arm around her shoulders and pulled her gently against his side, guiding her gently forward. Both remaining silent, reverence softening their expressions.

Desylva spoke her vows first, her voice resonating like thunder rolling over the sea, rich and powerful, each word woven with the strength of her storm-born magic and carrying the weight of their shared battles. Her cursed mark flared blue beneath her sleeve, a faint breeze swirling around her, rustling the nets draped along the pier and setting the lanterns dancing, their light trembling like stars caught in a storm. "Killian Jones, my pirate, my captain, my flame, my heart's true north," she began, her gray eyes locked on his, fierce and unwavering. "You dove through raging seas to pull me from Veyra's rock, your hook a beacon in my darkest storms. Your voice the wave that called me from despair, your grin the spark that lit my storms. Through every battle your hand steadied mine, your love a compass when I was lost, your strength my anchor. Your name is etched in my soul, carved in my heart. I vow to be your haven, your wind, your tide, your sky. To wield my storms to give you strength, to weave my rain into your calm, to light your way with my lightning and guard your sails from gales. To soothe your scars, my heart your harbor. No curse, no imp, no sea will tear me from you. I'm yours, my rogue of steel, my pirate bold, beyond realms, beyond curses. Forever bound by the sea. 'Til the stars fall, the tides still, the seas dry, and the heavens crack. I'll fight fate itself to keep us whole. Your steel, my lightning. Our love a tempest no realm can break. Our saga eternal, written in salt and starlight." Her words hung in the air, a vow as fierce as the tempests she commanded, her cursed mark pulsing brighter, a blue flame that cast fleeting shadows across the pier.

Emma arrived just as Desylva finished her vows, her red jacket blending with the night. She took her place among the gathering shadows. her gaze softening as Killian's voice rose to answer Desylva's vow.

Killian's eyes shimmered with unshed tears, his hook resting gently at her waist, its cool metal a grounding contrast to the warmth of his hand clasping hers, their rings a shared pulse between them, glinting like twin stars. He took a deep breath, his chest rising as he steadied himself, his baritone carrying the lilt of crashing waves, rough yet tender, woven with the magic of their true love, a melody forged in the fires of their shared trials. "Desylva, my tempest, my storm, my love, my home," he began, his voice steady but thick with emotion, each word a wave breaking against the shore of their past. "You're the storm that woke my soul, your gray eyes a squall I'd sail into a thousand times. You're the gale that sets my sails, your lightning the flame that lights my course. Your fire saved me when vengeance drowned my heart, your touch a spark in my darkest nights. We've fought krakens and curses, from the Shattered Peaks to the Bone Cliffs. Your lightning my guide, your laugh my rum. We've carved our tale through far-off realms, defied seas and gods, your magic woven with my steel, our love a saga sung by stars. I vow to hold you close, to weather your gales, to be your harbor and anchor, your sword and sky. To guard you with hook and heart, to dance with you 'neath moonlit cliffs, to love you fierce like the seas we've conquered. To sail with you through every storm, love you with every breath, to be the man worthy of your strength. You're my compass, my sea, and I'm yours, forever, through every tide and trial, 'til the waves cease and the heavens fade, bound by salt and eternity. Nothing shall ever part us." His voice trembled with the weight of his promise, his blue eyes locked on her gray, a sea meeting a storm in a moment that felt eternal.

Regina, Archie, the dwarves, Granny, and the rest of Storybrooke had filtered in quietly during Killian's words. Their presence a quiet, respectful vigil. Some came from the streets, some from homes, all drawn by Grumpy's warning. They gathered along the pier's edges, forming a loose semicircle, faces illuminated by the lanterns and the faint glow of Desylva's magic. Not a single person spoke. Not a footstep rang out. No one moved to interrupt. A silent

circle of love and support. They simply stood in silence, watching with shining eyes, bearing witness without disturbing the moment. The air between them thick with unspoken joy.

Killian's tone thickened with emotion, his voice breaking slightly, "With the rings on your fingers, my vow, I thee wed," he said, his words a solemn promise carried on the harbor's breeze. His hand squeezed hers, the silver band gleaming. Desylva pressed the ring deeper onto his finger, her touch firm and fierce, her voice a vow etched in iron, "With this ring I offer, my vow, I thee wed."

Desylva drew her dagger, its blade catching the lantern light as she pressed it to her left palm, making a small incision, not deep, just enough to draw a thin line of blood, crimson beading against her skin. Then did the same on her right palm. Killian mirrored her, his hook slicing a shallow cut across his right palm, blood welling and dripping onto the curved metal, staining it with a dark sheen. They faced each other, the sea's gentle lapping a soft counterpoint to their steady breaths. Desylva's left hand clasped Killian's right, their blood merging in a warm, mingling pulse, then her right hand gently pressed against his hook, the cool metal slick with his blood, merging into her cut. Their grip a vow sealed in crimson and steel.

Their eyes locked, their hands held tightly, as their voices rose above the wind, a shared declaration that resonated with the sea's rhythm and carried the weight of their love across the harbor, "With the sea as our witness, the stars as our guide." Killian's eyes gleamed, a roguish grin breaking through his tears as he added, "I'm now my tempest's husband, bound to you in every tide," his voice warm with triumph. Desylva's smile broke wide, radiant and unguarded, her voice a soft echo of his joy, "I'm now my pirate's bride, yours through every storm," her gray eyes sparkling like the sea under moonlight. A blue glow emanated from their clasped hands, Desylva's magic sealing the cuts on their palms, the warmth of her power knitting their skin whole. The glow faded, and they released their hands, the healed scars a faint testament to their blood-oath.

His hand cradled her face, his thumb brushing her cheek, tracing the faint salt of her skin, while his hook circled her waist, cool metal against her warmth, anchoring her to him. Her arms wound around his neck, fingers threading through his dark hair with a tender urgency, pulling him closer as their breaths mingled, tasting of sea brine and love's fierce promise. A true love's kiss effect rippled outward, a warm, golden wave pulsing through the harbor, trembling the planks beneath their feet and stirring the air with an electric hum that set the lanterns swaying and the nets fluttering like sails catching a sudden gust. Their kiss ignited like a gale, deep, ravenous, a reclaiming of every lost year, their lips moving with a hunger tempered by tenderness.

As their kiss deepened, a blinding flash of lightning streaked overhead, splitting the indigo sky with a crack that echoed across the water like a cannon's roar, illuminating the pier in stark, radiant light that bathed their entwined forms in silver. Tears traced down Killian's cheeks, mingling with the sea's brine on her lips, a silent hymn to their union, their love a fire that burned through the weight of curses and schemes. Desylva's body pressed against his, soft yet fierce, her heartbeat thundering in time with his, her scent of wild winds and leather filling his senses, her gray eyes holding his like a horizon he'd chase across every realm to reach. His hand tightened on her face, his hook drawing her closer, the cool metal a grounding contrast to the heat of her skin beneath his trembling fingers.

The onlookers flinched at the sudden brilliance, their faces lit by the lightning's glow, their reactions a chorus of awe and wonder. As they quietly talked amongst themselves. Emma staggered back a step, her hand shielding her eyes, her soft smile faltering into reverence as she murmured, "That's… incredible, like the sea itself is blessing them." Snow gasped, clutching David's arm, her dark eyes wide with wonder, her voice trembling, "It's true love's magic. Pure and unstoppable. Like nothing I've ever seen!" David's eyes widened and his jaw tightened, his hand resting on his belt as he nodded, his gruff tone softened by awe, "Never seen it hit like that. Like the whole harbor's alive with it." Ruby let out a sharp yelp, then laughed, her red-streaked hair whipping in the sudden gust, her voice bright with delight, "Hell of a wedding gift from the sky. Those two don't do anything small!" Grumpy flinched, his arms uncrossing as he squinted upward, his grumble laced with grudging amazement, "Great, now the weather's in on it. Bloody show-offs," though his scowl twitched into something closer to grudging amazement, a rare softness in his eyes as he watched the couple. Smee stood a little apart, hat now clutched in both trembling hands against his chest like a prayer, tears streaming freely down his ruddy cheeks and disappearing into his beard. His shoulders shook with silent sobs that he tried, and failed, to stifle, the mug forgotten in his grip, rum dripping unnoticed onto the planks. When he finally spoke, his voice was thick, broken, almost reverent cracking with pride and emotion, "My Cap'n got his storm now, proper and forever." He sniffled loudly, wiping his face with the back of one sleeve, then the other, unable to stop the fresh wave of emotion. "Never thought I'd live to see them joined like this, like they should have been so long ago. Bloody beautiful, it is. True love at it's best." His watery gaze never left the

couple, shining with a fierce, paternal love that had weathered centuries of piracy, loss, and loyalty, now breaking open in the face of Killian's joy. He raised his mug in a trembling toast toward them, whispering hoarsely to no one and everyone, "To the Cap'n and his tempest. May the sea keep you both." Then he simply stood there, crying openly, proudly, the rough old pirate reduced to a man overwhelmed by the sight of his captain finally finding peace.

The air crackled with the power of their union, a tangible force that pulsed through the harbor, stirring the water into restless ripples and setting the Jolly Roger's rigging humming like a plucked string. Desylva's body remained pressed against Killian's, soft yet fierce, her curves yielding yet unyielding, her warmth a counterpoint to the cool night air, her heartbeat thundering in time with his, a rhythm that echoed the sea's pulse. He lost himself in her storm. Her scent of wild winds and leather filling his senses, the heat of her skin beneath his trembling hand sparking memories of their battles, Her gray eyes held his like a horizon he'd chase forever, their depths a storm he'd sail into without hesitation, their love a tempest that had defied realms and curses, and fate and time itself.

She pulled back slightly, her lips brushing his in a softer echo of their kiss, her voice a whisper meant only for him, "You're my sea, Killian. My forever." He smiled, his hand still cradling her face, his hook resting gently at her waist, "And you're my tempest, love. My eternal harbor."

They kissed again, slower this time, deeper, their lips parting with a soft, hungry sound, tongues brushing in a slow, lingering dance that tasted of salt and starlight, of every battle survived and every promise kept. His hand slid to the nape of her neck, fingers threading through her dark hair, cradling her close as if afraid she might vanish; her arms tightened around his shoulders, pulling him flush against her, their bodies pressed so tightly that the heartbeat between them felt like one. The kiss stretched, unhurried and reverent, a quiet claiming that carried the weight of every lost year and every hard-won moment, their breath mingling in warm, shuddering gasps, the world narrowing to the heat of their mouths, the press of their bodies, the steady thrum of their shared pulse.

The lightning overhead had faded, but the air still hummed with the afterglow of their magic, the harbor itself seeming to hold its breath as they poured every unspoken vow into their lingering kiss.

The harbor sighed around them, the sea lapping at the pilings, the stars above bearing witness to a love forged in salt and starlight, unyielding against the trials of their past and the shadows yet to come. Only then did the townspeople step forward, their quiet circle breaking into soft applause and murmured congratulations, their faces glowing with shared joy as they finally made their presence known, the night alive with the warmth of their silent vigil now turned to celebration.

A few hours later

The night unfurled in a haze of joy, the harbor alive with their celebration as Desylva and Killian took center stage on the pier, their voices rising in song, each a testament to their love, the sea and stars their audience, weather weaving through their performance like a living chorus.

Killian
Sailed through the dark, lass, a sea so mean,
Lost in the shadows, no land to be seen,
Then came your thunder, your wild storm's scream,
Lit up my heart with a pirate's dream.

Killian strode forward, hand gripping an invisible helm, his coat billowing as he mimed steering through a squall, eyes locked on Desylva with a roguish grin.

A gust of wind swept across the pier, tugging at their hair.

Desylva
Waves tried to drown me, the deep so cold,
Cursed by the fates, lost tales untold,
Your hook shone steel, your heart so bold,
Brought me to a harbor, worth more than gold.

Desylva staggered as if battered by waves, then straightened, arms outstretched as she spun towards Killian, her hair whipping wildly as a faint rumble of thunder rolled in the distance.

Together
Storm and Hook a-gleam, that's what we are,
No curse can tear us, no sea too far,
Riding the tempest, we'll chase the star,
Storm and Hook a-gleam, my love, we are!

They clasped hands, twirling in a joyous reel, Killian dipped her low as the sea sprayed mists the air.

Killian
Oh, the winds may howl, the skies may rend,
But with you, my lass, I'll fight to the end,
Lightning's our banner, our love won't bend!

Killian raised his hook skyward, defiant, as Desylva pressed against his side, her hand on his chest, a flicker of lightning danced faintly overhead.

Together
Storm and Hook a-gleam, that's what we are,
No curse can tear us, no sea too far,
Riding the tempest, we'll chase the star,
Storm and Hook a-gleam, my love, we are!

They spun again, laughing, Killian swept Desylva off her feet as the wind howled louder. Snow clapped, beaming, "That's their spirit!" Ruby stomped her boot, grinning, "Sing it, you two!"

The song's final notes faded into the night, and the festivities surged back to life. Lanterns swayed as the crowd cheered, their voices mingling with the sea's restless rhythm.

Killian and Desylva caught their breath, still tangled in each other's arms, when Henry darted through the throng, his eyes bright with excitement. "That was amazing!" he exclaimed, clutching his storybook. "You've got to sing another one. Please?"

Killian chuckled, ruffling Henry's hair. "Aye, lad, how can we say no to that?" Desylva nodded, her smile warm. "One more, then, for the truest believer."

The pier buzzed with renewed energy as they prepared to launch into the next tune.

Desylva
I feel the spark when your hand meets mine,
A pirate's call through the gale's design,
The thunder rolls, and the seas align,
Your love's the fire that storms define!

Desylva grabbed Killian's hand, pressing it to her heart, her eyes blazing as she swayed toward him.
A low rumble of thunder punctuated her words, the air growing charged.

Killian
The waves may crash, the nights grow rough,
But lass, your kiss is strong enough,
To light my way through all dark stuff,
You're my wild wind, my stormy bluff!

Killian pulled her close, miming a kiss as he spun her outward, his hook glinting.
Waves crashed harder against the pilings, spraying the pier with foam.

Together
'Cause every storm we touch, I feel the rush,
The lightning cracks, my heart's a-crush,
I need you near, oh, so damn much,
Our love ignites with every storm we touch!

They leapt and stomped in unison, hands clasped high, their voices soaring as a sharp gust whipped through, rattling the lanterns. Emma swayed, murmuring, "They've got fire."

Killian
Forgive the tides that pulled us apart,

Desylva
Your hook's still carved upon my heart,

Together
We'll sail as one where tempests start!

Desylva trailed a finger down Killian's chest, then spun away, arms wide as if embracing a storm. Distant lightning flickered, mirroring her intensity.

Together
'Cause every storm we touch, I feel the rush,
The lightning cracks, my heart's a-crush,
I need you near, oh, so damn much,
Our love ignites with every storm we touch!

They collided in a fierce embrace, foreheads touching, voices raw with passion as the wind surged. Grumpy snorted, "Too much fire," but tapped his foot reluctantly.

As the echoes of their passionate shanty drifted into the harbor's haze, the festivities roared back to life. Smee struck up a jaunty whistle from the Jolly Roger, and the crowd clapped and stomped, caught in the infectious energy. Killian and Desylva stood chest-to-chest, breathless and grinning, when Ruby sauntered over, leaning against a piling with a wolfish smirk. "You two are on fire tonight," she said, her red-streaked hair glinting in the lantern light. "Give us another."

Desylva laughed, brushing a strand of hair from her face. "Can't refuse a request like that, can we, love?" Killian winked, "Aye, lass, let's give 'em one more."

The pier thrummed with anticipation as they turned to face the crowd again.

Killian
Oh, my love, my stormy flame,
Lost to me through time's cruel game,
The seas did part us, wild and free,
I've longed for you, unchained by the sea.

Killian sank to one knee, reaching for Desylva with a yearning gaze, his hook resting on his heart. The sea calmed briefly, a gentle lapping underscoring his plea.

Desylva
Through the dark, I called your name,
Felt your hook in every rain,
The curse held tight, but I broke free,
To find you here, unchained by the sea.

Desylva stepped forward, hands cupping the air as if catching rain, then rushed to Killian, pulling him up. A soft drizzle began, misting the pier.

Desylva
The tides roll on, so slow, so wide,

Killian
Your storm's the pull I can't deny,

Together
We'll meet again where waves collide,
Unchained by the sea, my love, we'll bide.

They swayed together, arms entwined, rocking like a ship on gentle waves. The drizzle thickened, a tender veil around them.

Killian
Time drags on, the nights so long,

Desylva
But love's a gale, fierce and strong,

Together
We'll sail as one, where we belong!

Killian lifted Desylva's chin, her hand gripped his coat. They stepped apart, then rushed back together, voices blending as the drizzle faded. David nodded, "That's their story."

Desylva
The tides roll on, so slow, so wide,

Killian
Your storm's the pull I can't deny,

Together
We'll meet again where waves collide,
Unchained by the sea, my love, we'll bide.

They slowed to a standstill, foreheads pressed, hands clasped. Ruby whooped as Snow wiped a tear, "So beautiful."

The shanties faded into the salt-laced air, their voices lingering like a soft echo over the harbor as the crowd erupted in cheers, the pier alive with the glow of their celebration.

Killian pulled Desylva close, her breath warming his neck as he murmured, thick with emotion, "Those songs, they're us, love, every storm, every fight, every moment I thought I'd lost you." Desylva's gray eyes shimmered as she cupped his face, her voice a tender sob, "And every time we found each other again, pirate. I'm yours through it all, 'til the seas dry up and the stars fall."

Snow approached, clasping her hands, "Those were perfect. Congratulations, you two!" David clapped Killian's shoulder, grinning, "Fine singing for a pirate and his storm. Well done." Ruby sauntered up, smirking, "You've got pipes and heart. Here's to the wildest couple on the pier!" Even Grumpy muttered, "Not bad tunes," his scowl softening as he nodded their way.

Henry bounded forward, practically vibrating with excitement, and threw his arms around them both in a massive hug, his voice bursting, "I'm so happy you got your happy ever after! I knew true love would win. It's the best story yet!"

Killian ruffled his hair, chuckling, "Couldn't have done it without you, lad. Thank you." Desylva squeezed Henry tight, smiling, "You're our hero, Henry. Thank you for believing in us." As Henry stepped back, beaming, Killian and

Desylva shared a look, a quiet, radiant spark passing between them. Then Killian leaned in, kissing her deeply, his hand cradling her neck, her fingers tangling in his coat.

The crowd erupted in cheers, whoops, and applause, the sound swelling over the lapping waves. The festivities surged anew, dancing resumed, boots scuffing the planks in lively reels, laughter and merriment spilling into the night as Smee's shanty picked up again from the Jolly Roger's deck, the harbor glowing with joy.

Rooftop

Yet, unnoticed amid the revelry, a shadow crept along the rooftops above, dark and deliberate. Rumpelstiltskin perched on a rooftop, catching the moon's faint gleam, fingers tracing his dagger's edge with a predator's patience, his cackle swallowed by the wind, his festering hatred for Killian's triumph and the love that defied him coiled tight, a silent threat lurking against the night's bright promise.

Killian & Desylva's Cabin (A few hours later)

The Jolly Roger swayed gently at its moorings, her hull thrumming with a quiet hum as if savoring the harbor's lingering joy, the crescent moon's silver glow spilling through the stern window to bathe the cabin's salt-worn planks in ethereal light.

Killian carried Desylva over the cabin's threshold, her weight a fierce, warm presence in his arms, her leather jacket trailing like a storm cloud as he stepped through the door, his boots scuffing the planks with a gritty rasp. Her dark hair cascaded over his shoulder, wild and windswept, her gray eyes blazing with a seductive fire that rivaled the lightning of their vows, her storm magic crackling faintly, a warm pulse making the overhead lantern flicker and sway.

He kicked the door shut with a heavy thud, the latch rattling as the ship rocked gently, waves lapping the hull in a tender rhythm that echoed their shared pulse. "Welcome home, my bride," he murmured, his voice a low, husky growl laced with innuendo, his blue eyes glinting with roguish delight as he set her down, her boots grazing the planks before she pressed herself against him, her body soft yet unyielding, her hands fisting his coat. "Home, eh, pirate?" she purred, her tone dripping with playful challenge, her fingers tracing the silver band on his finger, the sapphire glinting in the lantern's golden glow. "Reckon you'll have to prove this cabin's worth a wedding night's storm." Her storm magic flared, a faint crackle sparking in the air, the window fogging with a cool mist as a soft drizzle pattered against the deck above, the sea swelling restlessly beneath them.

His grin sharpened, his hook brushing a strand of hair from her face, the cool metal grazing her cheek with a shiver-inducing tease. "Oh, lass, I'll make this ship quake 'til you're singin' my name louder than those shanties," he vowed, his voice thick with seductive promise, his hand sliding to her waist, pulling her flush against him, the heat of her body igniting a fire in his chest. She laughed, a husky ripple that danced through the cabin, her hands tugging at his coat, peeling it free to reveal the linen shirt beneath. She knelt, unlacing his boots with deliberate slowness, her fingers brushing his calves, sending a jolt of heat through him as she tugged them off, the leather thudding to the planks. Rising, her fingers grazed the taut muscle of his chest, lingering on the silver chain from their past, its pirate knot pendant swaying with their motion. "Big talk, Hook," she teased, her gray eyes flashing with mischief, her storm magic surging, a low rumble of thunder rolling outside as the drizzle sharpened into a steady rain, the Jolly Roger pitching with a joyous lurch that mirrored her rising heat.

Their lips crashed together in a ravenous kiss, fierce and deep, a gale meeting the sea, her moan vibrating against his mouth as his tongue teased hers, tasting the salt of her breath and the rum-laced warmth of their celebration. His hand cupped her face, thumb tracing her jaw with reverent urgency, fingers trailing down her neck to fondle the curve of her shoulder, while his hook slid beneath her jacket, its cold curve hooking her belt, tugging it free with a soft clink, while his hand removed her jacket. She gasped into the kiss, her fingers threading through his dark hair, pulling him closer as she kicked off her boots, the leather sliding across the planks with a soft scrape. Her hands roamed his chest, unbuttoning his shirt with fervent tugs as she shoved it open, her nails grazing his scars with a loving sting, savoring the roughness of his skin. His hand slipped beneath her sweater, cupping her breast, thumb brushing her nipple with a slow, teasing stroke that drew a shuddering sigh from her throat, her body arching into his touch as the ship rocked harder, waves slamming the hull, rain drumming a wild beat, her storm magic flaring, lightning flickering in stark relief.

He guided her toward the bed, runes glowing faintly to mend a scratch from his hook as they moved. The quilt, patched with faded greens and grays, creaked under their weight as he eased her down, kneeling above her, his hook braced against the frame, its tip scraping the wood, runes pulsing to heal the faint gouge. “Ready to ride this storm, love?” he murmured, his voice a seductive growl, his eyes locking with hers as his hand slid beneath her sweater, caressing the curve of her ribs, fingers teasing her skin as he lifted it free, revealing the gentle swell of her breasts. She arched into his touch, a sharp moan escaping as her storm magic crackled, the air thickening with static, the window shuddering as spray misted the cabin. “Ride it? I’m steerin’ it, pirate,” she retorted, her tone dripping with innuendo, her legs hooking around his waist, pulling him down with a tug that made the bed groan, her gray eyes blazing with wild desire.

Her hands roamed his back, nails digging into his shoulders, her cursed mark glowing faintly blue, pulsing with her quickening breath. His fingers deftly unlaced her trousers, sliding them down to reveal the curve of her hips, his hand brushing the inside of her thighs, caressing the soft skin with a tenderness that made her gasp. “Bloody hell, never tire of lookin’ at you, tempest,” he breathed, his voice thick with awe, his hand cupping her breast, fingers fondling with a slow reverence, thumb circling her nipple, drawing a shuddering moan. She smirked, her fingers tracing the silver band, then flipped him onto his back with a swift, graceful twist, her storm magic flaring as she slid lower, unlacing his trousers with a teasing slowness. Her touch lingered as she freed him, “Mine,” stroking his heat with a gentle firmness that made him groan, “Yours,” his body tensing with desire. Her fingers brushed his hook, sending a sudden current through it, a tingling jolt that raced up his arm, sparking a fiery thrill in his chest, his pulse quickening as the sensation coiled low in his gut, urging him closer to her fire. The ship lurched, rain lashing the deck in a torrential burst, thunder clapping in time with their fevered breaths.

He flipped her onto her back, his hand caressing her thigh, fingers tracing her curves, fondling the soft swell of her hip as he positioned himself. His lips found hers, kissing deeply, tongue exploring with a hungry edge, while his hook grazed her side, its cool metal teasing her skin, sending shivers through her as she moaned into his mouth. Her hands cupped his face, fingers threading through his hair, pulling him closer as she whispered, “Now, love, take me.”

He entered her slowly, a deliberate thrust that stretched her with exquisite intensity, her moan sharp and breathless as she arched beneath him, her heat enveloping him in a tight, perfect embrace. The sensation was electric. Her warmth gripping him, a pulsing tide that set his nerves alight, his groan low and reverent as he savored the connection. Her hands clutched his back, nails leaving red trails across his scars, her legs tightening around his hips, drawing him deeper. The bed’s runes glowed, mending a splinter from his hook’s scrape, as the Roger rocked in sync with their rhythm, waves crashing with jubilant force, her storm magic misting the air with a phantom drizzle, cooling their fevered skin. “Like that, love?” he rasped, his voice a low rumble, his hook resting at her thigh, its cold edge a thrilling contrast to the heat of their union, enticing her with a gentle press that drew a gasping moan.

His thrusts deepened, slow and deliberate, each movement stoking the fire between them, her sighs melting into moans, her mark pulsing brighter, casting a soft blue glow across his chest. “Killian,” she whispered, her voice trembling with passion, her fingers tangling in his hair, pulling him into a kiss that deepened with every thrust, their tongues dancing in a rum-laced waltz. His hand fondled her breast, cupping its weight, fingers teasing her nipple, while his hook traced her hip, its metal grazing her skin, enticing her with a shiver-inducing caress. Desylva’s fingers brushed his hook again, sending another current through it, a warm, pulsing shock that surged through his veins, igniting a primal hunger, his breath hitching as the electric thrill intensified his desire, urging him to claim her fully.

His pace quickened, each thrust a fierce promise, the bed creaking loudly as he drove into her, her cries sharpening into desperate gasps. “Harder, love, make me feel the storm!” she urged, her voice raw with need. The ship bucked, timbers groaning as waves slammed against the sides, her storm magic roaring, lightning splitting the sky in jagged arcs, illuminating the cabin in blinding flashes, rain pounding the deck in a deafening torrent.

“You’re mine, tempest, now and forever,” he growled, his hand gripping her hip, lifting her to meet him, his hook scraping the bedframe, runes glowing to mend the splintered wood as he braced himself, the sharp edge grazing her thigh, a thrilling danger that made her moan. She arched beneath him, her cry breaking into a wild crescendo, “Yours, Killian, now and forever!” Her hands clawed at his shoulders, drawing blood as she pushed against him, her mark blazing like a beacon, the air crackling with static as thunder shook the cabin.

Their rhythm grew erratic, a primal clash of need and love, his thrusts deepening, each eliciting a shuddering moan, her body trembling as she gasped, “More, pirate, break me open!” He obliged, his pace relentless, the bed thudding

against the wall, its runes mending creaks, waves crashing in time with their frantic rhythm. “Ready to shatter for me, love?” he rasped, his voice rough with exertion, his blue eyes burning into hers as he angled himself deeper, his hand tangling in her hair, tugging gently to tilt her face to his.

“Now, Killian!” she cried, her voice a raw scream, her legs tightening around him as their climax crested like a tidal wave, her scream piercing and joyous, “Killian!” Her body convulsed, a trembling surge of ecstasy, her mark flaring in a blinding blue pulse, the storm magic sparking arcs that danced across the cabin. His groan was a guttural roar, his release a fierce, shuddering flood, spilling into her with a primal intensity that rocked them both, his body trembling as the sensation overwhelmed him, the Roger jolting as lightning streaked across the sky, waves crashing in a jubilant peak, rattling the hull.

The storm eased, rain fading to a gentle sprinkle pattering against the hull, the sea settling as her magic calmed, the ship swaying gently, timbers creaking softly as if settling after a dance. He collapsed beside her, pulling her into his arms, their bodies slick with sweat, her head resting on his chest, ear pressed to his steady heartbeat, the cabin thick with the scents of salt, leather, and their love. Her storm mark dimmed to a faint glow, her fingers tracing the silver band on his finger, then brushing the pirate knot pendant, its cool weight a reminder of their shared past.

“Reckon you made this ship quake, pirate,” she murmured, her voice a seductive purr, her gray eyes glinting with mischief as she propped herself up, her dark hair spilling over his chest like a storm-wrought veil. He chuckled, his hook resting lightly at her hip, its curve glinting in the lantern’s dying glow, his hand threading through her hair, caressing her scalp with a tender touch. “Aye, lass, but you’re the tempest that nearly sank us,” he teased, his tone rich with innuendo, his blue eyes dancing with sated delight, his fingers fondling her shoulder, tracing her curves.

Their breaths steadied, the cabin quiet save for the soft creak of the ship and the whisper of waves against the hull, but the fire between them smoldered, a tender ember waiting to flare anew. “Think you can handle another round, husband?” she whispered, her voice a sultry challenge, her storm magic flaring briefly, a warm breeze stirring the charts pinned to the wall. His grin was dark and hungry, his hand gripping her thigh, fondling its softness. “Oh, wife, I’ll sail you through every storm ‘til dawn,” he growled.

She rolled onto him, her fingers trailing down his chest, caressing the scars and silver chain with gentle reverence, her gray eyes softening with a warmth that spoke of forever. “Good, ‘cause I’m not done with you yet, husband,” she whispered, her voice a tender caress laced with passion that made his heart stutter, her storm magic humming low, a warm breeze stirring the air, the window mist clearing to reveal a star-strewn sky.

His eyes met hers, a slow smile spreading across his face, his hand cupping her cheek, thumb brushing her lips with a tenderness that drew a soft sigh. His fingers fondled the curve of her neck, tracing her collarbone, while his hook grazed her arm, its cool metal enticing her with a shiver-inducing tease that made her gasp. “Nor I with you, wife,” he murmured, his voice a soft growl thick with love, his hook sliding along her side, its curve tracing her hip with deliberate slowness, sending a thrill through her as her breath hitched. Her fingers brushed his hook, sending a sudden current through it, a tingling surge that raced through his veins, sparking a fiery warmth in his chest, his pulse quickening as the electric jolt intensified his desire, a low “Gods, lass, how I’ve missed that surge,” escaping his lips.

She leaned into him, her lips brushing his in a slow, lingering kiss, soft and deep, a promise sealed in the lantern’s golden glow, her sigh a quiet melody against his mouth as their tongues entwined, tasting the salt and rum of their vows. His hand slid down her back, fingers splaying across her spine, fondling the curve of her waist, pulling her closer until their bodies melded, her warmth a haven he’d never tire of. Her hands caressed his shoulders, cupping his face with a tender touch, fingers threading through his dark hair as she pressed against him, her breasts brushing his chest, his heat stirring with every gentle touch. Her fingers grazed his hook again, sending another current, a warm pulse that coiled low in his gut, igniting a primal hunger, his body tensing as the sensation urged him closer to her fire, his breath hitching with a reverent groan.

He rolled her beneath him, his thoughts lingering on the sensation he’d feel sliding into her, her heat enveloping him, tight and perfect, a home he’d found after decades adrift, his only desire to please her, to see her gray eyes blaze with the ecstasy he could give. Every moan, every shudder, was a treasure he’d chase, his heart swearing to make her feel this loved, this cherished, every night of their lives.

Her mind drifted to how his presence inside her was a steady anchor, filling her with a warmth that tamed her wildest storms, making her feel whole, safe, and utterly adored, his love a fire that burned away the shadows of their past, igniting a future she'd fight for.

He entered her with a slow, deliberate thrust, drawing a soft, trembling moan from her lips, her hands gliding over his shoulders, fingers caressing his scars with a loving tenderness as she arched into him, savoring the stretch, the intimacy of their union. The bedframe's runes glowed faintly, mending a scratch from his hook's earlier graze, the enchanted oak healing seamlessly. "Killian," she whispered, her voice a reverent sigh, her gray eyes locked with his, reflecting the moonlight as her storm mark pulsed faintly, casting a blue glow across their entwined forms. "Aye, love, I'm here," he breathed, his voice thick with emotion, his thoughts consumed by the slick warmth of her, the way she held him, a perfect fit that made his chest ache with love, his every movement calculated to draw out her pleasure, to etch this moment into their souls.

His hand cupped her breast, fondling its softness, thumb brushing her nipple with a gentle reverence that drew a shuddering gasp, while his hook traced her thigh, its cool curve pressing lightly, enticing her with a thrilling caress that made her moan. He thrust again, slow and deep, each motion a tender caress, her sighs melting into soft moans, her body trembling beneath him as the Jolly Roger rocked gently, waves lapping the hull in a soothing rhythm, the sprinkle fading to a faint mist, the sea mirroring their quiet passion.

Her hands roamed his back, nails grazing his scars with loving tenderness, her thoughts swirling around the sensation of him inside her, his steady, deliberate rhythm grounding her, his love making her feel like the eye of a storm, calm yet powerful, cherished in a way she'd never known. "You make me feel… everything," she murmured, her voice a soft sob of passion, her legs wrapping around his hips, drawing him deeper, her mark glowing brighter, its light dancing across his chest.

He leaned down, kissing her neck, his lips lingering on her pulse, tasting the salt and storm of her skin, his hook resting at her thigh, its cool curve pressing gently, anchoring her as he moved with unhurried grace. His hand fondled her hip, caressing the curve with a tender touch, fingers cupping her softness as he whispered, "All I want is you, tempest," his voice a tender vow, his thrusts slow and measured, each one eliciting a shuddering sigh, her body arching to meet him, the bed creaking softly, its runes mending a faint splinter from their weight, the rhythm a counterpoint to their shared breaths.

The air thrummed with her magic, a gentle static prickling their skin, the cabin bathed in the lantern's warm glow and the faint blue of her mark, the window framing a calm sea under a starlit sky, its surface shimmering as her restrained power brushed against it. His hand cupped her breast again, thumb brushing her nipple with a reverence that made her gasp, her moan a soft, pleading note that fueled his steady pace, his thoughts fixed on her pleasure, on making her feel the depth of his love.

"Gods, you're my harbor," he murmured, his lips trailing kisses along her jaw, lingering at the corner of her mouth, his thrusts deepening slightly, each one a promise, her sighs growing longer, more languid, as she melted into him. Her fingers tangled in his hair, pulling him into a kiss that was slow and consuming, her tongue brushing his with a tenderness that made her heart swell, her thoughts consumed by how he filled her, not just physically, but emotionally, his love a tide that carried her beyond the pain of their past.

Their rhythm was a gentle dance, each thrust a deliberate exploration, his slow, deep movements drawing out every sensation, her moans soft and reverent, "Killian… love…" her voice trembling with emotion, her body trembling as she clung to him, her mark pulsing in time with her heartbeat, the sea lapping the hull in a soothing cadence, the Jolly Roger swaying like a lover's embrace. He groaned, a low, rumbling sound, his thoughts overwhelmed by the warmth of her, the way she enveloped him, his only goal to make her shudder with bliss, to be the man who could tame her storms and set her free. "Forever, love, like this," he whispered, his voice a tender growl, his hand sliding to her hip, caressing its curve, cupping her softness to guide her to meet him, their bodies melding in the lantern's glow, the air thick with their mingled scents, salt, leather, and the ozone tang of her magic.

Their climax built slowly, a tender wave that crested with quiet intensity, her sigh breaking into a soft cry, "Killian, now…" her voice a breathless plea as she trembled beneath him, her body convulsing gently, her mark flaring briefly, casting a blue light that mingled with the lantern's glow. His groan was soft and reverent, his release a warm surge as he pressed himself deeper, savoring the connection, his sea flowing into her, his thoughts filled with her, her warmth, her love, his vow to please her etched into every moment.

The Jolly Roger steadied, the sea calming to a gentle ripple, a faint breeze stirring the charts on the wall as her storm magic subsided, the rain gone, the stars sharp and clear through the window. He collapsed beside her, pulling her close, her head nestling against his chest, her fingers caressing the silver band and the pirate knot pendant, their breaths slowing in the cabin's quiet warmth.

They lay entwined for what seemed like forever, their bodies a tangled knot of warmth and love, the cabin a cocoon of starlight and lantern glow, the Jolly Roger's gentle sway a lullaby beneath them. Desylva's fingers traced idle patterns over his scars, her storm mark a faint, steady pulse against her skin, her thoughts drifting to the wild nights they'd shared in this very cabin, moments of untamed passion that had left her breathless.

She turned to him, her gray eyes glinting with a seductive spark, her voice a sultry murmur, "Remember all those wild times, love? Takin' me on that desk, up against the wall, leavin' this ship shakin' like a storm-tossed wreck?" Her lips curved into a wicked smile, her fingers brushing the silver band on his finger, then trailing lower, teasing the edge of his hip with a gentle caress.

His eyes snapped to hers, a roguish smirk spreading across his face, his hook glinting as he propped himself up, his voice a low, teasing growl. "Is that a question, wife, or a request?" His hand slid to her waist, fingers fondling her skin with a deliberate slowness that made her shiver, his thoughts racing with memories of those frenzied nights, his desire to please her burning anew. She leaned closer, her breath warm against his ear, her voice a seductive whisper, "What do you think, husband?" Her storm magic flared, a faint crackle sparking in the air, a soft drizzle pattering against the deck above, the sea stirring restlessly beneath the hull.

His smirk widened, dark and hungry, his blue eyes blazing with intent as he leaned in, his lips brushing hers with a teasing nip. "Assume the position then, love," he growled, his voice thick with promise, his hook tapping her hip lightly, urging her to move. Desylva's laugh was a husky ripple, her movements slow and deliberate as she slid from the bed, her naked form catching the lantern's glow, her dark hair spilling over her shoulders like a storm cloud, her storm mark pulsing faintly blue. She sauntered to the desk, the enchanted oak surface cluttered with charts and a tarnished spyglass, runes glowing faintly to mend a scratch. Leaning against it, her hips swayed provocatively, her gray eyes locking with his. "Come plunder me, pirate," she purred, her voice a sultry challenge, her fingers motioning him over with a beckoning curl, her storm magic surging, a low rumble of thunder rolling outside as the drizzle sharpened into a steady rain, the Jolly Roger pitching with a restless lurch.

He rose, his movements predatory, his body a map of scars and muscle lit by the lantern's golden glow, the silver chain and sapphire ring glinting with each step. He reached her in three strides, his hand cupping her face, pulling her into a fierce, hungry kiss, his lips claiming hers with raw intensity, her tongue meeting his in a wild, rum-laced dance that drew a sharp moan from her throat. Her hands gripped his shoulders, nails digging into his skin as she pressed herself against him, her breasts brushing his chest, the heat of her body igniting a fire in his veins. His hand fondled her side, fingers caressing the curve of her waist, cupping her breast with a tender reverence, thumb teasing her nipple, while his hook grazed her arm, its cool metal enticing her with a shiver-inducing caress that made her gasp. Her fingers brushed his hook, sending a sudden current through it, a tingling surge that raced through his body, sparking a fiery thrill in his chest, his breath hitching as the electric jolt intensified his hunger, a primal "Gods, lass," escaping his lips, his eyes darkening with desire.

He lifted her onto the desk, charts crinkling beneath her, the spyglass rolling to the floor with a dull clatter as he pressed himself between her thighs, his hook bracing against the desk's edge, its cold curve digging into the wood, runes glowing to mend the faint splinter. "Ready for a good pluderin', tempest?" he growled, his voice a rough promise, his blue eyes burning into hers as his hand slid down her side, caressing her hip with a possessive edge, fingers fondling her curves. "Take me," she gasped, her voice a raw plea, her legs wrapping around his waist, pulling him closer, her storm mark blazing brighter, casting a blue glow across the cabin, the air crackling with static as thunder clapped outside, rain lashing the deck in a frenzied torrent, the ship bucking, waves slamming the hull.

He entered her with a single, forceful thrust, her cry sharp and wild, "Killian!" as she arched against him, her hands clutching the desk's edge, knuckles whitening as she braced herself, her body trembling with the intensity of his presence. The sensation was overwhelming, her heat gripping him, fierce and unyielding, a tempest that set his nerves ablaze, his groan a primal rumble as he savored the connection. "Give me your storm, love." he rasped, his voice a gravelly snarl, his hook scraping the desk, runes glowing to mend the gouges as he thrust again, rough and deep, each movement a claim, her moans breaking into desperate gasps, "it's yours. Harder, pirate!" Her mind

swirled with the feel of him, powerful, relentless, filling her with a wildness that set her soul ablaze, his love a storm that shattered her defenses, making her feel alive, untamed, and utterly his.

His pace was unrelenting, each thrust a fierce, primal clash, the desk shuddering beneath them, charts tearing as they slid across its surface, runes mending the splintered wood as the cabin trembled with their fervor, the Jolly Roger pitching wildly as waves crashed with a savage rhythm. “Take it all, Des, every bloody inch,” he snarled, his hand gripping her thigh, lifting it to angle himself deeper, his hook slamming into the desk, runes healing the splintered wood as he braced himself, its sharp edge grazing her hip with a thrilling sting that drew a gasping moan. Her fingers brushed his hook again, sending another current through it, a warm, pulsing shock that surged through his veins, igniting a fiery ecstasy, his body shuddering as he growled, “Bloody hell, lass, you’re killin’ me, with that,” the sensation urging him to thrust harder, his eyes blazing with raw passion.

Her hands roamed his chest, cupping his face, fingers fondling his scars with a loving tenderness, her touch enticing him further as she moaned, “Keep goin’, love!” Her nails raked his back, drawing blood as she pushed against him, her cries sharp and unrestrained, “I want it all, Killian. I need it all. Don’t hold back!” Her hands clawed at his shoulders, her body arching to meet his, her thoughts consumed by his ferocity, his strength, his passion, making her feel like a tempest unleashed, her heart soaring with the knowledge that she was his, and he was hers, no sea strong enough to tear them apart. “Break me, love!” she gasped, her voice a raw scream, her legs tightening around him, pulling him deeper as the desk bucked beneath them, its legs scraping the planks with a grating screech, runes mending the gouges.

He thrust harder, faster, his groan a guttural roar, his thoughts fixed on her pleasure, on making her shatter, his love a fire that burned through every restraint. “Surrender to me, love. … Let it go, for me!” he growled, his voice rough with need, his hand tangling in her hair, tugging hard as he drove into her, the desk slamming against the wall with a thunderous crash, the Jolly Roger jolting as waves surged.

“Take it. It’s all yours. Claim it, pirate. Break me.” Her fingers gripped his hook once more, sending a final current through it, a searing jolt that pulsed through his core, his body trembling as he gasped, “Des, gods, you’re my fire,” the electric thrill pushing him to the edge, his thrusts growing erratic with need.

Their climax hit like a gale, her scream piercing the air, “Killian!” her body convulsing against him, a trembling surge of ecstasy, her mark flaring in a blinding blue pulse, her storm magic sparking arcs that danced across the cabin, her thoughts overwhelmed by the raw power of his love, the way he filled her, set her free. His roar was primal, his release a fierce, shuddering flood, spilling into her with a visceral intensity that rocked them both, his body quaking as the sensation overwhelmed him, his thoughts consumed by her fire, her surrender, his vow to please her sealed in this moment.

The Jolly Roger shuddered, lightning splitting the sky in a deafening crack, the rain a torrential roar that drowned the world beyond, waves crashing in a chaotic peak that rattled the hull, charts scattering across the floor in a storm-wrought flurry. The storm subsided, rain tapering to a soft patter, the sea calming to a gentle ripple, the Jolly Roger steadying with a contented creak, timbers sighing as if exhausted by their passion.

He pulled her into his arms, easing her down from the desk, their bodies slick with sweat, her head resting against his chest, her storm mark dimming to a faint glow, the cabin thick with the scents of salt, leather, and their love. He placed her down. As they stood facing each other, her fingers traced the silver band on his finger, then the pirate knot pendant, its cool weight a testament to their unbreakable bond, her hands caressing his chest, fondling his scars with a tender touch.

“Plundered me proper, love,” she murmured, her voice a sated purr, her gray eyes glinting with mischief as she pressed a soft kiss to his jaw, her fingers cupping his face, lingering with a loving stroke, her thoughts lingering on how he made her feel, wild, cherished, a storm forever anchored by his love. He chuckled, his hook resting lightly at her hip, its curve glinting in the lantern’s dying glow, his hand threading through her hair, fondling her scalp with a gentle caress, his blue eyes soft with adoration, his thoughts fixed on her, his tempest, his wife, the woman he’d spend every night pleasing, loving, claiming. “Aye, tempest, and I’ll plunder you again ‘til the seas run dry,” he growled, his voice a tender promise, kissing her deeply, their lips melding in a slow, passionate dance.

He scooped her into his arms, her body limp and sated against his chest, her dark hair clinging to her sweat-slicked skin, her storm mark dimming to a faint glow. He carried her back to the bed, its frame glowing faintly as runes

mended a final scratch from their fervor. The lantern's golden glow cast their shadows in a soft dance across the cabin walls, the air thick with the scents of salt, leather, and their love.

As he crossed the cabin, her fingers traced the silver band on his finger, her gray eyes shimmering with a mix of mischief and devotion, her voice a husky murmur, "You're mine, pirate, every night. Can't wait to have you break my storm like only you can. We lost so many years, love, and we've got so much to make up for. Hope you're up for the task."

Her storm magic hummed low, a warm breeze stirring the charts on the floor, the sea lapping the hull in a gentle rhythm that echoed her words.

His blue eyes blazed with adoration, his roguish smirk softening into a tender smile as he laid her gently on the bed, the quilt crinkling beneath her, his hook resting lightly at her hip, its curve glinting in the lantern's dying glow. "Aye, love, I can't get enough of you and I'll enjoy provin' it over and over," he murmured, his voice a warm growl, thick with passion and promise, his hand cupping her face, thumb brushing her cheek with a reverence that made her heart stutter. "Those lost years? We'll make 'em fade with every night like this. You're my forever, and I'll plunder you every night 'til the stars burn out."

He leaned down, kissing her deeply, his lips melding with hers in a slow, consuming dance, their tongues entwining with a tenderness that sealed their vows anew, her soft sigh vibrating against his mouth, her fingers tangling in his hair, pulling him closer. "Gods, Killian, you'd better," she whispered against his lips, her voice a playful tease laced with love. He smirked as his hand roamed down her side and rested between her thighs, "The way your channel opens for my ship, and takes it in. I'll be dropping my anchor every night." She smiled as she pressed herself against his hand, her storm mark pulsed faintly, casting a blue glow across his chest. "I'm holdin' you to that, pirate, every night." He chuckled, his hook sliding to her waist, pulling her against him, their bodies entwining once more, the Jolly Roger rocking them gently, the sea's whisper a hymn to their wedding night, their love a blaze that would burn eternal beneath the star-strewn sky.

Day 48

The cabin aboard the Jolly Roger was a cocoon of warmth, timbers creaking softly as the ship rocked on the gentle harbor waves, the faint scent of salt and polished oak mingling with the musk of their shared slumber. Desylva stirred first, her gray eyes fluttering open in the pre-dawn gloom, the mark on her skin pulsing a faint blue, like a distant lighthouse in her dreams. She turned, her gaze softening as it settled on Killian, his dark hair tousled against the pillow, his chest rising and falling with the steady rhythm of sleep. A smile tugged at her lips, tender and unguarded, as she slid her arm beneath the covers, her fingers seeking the familiar heat of his body. She traced the curve of his side, her touch light as a breeze, savoring the warmth that anchored her after years of searching realms. He sighed in his sleep, a low, contented sound that vibrated through her, and she let her hand linger, holding him gently, as if to tether their shared heartbeats against the world's uncertainties.

Her touch grew bolder, a slow caress that stirred him from slumber. Killian's blue eyes flickered open, catching the dim glow of her mark, and he turned to meet her gaze, his lips curving into a sleepy, roguish grin. "Whatcha scheming, love?" he murmured, his voice a husky drawl, rough with sleep but laced with the teasing warmth that always set her pulse racing. Her smile widened, mischievous and bright, her gray eyes glinting like storm clouds kissed by dawn.

"How'd you fancy slipping away from Storybrooke for a while?" she asked, her tone light but threaded with a longing that echoed the sea's restless call. Killian propped himself on an elbow, his hook glinting faintly as it rested on the blanket, one brow arching in that familiar, skeptical charm. "Away, is it? And where might we be off to?"

Desylva's fingers trailed along his arm, her touch a quiet promise as she leaned closer, her voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper. "One last realm-hopping adventure, Killian… before we anchor ourselves here for good." His eyes narrowed, a spark of intrigue dancing in their depths, though his tone stayed playfully dubious. "Realm-hopping? Unless you've got a secret stash of magic beans tucked away, love, I'm not sure how…" She cut him off with a soft laugh, her hand resting over his heart, feeling its steady thrum. "We don't need beans, my love," she said, her voice rich with confidence, the cadence of a woman who'd wrested secrets from the darkest corners of magic. "All I need is you, the Roger, and a full moon. Then I can open a portal."

Killian's brow shot up higher, his curiosity now fully piqued, his grin tilting with a mix of admiration and skepticism. "Since when've you been spinning portals?" he asked, his accent curling around the words like a wave around a ship's prow. Desylva's expression softened, her gaze drifting to the window where the first light of dawn shimmered on the harbor. "Forty-four years held captive by Rumpelstiltskin," she said, her voice steady but tinged with the weight of those lost decades, "I learned a thing or two, tricks even he couldn't cage. After I broke free, I rebuilt my strength and set out to find you. At first, my portals were wild. I landed in realms I couldn't name, lost in chaos. But over two years, I honed the craft. … I searched for you, Killian, creating portals to countless realms. … I was beginning to think I might never find you. … Then one day, a portal spat me back here and I saw the Jolly Roger in the harbor, her masts calling me home." Her eyes met his, fierce and unguarded, a storm-witch's resolve tempered by love.

He studied her, his skepticism melting into a quiet awe, though a pirate's caution lingered. "You're certain it'll work, love?" he asked, his hook tracing an idle arc on the blanket, a habit when his mind weighed risks. Desylva's smile was radiant, her confidence a beacon that banished doubt. "This time, I've got the Roger's help," she said, her voice vibrant with certainty. "Her enchantments and my magic, they've always danced together, like in the old days. The ship's as much a part of this as we are." Killian's grin returned, broad and boyish, his eyes alight with the thrill of adventure. "Well, then, when do we cast off for this grand escapade?" he asked, leaning closer, his breath warm against her cheek. She tilted her head, considering, her fingers brushing his jaw. "When's the next full moon?" Killian's brow furrowed briefly, calculating. "Next week, I reckon… Tuesday, if the almanac's true."

Her eyes sparkled, a storm brewing with mischief and love. "Then it'll be our honeymoon," she declared, her voice soft but electric, pulling him into a kiss that tasted of salt and promise, their lips moving with the slow, hungry rhythm of two souls bound by trials and triumphs. She broke away, her breath mingling with his, and added in a whisper, "Let's keep this between us for now, Killian. I don't want to tempt fate, or Storybrooke's gossip, until we're ready to sail."

He arched a brow, his smirk pure pirate. "A secret adventure? You're speaking my language, love." Desylva's laugh was low, her hand resting on the ship's timber wall, feeling its subtle pulse. "The Roger's restless, you know. She's been moored too long, itching for the open sea." Killian chuckled, his hand brushing a strand of hair from her face. "Aye, sometimes I swear she fancies you more than me."

Desylva's smile turned knowing, her fingers lacing with his. "Not true. She knows we're one. My magic ties to her enchantments, a bond as deep as ours." Killian's voice softened, a rare vulnerability surfacing. "The three of us, then. Together forever." Desylva's gaze held his, her storm-gray eyes shimmering with unspoken promises as her fingers tightened around his, the warmth of their touch grounding them both. "Forever," she echoed.

The Jolly Roger rocked gently, as if nodding in agreement, timbers humming with shared purpose. Killian's hand cupped her face, his thumb tracing her cheek. "I love you, Desylva Jones." Her hand found his heart again, her voice a vow. "And I love you, Killian."

Their kiss deepened, sealing their pact as the dawn broke, the ship cradling their dreams of one last adventure.

A few hours later

A golden light spilled through the window, dancing across the cabin, the air thick with the briny tang of sea salt and the faint musk of leather from their discarded clothes, the ship's gentle sway a lullaby beneath the distant cry of gulls.

Desylva stirred on the bed, her hair splayed across the pillow like spilled ink, her storm gray eyes fluttering open to find Killian's side empty, yet still warm from his presence, their shared heat lingering like a promise. She rose, her storm-mark pulsing faintly, and slipped on one of his long shirts, the linen soft and salt-stiffened, its hem brushing her thighs.

Quarterdeck

She emerged from the companionway, the planks cool under her bare feet, into a breeze that whipped her hair and stung her cheeks with salt. Killian stood at side of the companionway hood, his hook glinting as he stepped back

from the enchanted oak, where a freshly carved *"J"* now gleamed after the "*D*" in their initials, *KJ + D,* carved so long ago. The wood's runes shimmered faintly, holding the mark despite its mending magic.

She approached, her fingers tracing the jagged script, the carving rough and warm under her touch, and he turned, his blue eyes soft yet fierce. "Took a long time to get that *J* there, love," he murmured, his voice a low rumble thick with years of longing, "but it's now where it should've been, all those years ago."

She took his hook in her hand and pricked her finger, letting her blood drop into the carving. "Now my blood is part of the ship forever." He smiled, pricked his finger with his hook and let his blood fall into the carving. "Aye love, forever."

He pulled her close, his hand splaying across her back, and kissed her deeply, his lips warm and tasting of salt, the sea's hum rising as her storm crackled faintly, sealing their vow anew. The *KJ + DJ Forever* shimmering as the Jolly Roger gave them her blessing.

Day 49

Harbor

The late afternoon sun dipped low over Storybrooke, casting a golden sheen across the harbor where the Jolly Roger bobbed gently, her sails furled and timbers gleaming with a quiet pride.

Henry's Room

In his cluttered room, Henry sat cross-legged on his bed, the storybook closed beside him, its leather cover now a silent partner in his latest scheme. His pencil scratched furiously across a notebook, sketching out a plan with the precision of a general plotting a campaign. The idea had struck him during breakfast at Granny's, sparked by Ruby's offhand remark about Killian and Desylva's electric wedding performance.

"Those two deserve a night as wild as their shanties." Henry's mind had raced, envisioning a romantic dinner to celebrate their union. A surprise to weave another thread into their story of true love.

He scribbled a list… candles, tablecloth, flowers (wild ones, like Desylva's storms), food (Granny's best, maybe seafood for the pirate vibe), music (something soft, not Smee's shanties). His brow furrowed as he tapped the pencil against his chin, picturing the perfect spot. A secluded cove just beyond the harbor, where the cliffs met the sea, its rocky shore kissed by waves and framed by pines that whispered in the breeze. It was a place he'd stumbled upon while exploring, hidden enough for intimacy but open to the stars, a stage for their love.

"They'll love it," he muttered, his grin widening as he imagined their faces—Killian's roguish smirk, Desylva's storm-gray eyes sparkling with surprise. He jotted down a final note. *Get them there without spilling the secret.*

Satisfied, he tucked the notebook under his arm, grabbed his jacket, and darted out, his sneakers thudding down the stairs with purpose.

Granny's Diner

Henry burst through the door, the bell jangling wildly as he skidded to the counter. Ruby looked up from wiping a mug, her red-streaked hair catching the light. "Whoa, kid, what's the rush?" she asked, her wolfish grin flashing. Henry leaned in, voice low and conspiratorial. "I need your help. I'm planning a surprise dinner for Killian and Desylva. Romantic, by the cove. Can Granny whip up something special? Seafood, maybe some of that lobster bisque they love?"

Ruby's eyes lit up, and she leaned closer, intrigued. "A secret love feast? I'm in. Granny's got a killer recipe for shrimp scampi, and I'll throw in some chocolate tarts for dessert. Those two seem like the indulgent type." Henry nodded eagerly, scribbling her suggestions. "Perfect! Can you deliver it to the cove by six? I'll set up the rest." Ruby winked, already jotting down the order. "Consider it done, kid. You're gonna make their night."

Various locations

With the food secured, Henry raced to the flower shop, where he talked Mr. French into donating a bundle of wildflowers. Sea lavender and daisies, their untamed beauty a nod to Desylva's spirit. He then scavenged a linen tablecloth from his mom's attic and borrowed a portable speaker from Emma, promising to return it "without a scratch."

Cove

By mid-afternoon, he was at the cove, his backpack stuffed with supplies. He set up a small wooden table, borrowed from the diner's storage, draping it with the tablecloth and arranging the wildflowers in a chipped vase. Candles flickered in mason jars, their warm glow dancing against the cliffs as the sea lapped gently below.

He tested the speaker, a soft violin melody drifting through the air, blending with the waves' rhythm. Stepping back, he surveyed his work, hands on hips, a triumphant grin spreading across his face. "This is perfect," he said to the empty cove, the stars just beginning to peek through the twilight sky.

Harbor

Henry sprinted back to the harbor, his heart pounding with excitement as he approached the Jolly Roger. The ship's lanterns cast a golden glow across the deck, where Killian and Desylva stood near the helm, their laughter carrying on the breeze.

Jolly Roger

Killian's hook glinted as he gestured animatedly, recounting some tale, while Desylva leaned against him, her dark hair whipping in the wind, her storm-gray eyes sparkling with amusement. Henry clambered aboard, his sneakers thudding on the planks, and they turned, their expressions shifting to curiosity. "Well, now, lad, what's got you stormin' the Roger like a man on a mission?" Killian asked, his brow arching, a playful skepticism in his voice as he rested his hand on Desylva's waist. Desylva tilted her head, her smile teasing. "Yeah, kid, you look like you're up to something. Spill it."

Henry bounced on his toes, trying to keep his grin in check. "I need you both to come with me. It's important," he said, his voice brimming with barely contained excitement. Desylva's eyes narrowed, her storm magic humming faintly, a soft breeze stirring the air. "Important, huh? This better not be another one of your 'save the town' quests, Henry," she teased, crossing her arms.

Killian chuckled, his hook tapping the helm lightly. "Aye, what's the game, lad? You've got that schemer's glint in your eye, like your mum when she's got a plan." Henry shook his head, hands raised in mock innocence. "No quests, no games. Just trust me! You'll like it, I promise. Follow me." He darted toward the gangplank, pausing to glance back, his grin infectious. "Come on, you're gonna love this!"

Exchanging a curious glance, Killian and Desylva followed, their boots echoing on the planks as they descended to the dock. "What's he got up his sleeve?" Desylva murmured, her tone a mix of amusement and suspicion, her hand brushing Killian's as they walked. Killian smirked, his blue eyes glinting with intrigue. "Dunno, love, but the lad's got a knack for surprises. Let's see what he's cooked up."

Enroute to cove

Henry led them along the harbor's edge, past the flickering streetlamps, toward the cove's hidden path, his pace quick and purposeful. "No peeking!" he called over his shoulder, dodging their playful questions with a laugh. The sea's murmur grew louder as they neared the cliffs, the air thick with salt and pine, the sky now a deep indigo studded with stars.

Cove

As they rounded the final bend, the cove came into view, its rocky shore aglow with candlelight. The table stood at the cliff's edge, draped in linen, wildflowers swaying in the breeze, the soft violin melody weaving through the waves'

rhythm. Plates of steaming shrimp scampi and lobster bisque waited, their rich aroma mingling with the sea's tang, a bottle of rum gleaming beside two glasses.

Killian and Desylva froze, their eyes widening as they took in the scene. "Henry…" Desylva breathed, her voice soft with awe, her storm-gray eyes shimmering as she stepped forward, her hand finding Killian's. Killian's grin was slow and radiant, his hook glinting as he squeezed her hand. "Bloody hell, lad, you've outdone yourself," he said, his voice thick with emotion, his gaze sweeping the cove with a pirate's appreciation for a well-laid plan.

Henry beamed, rocking on his heels. "Surprise! I wanted to give you a proper romantic dinner. Y'know, to celebrate your wedding and all the epic stuff you've been through." He gestured to the table, his excitement spilling over. "Granny made the food, Ruby helped, and I set it all up. You two deserve a night like this." Desylva's smile trembled, her storm magic humming softly, a warm breeze stirring the candles' flames. "Kid, this is… incredible," she said, her voice cracking as she pulled him into a fierce hug, her arms tight around his shoulders. "You're somethin' else, Henry." Killian ruffled Henry's hair, his blue eyes warm with gratitude. "Aye, lad, you've got a heart bigger than the seas. Thank you."

Henry stepped back, grinning ear to ear. "Sit, eat, enjoy! I'll leave you to it. … Don't want to crash your date." He winked, then darted back toward the path, pausing to call over his shoulder, "Have fun, you two!" Killian chuckled, guiding Desylva to the table, his hand resting at the small of her back. "Shall we, my tempest?" he murmured, pulling out her chair with a flourish, his hook glinting in the candlelight. Desylva sat, her smile radiant, her storm-gray eyes locked with his. "Aye, my pirate," she purred, her voice laced with love as she reached for his hand, their silver bands catching the starlight.

The sea lapped gently below, the violin's melody weaving through the night, as they leaned in, their lips meeting in a soft, lingering kiss, the cove a haven for their love, Henry's gift a perfect chapter in their story.

They settled at the table, the candlelight casting a warm glow across their faces as Killian poured rum into the glasses, the amber liquid catching the starlight with a pirate's gleam. Desylva lifted her glass, her storm-gray eyes twinkling as she clinked it against his. "To Henry, the lad who keeps surprisin' us," she said, her voice rich with affection. Killian's grin widened, his hook resting lightly on the table as he nodded. "Aye, to the truest believer. Lad's got a knack for makin' magic happen." They sipped, the rum's warmth spreading through them, and turned to the food, the shrimp scampi's buttery aroma mingling with the lobster bisque's creamy tang. Desylva spooned bisque, savoring the rich flavor, her smile softening. "This is Granny's best yet. Henry knew exactly what we'd love."

Killian tore into a shrimp, his blue eyes glinting with amusement as he leaned closer, his voice a low murmur. "The lad's got your heart pegged, love. Wildflowers, seafood, a cove fit for a storm and her pirate. Reckon he's been takin' notes from that storybook o' his." Desylva laughed, a husky ripple that danced through the night, her fingers brushing the wildflowers in the vase.

"He's somethin' special, ain't he? Always believin' in us, even when we doubted ourselves. When it came to this..." Desylva said, her eyes dropping to the ring on Killian's finger. "I thought it was lost forever. I still remember ordering it all those decades ago, making the dealer swear it would be ready by dawn. Billy was supposed to sneak into town and get it from him before we rose. But then…"

She paused, the memory of the night Rumpelstiltskin took her still carrying a faint, old sting. She took a deep breath and continued, "All those years apart, the long decades of the curse… I never thought I'd see it." A soft, breathless smile touched her lips as she looked at the ring again. "For Henry to have found it, in Gold's shop of all places, after he saw a picture in his storybook... it defies everything."

She took Killian's hand, letting the thought hang between them in a quiet, reflective moment, before she continued. "It's like he's weavin' our story, piece by piece."

Killian's gaze softened. He laced his fingers through hers, their silver bands meeting with a soft clink. "He's our anchor," he murmured. "Reminds me o' you. Stubborn, fierce, with a heart bigger than the seas. We're lucky to have him."

A faint hum of storm magic sparked, sending a warm breeze through the room to stir the candle flames. She squeezed his hand tightly. "Aye, we are. Here's to Henry, and to nights like this."

They ate slowly, savoring each bite and each other's company, their conversation drifting to Henry's boundless energy, his knack for uniting Storybrooke's heroes, and the way his faith had reignited their own. "Remember how he hugged us on the pier?" Desylva said, her voice tender, a spoonful of bisque paused midair. "Like he'd won a war, just seein' us together." Killian chuckled, his hook tapping the table lightly. "Aye. Lad's got a hero's heart. Reckon he'll be plannin' our anniversaries next."

They laughed, the sound mingling with the waves' gentle lap, the cove a sanctuary where their love and gratitude for Henry burned bright.

As they finished, the chocolate tarts arrived, rich and decadent, a sweet end to the meal. Desylva fed Killian a bite, her fingers lingering near his lips, her smile teasing. "Sweet enough for you, Captain?" He caught her wrist, kissing her fingertips, his voice a playful growl. "Not half as sweet as you, love."

The violin melody swelled through the speaker, its notes weaving through the sea's rhythm, and Killian rose, offering his hand with a roguish bow. "Care to dance, my bride?" he asked, his blue eyes sparkling with invitation. Desylva took his hand and stood, her smile radiant. "Lead on, my pirate," she purred, her storm-gray eyes locking with his.

They moved to the cove's rocky shore, their boots scuffing the stones as he pulled her close, his hand at her waist, his hook resting gently at her hip. They swayed under the stars, their bodies pressed together, moving in a slow, intimate dance that echoed the Jolly Roger's gentle sway. The sea whispered below, the candles flickering like tiny beacons, and Desylva's storm magic pulsed softly, a warm breeze curling around them.

Killian paused mid-step, plucking a sea lavender from the table's vase, its purple petals soft and wild. "Hold still, love," he murmured, his voice tender as he tucked the flower into her dark hair, its delicate bloom contrasting her windswept locks. "There. Fits you perfect, like a storm's crown." Desylva's breath hitched, her fingers brushing the flower, her eyes shimmering with emotion. "You're a charmer, Killian Jones," she whispered, pulling him into a deep, lingering kiss, her lips warm and tasting of rum and chocolate. They resumed their dance, their steps growing bolder, laughter bubbling between them as they spun, the violin's melody soaring, the cove alive with their joy.

As the music faded, they slowed, breathless and grinning, their foreheads touching. Desylva's gaze drifted to the ground, spotting a soft wool blanket spread near the cliff's edge, its edges tucked neatly, a subtle addition Henry must have left. "Look at that," she said, her voice a mix of amusement and awe. "Kid thought of everything." Killian's grin turned wicked, his hook glinting as he tugged her toward it. "Aye, let's put it to good use, shall we?"

They sank onto the blanket, the coarse wool warm against the cool stone, the sea's murmur a steady heartbeat below. Desylva straddled his lap, her hands cupping his face, her storm-gray eyes blazing with desire. "Ready to make this cove quake, pirate?" she teased, her voice a sultry challenge, her storm magic crackling faintly, a static charge in the air.

Their lips crashed together in a fierce, hungry kiss, her tongue teasing his with a wild, rum-laced dance that drew a guttural groan from his throat. Killian's hand roamed her back, fingers tangling in her hair, pulling her closer as his hook grazed her thigh, its cool metal sending shivers through her. She moaned into his mouth, her hands sliding beneath his coat, nails grazing his chest through his shirt, the heat of their bodies igniting a fire that rivaled the candles' glow.

The weather shifted, Desylva's storm magic flaring, thunder rumbled low in the distance, a deep growl that echoed their rising passion, and lightning flickered faintly, casting stark shadows across the cove. Rain began to fall, a soft patter at first, kissing their skin with cool droplets, the sea swelling restlessly below, waves crashing against the cliffs with growing urgency.

Their kisses deepened, desperate and consuming, her fingers tugging at his shirt, baring his chest, her lips trailing hot kisses along his jaw, down his neck, tasting the salt and warmth of his skin. Killian's hand cupped her cheek, his thumb brushing her lips before sliding to her waist, fondling the curve of her hip, pulling her tighter against him.

"Gods, lass," he rasped, his voice thick with need, his hook pressing into the blanket, anchoring them as the rain intensified, soaking their clothes, clinging to their skin. Lightning cracked closer, illuminating their entwined forms, Desylva's storm mark glowing faintly blue, pulsing with her quickening breath. She gasped, her body arching into

his, her hands clutching his shoulders as thunder boomed overhead, shaking the cove, the rain now a steady torrent, drenching them in a wild, exhilarating embrace.

They rolled on the blanket, her beneath him now, their kisses unbroken, a primal clash of lips and tongues, her moans sharp and breathless as his hand slid beneath her shirt, caressing her skin. The storm raged around them, lightning splitting the sky in jagged arcs, thunder clapping in time with their fevered breaths, the rain a curtain that sealed them in their own world.

“Killian,” she whispered, her voice a raw plea, her storm-gray eyes locking with his, blazing with love and desire. He kissed her deeply, his lips claiming hers with a fierce promise, his thoughts consumed by her fire, her surrender, their love a tempest that nothing could break.

The cove trembled with their passion, the sea roaring its approval, the weather a living chorus to their untamed hearts, Henry’s gift a perfect stage for their storm-wrought love.

Desylva’s fingers dug into his shoulders, her body arching against him as the rain soaked them through. Her leather jacket heavy and clinging, his coat sodden against his back. Lightning flashed, illuminating her face, wild, radiant, her storm mark glowing brighter, pulsing with her racing heart. She gasped into his kiss, her nails grazing his neck.

Killian pulled back slightly, his blue eyes blazing with a mix of hunger and mischief, his breath ragged. “Lass,” he rasped, his voice a low growl thick with desire, “this cove’s a fine stage, but I’m thinkin’ we take this storm back to the Roger. … Plunder you proper in our cabin, where the sea can sing us through.” His hook grazed her cheek, cool and thrilling against her rain-slicked skin, a teasing promise that made her shiver.

Desylva’s laugh was husky, her storm-gray eyes glinting with challenge as she propped herself up, water dripping from her hair. “Oh, you’re playin’ cautious now, Captain?” she teased, her voice dripping with playful defiance, her fingers tracing the silver band on his finger. “But I’ll bite. Let’s see if you can make that ship quake harder than this storm.” She leaned in, nipping his lower lip.

Her storm magic flared. A sudden gust of wind whipped through the cove, rattling the candles before the heavy downpour extinguished the flames entirely. Thunder boomed overhead, urging them on. Killian grinned, dark and hungry, as he pulled her to her feet. “Challenge accepted,” he growled.

He gripped her hand, their fingers intertwining as they abandoned the blanket and the table, leaving the cove behind. Their laughter mingled with the roar of the rain.

Enroute to the Jolly Roger

They ran through the storm, boots splashing through puddles along the cliff path, the sea churning below, waves crashing against the rocks with a ferocity that matched their urgency. Lightning streaked overhead, illuminating their path, Desylva’s storm magic weaving through the tempest. Rain lashed their faces, but they reveled in it, her dark hair plastered to her cheeks, his coat billowing like a sail.

Granny’s Diner

Their laughter echoed wildly as they dashed past Granny’s Diner, its neon sign flickering through the downpour, casting a rosy glow on their rain-soaked forms. Inside, Henry, Ruby, and Grumpy glanced up from a booth, catching the blur of Killian and Desylva sprinting by, their joyous cackles piercing the storm’s roar. Ruby’s wolfish grin spread wide, her red-streaked hair glinting as she leaned back. “Well, *Operation Dinner for Two*’s a smash hit,” she declared, high-fiving Henry across the table.

Henry beamed, his eyes bright with pride, “Told ya they’d love it! But I should probably grab the stuff from the cove. Knowing them, they might conjure a full-blown tempest out there.” Ruby and Grumpy burst out laughing, the diner’s warm light dancing in their eyes, “Kid’s got a point,” Grumpy grunted, his scowl twitching into a rare smirk. “I’ll help ya haul it back.” Ruby slid out of the booth, tossing her apron on the counter. “Count me in. Let’s beat the storm.”

The trio headed out, their boots scuffing the linoleum as they stepped into the rain, bound for the cove.

Enroute to the Jolly Roger

“Keep up, pirate!” she called, her voice bright with exhilaration, tugging him faster as thunder rolled, shaking the ground. Killian laughed, his hook glinting as he matched her pace, his blue eyes locked on her. “Not lettin’ you out o’ my sight, love!” he shouted back, the wind carrying his words as they neared the harbor, the Jolly Roger’s masts rising like beacons through the storm.

The Jolly Roger

They clambered aboard, the deck slick and gleaming, the ship rocking eagerly as if welcoming their return. The companionway loomed, and Killian swept Desylva into his arms, her legs wrapping around his waist as he carried her below, their lips crashing together in a desperate, rain-soaked kiss.

Killian & Desylva’s Cabin

The cabin door slammed shut behind them, the Jolly Roger’s timbers creaking as the storm raged outside, lightning flashing through the stern window, casting stark shadows across the salt-worn planks. They paused, breathless, and Desylva slid down, her hands steadying herself against his chest.

“Boots off, love,” she murmured, her voice a sultry command, her fingers already tugging at the laces of his sodden boots. Killian chuckled, his hook braced against the desk as he kicked one off, the leather thudding wetly to the floor, then the other, his eyes never leaving hers. She followed suit, unlacing her own with quick, deft movements, the boots landing beside his in a damp pile, water pooling on the planks, her bare feet cool against the wood.

Their clothes came next, a frantic dance of need. Her jacket fell in a sodden heap, his coat followed, shirts and trousers peeling away to reveal rain-slicked skin, their silver bands glinting in the lantern’s flickering glow. Desylva pushed him against the enchanted oak desk, charts scattering as she straddled him, her hands cupping his face, her storm-gray eyes blazing with raw need. “Now, pirate,” she growled, her voice a sultry command, her storm mark pulsing bright blue, casting a glow across his chest. He entered her with a fierce thrust, her cry sharp and wild, “Killian!” as she arched against him, her heat enveloping him in a tight, perfect embrace. The sensation was electric. Her warmth gripping him, a pulsing tide that set his nerves ablaze, his groan primal as he savored the connection. The Roger bucked, waves slamming the hull, thunder clapping in time with his rhythm, rain lashing the deck in a torrential roar, her storm magic sparking arcs that danced across the cabin.

With a swift, powerful motion, he gripped her hips, his hand strong and sure, and flipped her onto her back, the desk creaking under their weight as charts slid to the floor, runes glowing faintly to mend a splintered edge. She gasped, her storm-gray eyes flashing with exhilaration, her legs wrapping around his waist as he loomed over her, his hook bracing against the desk, its cool curve digging into the wood. “My turn,” he growled, his voice a rough promise, his blue eyes burning with hunger as he thrust deeper. Her moan sharp and needy, her storm magic flaring, a gust of wind rattling the stern window, runes glowing faintly to mend any cracks ensuring the window's stability. Lightning flickering in sync with their shifting rhythm.

His hand roamed her back, fondling her curves, his hook grazing her thigh, its cool metal thrilling against her heated skin, drawing a gasping moan. “Like that, love?” he rasped, his voice rough with passion, thrusting deeper, each movement a claim, her moans breaking into desperate gasps, “Yes. Harder, Killian!” Her nails raked his shoulders, drawing blood as she pushed against him, the desk shuddering, runes glowing to mend splintered wood. Lightning split the sky, illuminating their entwined forms, her storm mark flaring brighter, the air crackling with static. “You’re mine, tempest,” he growled, his hand tangling in her hair, tugging gently as he drove into her, the ship jolting with each thrust. Her fingers brushed his hook, sending a sudden current through it, a tingling surge that raced through his veins, sparking a fiery thrill in his chest, his breath hitching as the electric jolt intensified his hunger, a primal “Gods, lass, that spark, it’s heaven,” escaping his lips.

Their rhythm grew relentless, a primal clash of need and love, his thrusts deepening, each eliciting a shuddering moan, her body trembling as she gasped, “More, pirate, claim me!” The desk thudded against the wall, runes mending creaks, waves crashing in time with their frantic pace. Her storm magic roared, lightning splitting the sky in jagged arcs, thunder shaking the cabin, rain pounding the deck in a deafening torrent. “Ready to break free, lass? Ready to let it go?” he rasped, his voice a gravelly snarl, his blue eyes burning into hers as he angled himself deeper, his hand gripping her hip, lifting her to meet him, his hook scraping the desk, runes healing the gouges.

She arched beneath him, her cry breaking into a wild crescendo, “Yes. I’m ready. Now, Killian!” her voice a raw scream, her legs tightening around him, pulling him deeper as their climax crested like a tidal wave.

Their release was a cataclysm, a shared eruption that consumed them both. Her body convulsed, her scream piercing and joyous, “Killian!” as waves of ecstasy crashed through her, her inner muscles clenching him in a fierce, pulsing grip, her storm mark flaring in a blinding blue pulse, sparking arcs that danced across the cabin like miniature lightning bolts.

Her pleasure was a torrent, a shuddering flood that left her trembling, her breath hitching in sharp, ragged gasps, her nails digging into his shoulders, anchoring her as the sensation overwhelmed her senses, her body quaking with aftershocks that rippled through her core.

His climax followed, a primal, shuddering explosion. His body tensed, a guttural roar tearing from his throat as he erupted within her, a searing, pulsing flood that spilled in multiple, forceful bursts, each surge a visceral release that rocked him to his core, his heat flowing into her in a hot, relentless tide, filling her with a warmth that made her gasp anew. The intensity was overwhelming, his nerves alight with the electric connection, his body trembling as the final pulses ebbed, leaving him spent, his thoughts consumed by her, the way she held him, her fire, her love, a home he’d found after decades adrift.

The Roger shuddered, lightning splitting the sky in a deafening crack, the rain a torrential roar that drowned the world beyond, waves crashing in a chaotic peak that rattled the hull, charts scattering across the floor in a storm-wrought flurry. The storm eased, rain tapering to a soft patter, the sea calming as her magic subsided, the ship steadying with a contented creak. Killian collapsed beside her on the desk, pulling her into his arms, their bodies slick with sweat and rain, her head resting on his chest, her storm mark dimming to a faint glow, the cabin thick with the scents of salt, leather, and their love.

“Plundered you proper, lass,” he murmured, his voice a sated growl, his hook resting lightly at her hip, its curve glinting in the lantern’s dying glow. Desylva laughed, her fingers tracing his silver band, then brushing the pirate knot pendant, her gray eyes glinting with mischief. “Aye, you did. But you didn’t get everything. Plenty more to plunder in my cave. You ready to dive in for a second plunder?” she purred, kissing him deeply, their lips melding in a slow, passionate dance.

The Jolly Roger rocked them gently, their love a blaze that would burn eternal beneath the storm-wrought sky.

Day 50-52

In the quiet corners of Storybrooke, Killian and Desylva wove their secret plans, their whispers filled with the thrill of a final realm-hopping honeymoon aboard the Jolly Roger, a last dance with adventure before embracing a quieter life by the sea.

Granny’s Diner

Amid the clink of coffee mugs and the hum of small-town chatter, Desylva hunched over a crumpled napkin, her pencil dancing across its surface as she sketched a modest seaside cottage. Her lines traced gabled roofs kissed by salt air, windows framing wind-whipped waves, and a garden where storms might rest.

Killian leaned closer, his blue eyes softening with a rare, unguarded smile, tracing her vision with a tenderness that belied his pirate’s edge. His hook rested lightly on the table’s edge, glinting in the diner’s warm glow, a silent vow to build that dream together as the napkin became a map of their future.

Day 53

Jolly Roger

The Jolly Roger rocked gently in the harbor, timbers creaking under a twilight sky streaked with fading pinks and purples, the air carrying the sharp tang of salt and the faint hum of Desylva’s storm-born magic lingering like a restless breeze.

Killian and Desylva sat on the deck near the helm, their shoulders brushing as they leaned against a coil of rope, the ship's lanterns casting a warm golden glow across their faces. His black coat was unbuttoned, his hook glinting faintly as he toyed with a loose thread on his sleeve, his blue eyes softened by the quiet moment. Desylva's dark hair spilled over her shoulders, her gray eyes catching the harbor lights as she traced the sapphire ring on her finger.

A sharp buzz broke the stillness. Killian's phone vibrated on the crate beside him, its screen lighting up with a text from Belle. He squinted, reading aloud in his low, lilting drawl, "*Can you ask Desylva to meet me at the forest edge as soon as possible?*" He turned to her, his brow furrowing, a flicker of unease in his gaze. "Belle's not one for cryptic texts, love. What's she after?"

Desylva tilted her head, a wry smirk tugging at her lips, her voice carrying the rough edge of Veyra's winds. "Only one way to find out, pirate. Tell her I'm coming." She leaned closer, her breath warm against his cheek, her fingers brushing his as she nudged the phone toward him.

He typed a quick reply, "*She's on her way*," his fingers lingering on the screen, his jaw tightening as he glanced at her. "I'm coming with you," he said, his tone firm, leaving no room for debate, his hook tapping the crate with a soft clink.

Desylva arched a brow, her smirk sharpening as she crossed her arms, her dagger glinting at her hip. "Not necessary. I can handle a chat with Belle." Her voice was light, but her eyes held a spark of defiance, the same fire that had faced down wyverns and wraiths across realms.

He raised an eyebrow, his lips curling into a half-smile, though worry shadowed his gaze. "Aye, maybe, but this doesn't sit right, love. Belle's not one for texting. She'd march down here with a book in hand if she wanted you. And the forest edge? At this hour?" He gestured toward the darkening horizon, where the first stars blinked over the treeline. "It's a strange place for a meet."

Desylva paused, her fingers brushing the cursed mark on her wrist, a faint blue glyph that pulsed softly, as if sensing a storm brewing beyond the harbor's calm. She nodded slowly, conceding his point. "True. Belle's more parchment than pixels." Her voice softened, but before she could argue further, her mark flared brighter, a sudden glow that cast eerie shadows across the deck, its pulse quickening like a warning drum.

Killian's eyes flicked to it, his expression hardening. "See? Even your storm agrees with me, lass. I'm coming." His voice was a low growl, protective and unyielding, his hand reaching for hers, his fingers warm against her skin.

She sighed, a playful glint in her eyes as she squeezed his hand, her tone teasing but warm. "Fine, pirate, but if it's just Belle wanting girl talk, you're leaving. I don't need you looming over gossip." She stood, brushing salt-dusted hands on her trousers, and delivered a light punch to his arm, her knuckles grazing his leather coat.

He feigned a wince, clutching his arm with exaggerated drama, his grin flashing in the lanternlight. "Oi, wounding the captain, are we? You'll pay for that, storm lass." His voice was rich with mischief, but his eyes held a flicker of unease as he rose, adjusting his coat.

They stepped toward the gangplank, their boots thudding on the deck, the ship's rigging swaying gently above. Smee glanced up from coiling rope near the mast, his stout frame silhouetted against the twilight, as he called, "Mind the tide, Cap'n!" Killian waved him off with a smirk, his hook catching the light as he and Desylva descended to the docks, their shadows merging in the fading light, the air alive with the promise of something stirring beyond the harbor's edge.

Forest Edge (A short while later)

The forest edge loomed at the outskirts of town, where gnarled pines and twisted oaks formed a dark wall under a sky bruised with dusk, the air heavy with the scent of damp earth and pine resin, a faint chill prickling the skin. Desylva and Killian stood on a carpet of fallen needles, the silence between them taut as a bowstring, broken only by the distant hoot of an owl and the rustle of leaves in a restless breeze. Killian paced, his boots crunching softly, his black coat swaying with each step, his hook tapping his thigh, a nervous tic he rarely showed. His blue eyes

scanned the treeline, narrowed with suspicion, his voice low and edged with unease. “I told you, love, something’s off. Belle would’ve shown by now, and this place feels like a trap waiting to spring.”

Desylva leaned against a moss-covered boulder, her arms crossed, her dagger sheathed but within easy reach, her gray eyes glinting with a mix of impatience and alertness. “Could be she’s just late.” Her tone was calm, but her fingers brushed her cursed mark, its faint glow pulsing under her sleeve like a storm stirring in her veins. “Text her again. See what’s keeping her.”

Killian pulled his phone from his coat, his thumb hovering over the screen, his jaw tight as he muttered, “Bloody contraptions. Never trusted ‘em.” Before he could type, an invisible force slammed into him like a gale, a concussive wave of dark magic that sent him flying backward through the air, his phone clattered to the ground, its screen cracking on a root as he crashed into a pine with a bone-jarring thud, needles raining down around him.

“Killian!” Desylva’s voice tore through the dusk, a defiant roar that echoed her storm-born fury, her dagger flashing free in a heartbeat as she spun toward the unseen attacker, her cursed mark blazing blue, its light cutting through the gathering shadows.

Vines erupted from the earth, writhing, thorned tendrils conjured from nowhere, gleaming with an unnatural sheen as they coiled around Killian, binding him to the tree with a creak of tightening fibers. A gag of dark, shimmering cloth materialized over his mouth, muffling his grunt of rage as he struggled, his hook slashing futilely at the vines, his eyes burning with defiance. Desylva lunged toward him, her boots skidding on pine needles, but her legs locked mid-step, rooted to the ground by an unseen force. Her cursed mark flared hotter, pain lancing up her arm as she hissed, “What the bloody hell…”

Rumpelstiltskin emerged from the underbrush, his silhouette sharp against the fading light. The air thickened with his magic, a cloying weight that pressed against the lungs, his voice a silken taunt laced with venom. “Well, well, dearie, I should’ve known you’d bring your pirate pet. No matter. It’s far sweeter this way. He can watch as I finish what I started.” His finger pointed at Killian, bound and gagged, his eyes promising murder as he strained against the vines.

Desylva’s gaze blazed, her gray eyes like storm clouds ready to break. She raised her hands, and the sky answered, massive thunderheads roiling above, black and heavy, their edges crackling with silver. Thunder roared, shaking the trees, and lightning arced from her fingertips, jagged and white-hot, illuminating the clearing in stark relief. “I’ve waited decades for this, imp,” she snarled, her voice a low growl, “Bring it on. You’ll choke on my storm.”

Killian’s muffled shouts vibrated against the gag, his muscles straining as he twisted, the vines cutting into his wrist and arms, blood trickled down his arm, staining the bark, his hook glinting as he fought to free himself. Desylva stepped forward, her dagger raised, lightning dancing across its blade as she faced Rumpelstiltskin, the air crackling with the promise of a battle forged in vengeance and love.

Granny’s Diner Patio

The patio of Granny’s Diner buzzed with the warmth of string lights and the clink of coffee mugs, the air scented with grilled burgers and the faint sweetness of apple pie cooling on a rack inside. Ruby and Grumpy sat at a wooden table, Ruby’s red-streaked hair catching the light as she sipped her iced tea, her sharp eyes scanning the evening sky, while Grumpy nursed a beer, his grizzled beard flecked with foam, his pickaxe leaning against his chair like a loyal companion. The horizon darkened as massive storm clouds gathered, their edges glowing with flashes of silver lightning, a low rumble vibrating through the patio’s planks.

Ruby tilted her head, her wolfish senses prickling, her voice low and wary. “That’s no ordinary storm. Desylva’s magic’s got a signature. Wild, raw. But this…” She trailed off, her fingers tightening around her glass, her nails tapping nervously.

Grumpy squinted at the clouds, his gruff voice cutting through the diner’s hum. “Looks like Hook and his storm lass are at it again. Probably sparring or… worse.” He smirked, but it faded as a bolt cracked louder, shaking the table. “Nah, that’s too fierce. Something’s wrong.”

Ruby's eyes narrowed, her instincts flaring. She pushed her glass aside, standing abruptly, her voice sharp with concern. "Those clouds aren't just Desylva's temper. They're violent. Angry. Something's got her riled, and it's not Killian's flirting."

Regina and Henry stepped out from the diner's glass door, the bell jingling behind them. Regina's dark hair framed her sharp features, her eyes scanning the patio with a queen's imperious gaze, while Henry clutched the storybook, his young face bright but curious. He glanced up, catching the storm's glow, his brow furrowing as he said, "Whoa, Mom, look at those clouds. Desylva's seriously upset. Wonder what set her off."

Regina's lips pursed, her voice dry but laced with a grudging respect, "Only one person can push her magic that far into chaos." She crossed her arms, her leather jacket creaking, her eyes locking on the horizon where lightning danced. Ruby, Grumpy, and Henry said in unison, their voices a mix of realization and dread, "Gold."

Henry's face paled, his book slipping to the table as he stepped forward, his voice tight with worry. "We gotta check on her, Mom. Those clouds… They're not just a fight. She might need us." His eyes, wide with the earnestness of youth, pleaded with Regina.

Regina sighed, her resolve softening under his gaze, though her tone remained sharp. "She's a storm witch, Henry. She can handle herself." She glanced at the sky, where thunder rolled like a warning drum, and relented with a reluctant nod. "Fine. Let's go see what trouble Gold's stirred up this time."

Ruby grabbed her jacket, her movements swift and predatory, while Grumpy hefted his pickaxe, muttering, "Better not be wastin' my evening for nothin'." Henry led the way, his sneakers crunching on the gravel path, storybook left on the table, as they headed toward the forest, the storm's glow guiding them like a beacon, their silhouettes stark against the diner's fading lights.

Road

The road stretched quiet under the deepening twilight, its asphalt gleaming faintly from an earlier drizzle, the air heavy with the scent of wet pavement and pine carried from the nearby forest. Emma, Snow, and David walked side by side, their boots scuffing softly. Emma's red leather jacket a splash of color against Snow's white coat and David's practical flannel, their breaths visible in the cooling air. The town felt calm, almost too calm, the streetlights flickering on one by one as the last of the sun's rays bled away.

Emma broke the silence, her voice light but edged with disbelief, her blonde hair catching the streetlight's glow. "Can you believe it's been over six months since the last crisis hit Storybrooke? No curses, no monsters, just… normal. It's weird."

Snow shot her a sharp look, her eyes flashing with alarm as she clutched David's arm. "Emma, you never say that. Never mention a good streak. It's like waving a red flag at fate." Her voice was firm, maternal, carrying the weight of countless battles in the Enchanted Forest.

David nodded, his hand resting on the hilt of his sword, his tone half-serious, half-teasing. "Back in our realm, saying things were too quiet was a sure way to summon a dragon or worse." His grin faded as he glanced at the sky, where storm clouds churned, their edges crackling with silver.

Emma laughed, rolling her eyes, her hands shoved in her pockets. "Oh, come on, you two. Don't tell me you believe in jinxes." Her smirk faltered as she followed their gaze, noticing the roiling clouds over the forest, not the harbor where Desylva and Killian usually lingered. "Wait… those aren't over the docks. That's not just Desylva and Hook messing around, is it?"

Snow's face tightened, her voice low and urgent. "No, those clouds are too wild. Too angry. They're over the forest edge. Something's wrong, Emma. You jinxed it." Her tone held a hint of teasing, but her eyes were serious, scanning the horizon where lightning flashed like a warning.

David's hand tightened on his sword, his posture shifting to the ready stance of a prince. "We'd better check it out. Desylva's storms don't lie. Trouble's brewing."

As they spoke, figures emerged from the dusk—Regina, Henry, Ruby, and Grumpy, their faces tense as they hurried down the road, the storm's glow casting long shadows behind them. Emma raised a brow, her voice dry but curious. "Where's the fire, guys? What's got you all charging toward the forest?"

Henry stepped forward, his young face set with determination, his comic book tucked under his arm. "It's Desylva. She might be in trouble. Those clouds aren't normal, mom. We're going to see if she needs help." His voice was firm, his belief in heroes unshaken despite the fear in his eyes.

Emma glanced at Regina, catching the faint roll of her eyes. Regina's expression said she'd tried to dissuade him but failed. "Really, Henry? You're leading the charge now?" Emma's tone was teasing, but her hand hovered near her gun, her sheriff's instincts kicking in.

Regina shrugged, her voice sharp but resigned, her leather jacket glinting in the streetlight. "Don't look at me. I told him she could handle herself, but you know how he gets." She gestured toward the clouds, her lips pursing. "Those aren't just her storms. Gold's involved. I'd bet my spell book on it."

David nodded, his sword hand flexing. "Then we're coming with you. If Gold's stirring up trouble, they'll need all the help they can get." Snow grabbed Emma's arm, her voice urgent. "Let's move. Those clouds aren't waiting."

The group turned as one, their boots pounding the pavement as they headed toward the forest, the storm's rumble a call to arms, their silhouettes merging into the twilight as the air crackled with the promise of battle.

Forest Edge

The forest edge pulsed with raw energy, the air thick with the ozone tang of Desylva's storm and the acrid bite of Rumpelstiltskin's dark magic, the pines trembling under the weight of thunder that rolled like war drums through the dusk. Desylva and Rumpelstiltskin clashed in a clearing ringed by gnarled trees, their magic a violent dance. Her lightning arced in jagged bolts, splitting the sky with white-hot fury, her cursed mark blazing blue beneath her sleeve, its glow illuminating her fierce gray eyes. Rumpelstiltskin countered with shadows that writhed like living serpents, his hands weaving curses that thickened the air, his laughter a sharp, mocking edge cutting through the storm's roar. Killian remained bound to a pine, blood trickling down his arms as he strained against the gag, his muffled shouts vibrating with rage, his hook slashing futilely at the tendrils, his blue eyes burning with a promise of vengeance.

The rescue party crept closer through the underbrush. Their breaths shallow as they glimpsed the battle. Henry's eyes widened, his heart pounding as he started to shout, but Grumpy clamped a rough hand over his mouth, his voice a low growl, "Quiet, lad. Don't give us away." His beard bristled, his pickaxe gripped tight, his eyes locked on the chaos. Snow's gaze found Killian, her lips parting in a soft bird call, a high, lilting trill that cut through the storm's din. Killian's head snapped toward her, his eyes flickering with recognition as David raised a hand, signaling, "We're here, Hook. Hold on." Henry slipped away, his sneakers silent on the pine needles as he darted toward Killian, his young face set with determination.

Ruby leapt from the shadows, her werewolf instincts flaring. Her snarl was feral, her red-streaked hair flying as she slashed at a shadow tendril with claws sharp as razors, her voice a fierce growl, "Not on my watch, you bastard!" The tendril whipped back, flinging her against a pine with a bone-jarring thud, needles raining down as she crumpled, a low groan escaping her lips. Snow's hands flew to her mouth, a gasp breaking free. "Ruby, no!" her voice trembling with fear for her friend. David drew his sword with a metallic hiss, his charge unwavering, his voice a prince's command, "Gold, you'll answer for this!" He swung at a shadow, his blade sparking against the dark magic. Grumpy charged beside him, his pickaxe swinging with wild abandon, his bellow raw and guttural, "Leave her be, you slimy git!" sparks flew as steel met shadow, the air crackling with defiance. Emma drew her gun, her sheriff's stance steady as she fired, bullets slicing through the air with sharp cracks, each shot aimed at Rumpelstiltskin's weaving form. Regina raised her hands, violet magic arcing in a searing blaze, her voice sharp with authority, "You're not winning this one, Gold!" her spell clashed with his shadows, the clearing ablaze with light and fury.

Henry reached Killian, grabbed the cutlass and started sawing at the vines, his hands trembling but steady, his voice a fierce whisper, "Hold on. I've got you." He sliced the gag free, and Killian spat it out, his voice hoarse, "Hurry, lad. She's in deep!"

Desylva's magic flared in a desperate surge, her cursed mark glowing like a beacon, a jagged bolt of lightning tearing through the sky, its thunder shaking the trees like a war cry, shadows flinched, recoiling for a fleeting moment. But Rumpelstiltskin's magic struck with lethal precision, a shadow tendril pierced her chest, crimson blooming across her jacket like a rose unfurling in the rain. He raised her off the ground, his voice a cruel hiss, "Say goodnight, storm witch," before flinging her toward Killian. She hit a nearby tree with a sickening crack, the bark splintering under the impact, her body slumping to the pine needles below.

Henry's voice broke, a raw cry of shock, "No!" the cutlass faltering as he freed Killian's last vine. Killian tore free, and sprinted to her, his boots skidding on the damp earth, sinking to his knees with a guttural cry that echoed through the clearing. Rumpelstiltskin's laughter, sharp and triumphant, cut through the chaos like a blade before he melted into the shadows, leaving only ruin in his wake.

Killian's hand trembled as he cradled her, her dark hair spilling across his lap, the sapphire ring on her finger glinting faintly, a fragile vow drowned in the spreading red of her blood. Her cursed mark flickered weakly, its blue glow fading like a dying star. "No," he choked, his voice fracturing into a broken plea, his hook brushing her cheek as he pressed a frantic kiss to her lips, tasting salt and iron, her warmth slipping away. Her gray eyes flickered open, dimming as she reached up, her trembling hand grazing his face, her voice a faint whisper, "Killian… I love you." He forced a smile through his tears, his voice cracking, "I love you too, my storm." He kissed her again, soft and desperate, as she whispered, "Forever…" her breath fading. "And a day," he replied, his voice breaking as her body went limp in his arms, a scream ripping from his throat, "No! Not again! Des, please!" raw and shattering, reverberating through the forest like a storm's final cry. Her cursed mark now gone dark.

Henry dropped beside him, his young face streaked with tears, his voice rising in a frantic plea, "Kiss her again, Killian! True love's kiss, it's gotta work!" His hands balled into fists, his belief in fairy tales unshaken, his eyes wide with desperate hope. Killian's gaze snapped to him, then back to Desylva, his heart seizing as he bent down, pressing his lips to hers once more, soft, urgent, willing her to stir, to breathe. But the air stayed still, her storm silent, her chest unmoving beneath his trembling grasp.

Henry collapsed, his small frame shaking as he reached out, touching her arm, "Come on, Desylva, wake up! You're true love. You have to!" His voice broke into sobs, his faith clashing against the cruel reality, his hands clutching the grass as he knelt in shared devastation. Ruby staggered to her feet, limping to Killian's side, her hand gripping his shoulder, tears carving tracks through the dirt on her face, her voice choked, "She fought like hell, Hook."

Grumpy lowered his pickaxe, its head thudding against the earth, his head bowing in a rare, heavy silence, his gruff exterior cracking under the weight of loss. Emma, Snow, David, and Regina stood frozen, their weapons lowered, the fight drained from them. Emma's gun hung limp in her hand, Snow's eyes glistening, David's sword point-down, Regina's magic fading into wisps of violet smoke. The forest's hush enveloped them, thick with the scent of pine and blood, a mournful stillness settling over the scene.

Emma stepped forward to go to Henry, but Regina caught her arm, her voice soft but firm, her eyes flickering with rare compassion. "Leave him, Emma. He needs this. And so does Killian." Emma hesitated, her jaw tightening, but she nodded, her voice barely a whisper, "Okay." The group turned, their footsteps heavy as they retreated into the dusk, leaving Killian and Henry with Desylva, the rain beginning to fall, soft and cold, as if the sky itself mourned her.

Henry's voice broke through the quiet, his young face crumpling as he knelt beside Killian, "She can't be gone. It's not fair. She was your true love. And true love always wins." His hands still gripping the wet grass, his tears mixing with the rain.

Killian gathered Desylva in his arms, her weight a heavy ache against his chest, his coat soaked with blood and rain as he stood, his voice hollow, "Come on, lad." He carried her toward the Jolly Roger, Henry walking beside him, his small frame hunched against the rain, their footsteps slow and deliberate, a silent march through the gathering dark.

Jolly Roger

A light rain fell over the harbor, mist curling around the Jolly Roger's masts like ghostly fingers, the ship's lanterns casting a dim, wavering glow across the deck, where water pooled in shallow dips on the wood. The air was heavy with the scent of salt and wet timber, the distant rumble of Desylva's fading storm echoing faintly over the waves.

Smee paced near the helm, restless, muttering to himself, his voice a low, anxious rumble, “Where’s the Cap’n? Too long. Too bloody long.” His boots thudded against the deck, his hands twisting a frayed rope as he scanned the dock, his face etched with worry. Through the mist, he spotted two figures approaching.

Killian, his black coat sodden, carrying Desylva’s still form in his arms, her dark hair spilling like ink across his chest, her arms limp, the sapphire ring glinting faintly in the lanternlight. Henry walked beside him, his young face streaked with tears, his sneakers dragging on the wet dock, his shoulders hunched as if carrying a weight too heavy for his years.

Smee’s heart sank, his breath catching as he whispered, “No… no, she can’t be. Not now, not after all they’ve fought through.” His voice trembled, his eyes stinging as he hurried to the gangplank, his boots slipping slightly on the slick deck, waiting as they ascended.

Killian’s face was a mask of grief, his blue eyes hollow, his jaw clenched as he carried her, each step deliberate, as if moving too fast might shatter him further. Henry’s sobs were soft but relentless, his hands shoved in his pockets.

As they reached the deck, Smee’s gaze locked on Desylva, her cursed mark dark, her face pale, the life gone from her storm-gray eyes. His worst fear confirmed, he choked out, “Cap’n… what happened?” Killian didn’t answer, his gaze fixed on Desylva as he moved past, his boots heavy on the deck, heading for the companionway. His silence spoke louder than words, a void where his usual wit and fire had burned.

Henry started to follow, but Smee caught his arm gently, his voice thick with emotion, “Lad, tell me. … What happened out there?”

Henry’s tear-streaked face turned to Smee, his voice breaking as he struggled to speak, “It was Gold… he… he attacked them. She fought so hard, but he… there was nothing we could do.” His words dissolved into sobs, his small frame shaking as he leaned into Smee, his voice muffled against the older man’s coat, “It shouldn’t have happened. They were true love. … They were supposed to win.”

Smee’s eyes brimmed with tears, his rough hand patting Henry’s back as he pulled the boy into a hug, his gaze drifting to the companionway where Killian’s shadow vanished, the door closing with a soft thud that echoed like a final note. “Aye, lad,” he whispered, his voice cracking, “They were. Bravest storm we ever sailed with.” His tears fell freely now, mixing with the rain as he held Henry.

The deck silent save for the patter of rain and the creak of timbers. The ship mourning the loss of her storm witch as the night closed in around them.

Day 54

Dawn

The burial took place at dawn by the sea’s edge, where the horizon stretched gray and endless, the waves lapping mournfully against a shore strewn with smooth pebbles and tangled seaweed. Desylva’s grave rested beneath a wind-gnarled pine, its roots clawing into the sandy bluff, a simple wooden marker etched with a storm rune carved by Killian’s hook in the sleepless hours before, standing sentinel over the grave.

The following text carved into the surface.

Desylva Jones
"My Storm, My Star, My Heart’s True Flame.
You Shone Through Night; Your Tempest Lit My Soul;
Though Darkness Stole You, Our Love Defies the Cold.
You Will Forever Burn Bright." – KJ.

He broke there as the first light touched the earth, his knees sinking into the damp sand, the grains clinging to his black trousers as his hook clawed at the soil, tearing at it as if he could dig her back into the world. Tears streamed

down his face, cutting paths through the salt and stubble on his cheeks, his breaths ragged gasps that mingled with the sea's low dirge.

The air carried the sharp tang of brine and the faint rot of kelp washed ashore, a scent that twisted in his gut, Veyra's shores reborn in this quiet corner of Storybrooke, mocking him with memories of her storm-touched birth.

Ruby approached first, her boots crunching softly on the pebbles as she knelt beside him, her red-streaked hair falling loose from its tie, framing a face etched with sorrow. She laid a bundle of wildflowers, daisies and lupines she'd gathered at dawn from the forest, their petals still dewed with morning mist, across the grave, her hands trembling as she smoothed them into place. "She was a fighter. Like family to me," she said, her voice cracking, thick with unshed tears. "I should've stopped it, should've clawed that bastard's heart out before he took her." Her fingers lingered on a lupine's purple bloom, her nails digging into her palms as she fought the sob rising in her throat, her wolfish strength useless now against the weight of loss.

Grumpy stood a few paces back, his usual bluster silenced, his flannel sleeves rolled up over arms taut with unspent anger. He placed a small stone he'd carved, its surface rough-hewn with a stormy wave, chipped out with his pickaxe in the dim light of his workshop, beside Ruby's flowers, his mutter barely audible over the waves, "Too damn tough to go like this, didn't deserve it." His eyes, usually sharp with cynicism, softened as he rubbed a hand across his beard, staring at the marker as if willing it to argue back.

Henry lingered near the pine, clutching his storybook to his chest, its leather cover scuffed from years of hope and heartbreak, tears streaking his young face and dripping onto the pages he'd once believed could save them all. "I failed her," he whispered, his voice a fragile thread breaking under the weight, "I thought I could save them, thought the story would let them win." He sank to his knees beside the grave, tracing the rune with a trembling finger. The wind tugged at his dark hair, mirroring the chaos in his heart, and he pressed his forehead to the book, a silent plea to rewrite this ending.

Snow knelt beside Killian, her white coat brushing the sand, her hands gentle as she rested them on his arm, her own eyes glistening with tears. "She loved you beyond realms, beyond anything I've ever seen," she said softly, her voice steady despite the quiver, "We'll keep that alive, I promise." David stood tall behind her, his broad frame a quiet fortress, gripping Killian's shoulder with a swordsman's strength. "You're not alone, We're here for you through this," his jaw tightened, his gaze fixed on the sea as if challenging it to take more from them.

Archie joined the circle, his umbrella tucked under his arm, its black canopy furled against the morning's chill, his footsteps soft on the sand as he adjusted his glasses with a thoughtful frown. "You loved her fully, Killian. Every moment, every fight," he said, his voice a steady anchor in the shifting tide of grief, "Grieve her. Let us help carry it. You don't have to face this alone." He paused, glancing at the waves, then back to Killian, his eyes warm with understanding born of countless hours listening to broken hearts.

Emma approached last, her red jacket a stark splash against the muted shore, her boots leaving faint prints in the sand as she settled beside Killian. She sat in silence at first, the sea's murmur filling the space between them, then rested her hand over his. Her fingers cool but firm, grounding him as her eyes shimmered with unshed tears. "She was your storm," she said finally, her voice low and sure, "wild and fierce across every realm. … You gave her everything, Killian. Every breath, every scar." He turned to her, his sobs raw and unfiltered, spilling out like the tide, "I've lost her twice. She was my everything."

She pulled him into her arms, her embrace a steady harbor against his breaking waves, her own tears falling silently as they soaked into his coat. "I'm here, Killian," she whispered, her voice thick but resolute, "We'll carry her together. Her storm's part of us now." She pressed a gentle kiss to his forehead, her lips lingering as she held him tight, the sand shifting beneath them like time itself. Henry shuffled closer, joining their embrace, his book pressed between them as he murmured, "I'll fix this somehow. I'll keep writing, for her, for you." His voice trembled, but his grip was fierce, a boy's determination woven with the weight of lost fathers and fractured families.

Ruby rose, brushing sand from her knees, and stood guard with Grumpy a few steps away. Her eyes scanning the horizon as if daring Rumpelstiltskin to return, his pickaxe resting against his shoulder like a soldier's rifle. The sea mourned with them, its waves a ceaseless lament for Veyra's tempest, Gulls cried overhead, their mournful calls blending with the wind, as the bluff stood witness to a grief as vast as the realms she once conquered.

Afternoon (Docks)

Archie found Killian alone by the water's edge, the Jolly Roger's silhouette a dark ghost against the fading light. He twirled his umbrella with a quiet step, its tip tapping the boards, and approached with a gentle, "Killian, you're grieving, let's talk."

The air hung heavy with the scent of salt and wet wood, the pilings slick with mist as the tide ebbed beneath them, his voice soft but firm, "You've carried so much. Let me help you through this." Killian leaned against a post, his coat damp from the day's tears, his hook glinting faintly as he rubbed a hand over his face, voice hoarse with exhaustion, "Aye, mate. I'll need it. Lost her twice, and it's hollowed me out. … Emma, Henry, you lot… something to hold onto." Archie nodded, his smile small but steady.

The sea stretched endless before them, whispering Desylva's name in every ripple, her storm forever woven into Killian's soul, tempered now by the quiet strength of those who remained—Emma's unwavering hand, Henry's fierce hope, Ruby's fierce loyalty, and Grumpy's unspoken vigil—a fragile thread of light piercing the dark.

Dusk

The Jolly Roger rocked gently in the harbor, timbers creaking under the weight of a mournful dusk, the sea whispering secrets against the hull.

Killian's Cabin

Killian pushed open the cabin door, his boots heavy on the worn planks, his blue eyes shadowed with grief that clung like damp fog. The cabin, lit by a single flickering lantern, felt hollow without her. Desylva, his storm, gone in a way that tore at his soul.

On the desk, her relics lay like a shrine. Her dagger that once danced with her magic. Her rings, glinting with the fire of their shared vows. Her necklace. And an urn, cold and gray, holding her ashes.

He approached the desk, his hook gleaming in the lantern's glow, his hand trembling as it hovered over the urn, the weight of loss anchoring him in place. He'd let everyone believe she was buried in that grave, but he couldn't do it. She deserved better.

He stood there, staring at the urn, time slipping away as memories flooded him—her gray eyes like thunderclouds, her laugh bright and fierce, her touch a spark that set his heart alight. The ache of her absence pressed against his ribs like a blade.

With a ragged breath, he removed the lid from the urn, the faint scent of ash rising like a ghost. He removed two vials, one large, one small, from a drawer. The glass of each felt cold against his fingers, fragile as the remnants of her life.

Carefully, reverently, he filled the small vial first, watching the ashes settle like drifting storm-snow. His breath hitched as the ashes slid into place—each grain a piece of her, a fragment of the storm that had once held him so fiercely. He would use this to bind her memory into the ship.

Then he filled the larger vial, a vessel to preserve the greater portion of her ashes among her relics, safe within the runes that guarded her belongings. A keepsake he could not bear to leave behind. The weight of it in his hand felt like a heartbeat lost.

He sealed the small vial with a stopper, and the large vial with wax, the motions deliberate, as if preserving her essence could keep her close. The lantern flickered, casting shadows that danced like memories across the cabin walls.

Closing the urn, he gathered the dagger, rings, and necklace, their weight a tether to their past, and crossed to a small, iron-bound chest in the corner.

Kneeling before the chest, he drew a key from his coat pocket, its brass worn smooth by years of secrecy. He unlocked the chest, the hinges groaning as the lid opened to reveal a trove of Desylva's belongings. Past and present woven together.

Her cloak, preserved in flawless condition by the chest's glowing runes, lay folded at the heart of the trove, its leather shimmering with an ethereal sheen untouched by time's decay. Intricate seaweed stitching wove along its edges, the threads glinting like sea-foam under moonlight, each pattern a delicate echo of the wild seas they'd sailed. Her scent, wildflowers and storm-swept brine, rose faintly from the preserved fabric, striking him with such force he nearly buckled. It was as if Desylva's tempest spirit lingered within.

Beside it rested a tattered scarf from a carnival, a vial of sea glass from Veyra's shores, a lock of her hair tied with a leather cord, and a stack of papers, their edges curled, filled with poems and shanties that chronicled their love. The words, some his, some hers, some the crew's, sang of storms and steel, of battles fought and nights entwined, a testament to a bond that defied realms. His vision blurred as he traced the edges of her handwriting, the loops and strokes that once flowed from her living hand.

He placed the dagger, rings, necklace, and large vial of ashes among these treasures, each item settling with a soft thud that echoed in his chest. His gaze lingered, tears welling in his eyes, blurring the relics into a mosaic of loss. The chest felt like a tomb, yet also a sanctuary—her story preserved, her storm waiting.

His eyes fell to the ring on his finger, a silver band etched with waves and crowned with a sapphire, a symbol of their union. It burned against his skin, a reminder of what he'd lost and what he owed her. To take her home, to Veyra, where her storm belonged. The fake funeral, the empty grave—it was a lie he couldn't sustain, not here, not in Storybrooke's borrowed peace. He knew what he had to do, the path as clear as a lighthouse in the dark.

With a shaky breath, he closed the chest, the lock clicking shut like a vow sealed. He slipped the key and the small vial of ashes into his coat pocket, close to his heart. Rising, he wiped his eyes with the back of his hand, his jaw set with resolve and exited the cabin.

Quarterdeck

Killian emerged from the companionway, the night air cool against his tear-stung face. The deck glimmered faintly with lantern light, the sea's hush rising to meet him like a familiar, grieving friend. He paused, breathing in the brine, the wood, the faint echo of her storm that seemed to linger in every plank. The ship felt alive with memory—hers, his, theirs.

His boots whispered over the boards as he approached the side of the companionway hood. His gaze fell to the carving of their initials, "KJ & DJ Forever," jagged and imperfect against the dark wood. He remembered the night he etched it with his hook—the crescent moon hanging low, the way her gray eyes had watched him, and the teasing flush on her cheeks. He could still hear her quiet question, "Forever?", and the way his own vow had rumbled from his chest, "Aye, and a day." She had kissed him afterward, soft and sure, sealing the promise with her storm humming beneath her skin.

His fingers brushed the carving, the wood cool beneath his touch. He remembered how he had added the "J" beside the "D" the day after their wedding, how they had pressed their own blood into the grooves, sealing their bond deeper than magic. And how the runes shimmered as the ship accepted their vow.

The memory struck him like a wave. Her smile had been radiant, fierce, a storm breaking open with pure joy that lit him brighter than any lantern. He remembered the warmth of her hand on his cheek, the way she had whispered, "Now it's true."

His throat tightened. Reaching down, he pulled the small vial of ashes from his pocket and popped the cork, his fingers steady despite the ache in his chest. Holding the open glass tight, he raised his hook and made a small, shallow gouge directly beside the carved vow. The wood split with a soft crack.

He carefully tipped the vial, pouring a tiny stream of ashes into the fresh groove. The runes beneath the companionway hood flared, a soft blue glow rising like a quiet breath as the wood healed itself seamlessly. The fading light brushed his fingers like a fleeting farewell, leaving the surface smooth once more.

Helm

He stepped past the companionway hood, his boots silent on the slick deck as he approached the helm. The ship's wheel stood like a sentinel, its enchanted oak gleaming softly under the dim lantern light. This was the place where their hands had so often overlapped on the spokes, fighting high seas or steering into quiet harbors together.

His throat tightened. He glanced at the very center of the wheel, the brass-rimmed hub that held the entire ship's steering together. He raised his hook, using the sharp tip to carefully score a shallow groove directly into the core axis. The enchanted wood split with a soft, resonant crack that vibrated all the way down the steering column.

With a steadying breath, he raised the vial of ashes. He reverently dusted the gray fragments straight into the axis of navigation, giving her control over their path ahead.

The response was immediate. The intricate runes carved beneath the wheel pulsed like a waking heartbeat, a rich, deep blue glow rising up through the spokes like catching breath. The split wood mended itself seamlessly, sealing her essence into the ship's very soul. From this moment on, every turn of the wheel would be guided by her memory, ensuring that no matter how lost he became, her storm would always steer him home.

Port Rail

Moving away from the helm, he stepped to the port rail, the sea dark and endless just beyond the wooden barrier. His hand rested on the damp cap log, and a physical memory surged through him so sharply it made his breath hitch—the first time she had ever channeled her spark directly through his hook.

He could still feel the phantom warmth of it. Her storm mark had glowed a brilliant, electric blue against her skin as her fingers gripped his hook, sending a current of pure, crackling magic straight through the steel and into his veins. It had been a heady cocktail of pleasure, magic, and absolute trust. He remembered the sudden shock of it, the way it had filled his chest with a heat so intense he'd laughed aloud, entirely breathless, while her gray eyes shone with pride and raw affection. She had held him steady as her tempest answered his own racing heartbeat, her laugh soft and triumphant when he begged her to do it again. That was the exact moment he realized her storm wasn't just a weapon or a display of power—it was her way of connecting to him, soul to soul. The echo of that storm-fire warmed his blood even now, a solitary spark fighting the freezing night air.

His jaw set. He brought his hook down, carving a precise, clean gouge into the top of the rail where her hands had so often rested. Tilting the open vial, he let a small cascade of ashes fall into the wound.

The response from the ship was deep and lingering. The hidden runes beneath the rail bled a slow, luminous blue into the grain of the wood, absorbing her ashes and knitting the timber back together. The magic held its glow against the dark water for a long, quiet moment, as if the ship itself was reluctant to let the warmth of her spark fade.

Main Mast

He walked toward the main mast, the towering column of enchanted timber rising like a black spire into the starless night sky. His breath caught in his throat as his hand met the rough bark, the heavy canvas of the furled sails snapping softly overhead in the rising wind.

Memory slammed into him, thick as the sea fog she had conjured that night. He could still see her silhouette emerging from the rolling white mist like a beautiful, dangerous phantom, her storm humming softly in the air. She had been barefoot on the deck, wearing nothing but his own loose linen shirt, her eyes flashing with a sultry, wicked lure. With a simple, low murmur of her voice, the heavy hemp rigging had slithered to life under her magic, coiling and undulating through the air like living serpents. He remembered the wild, unrestrained ring of her laughter echoing through the dense fog, the way she had called his name with a tease that made his blood run hot, and the raw hunger burning in her gray eyes. Her tempest had wrapped around them both like a living entity, shaking the very rigging until the entire ship rocked under the sheer force of their passion. She had always been so breathtakingly bold, completely unafraid to surprise him, meeting his own pirate fire with an unshakable spirit that refused to be tamed. This mast had stood as the ultimate witness to her absolute courage, her fierce desire, and the unbridled joy of her magic.

A heavy ache pressed against his ribs. Raising his arm, he used the sharp, curved edge of his hook to carve a deep, ragged scoring into the vertical grain of the mast—a wound into the very spine of his ship. With a trembling hand, he tipped the vial, pouring a generous stream of ashes straight into the split wood.

The Jolly Roger responded with a deep, resonant shudder that vibrated right through the soles of his boots. The runes buried deep within the core of the mast flared into a brilliant, blinding blue, drinking in the ash before drawing the timber back together. The thick wood seemed to exhale a low, mournful sigh as it mended, forever binding her memory into the mast she had once commanded with storm, desire, and absolute certainty.

Bow

Finally, he walked to the absolute bow of the ship, where the wooden timbers tapered to a sharp point over the dark, endless void of the sea. The water throwing a fine, freezing mist into the night air.

He rested his hand on the forward rail, his knuckles turning white as memory surged—the sky a deep, indigo canvas just before dawn, the stars reluctant to surrender as they dueled out on the narrow bowsprit. She had always matched him blow for blow, meeting his pirate cunning with a fierce, untamed fire in her eyes. He could still see her balancing flawlessly on the swaying spar over the open ocean, her dagger flashing against his cutlass like scattered stars. He remembered the rough triumph in his own voice when he yanked her off-balance, murmuring, “Got you, love,” only for her storm-gray eyes to flash with defiance as she wrenched her blade free. The final, fierce pressure of their locking steel had sent his cutlass skidding into the dark water just before they plunged together into the cool, dark sea.

He closed his eyes, tasting the phantom salt and laughter of their shared kiss as they surfaced in the gentle swell. He remembered the sheer awe that had filled him moments later on the quarterdeck when she lifted her hand, summoning a spiralling gust of wind to drag their lost weapons straight up from the ocean floor, handing him his cutlass with that wicked, triumphant smirk. She had been so breathtakingly bold, completely untamed, meeting the world with a fierce spirit that lit his soul brighter than any lantern. Her bright, unrestrained laughter from that private dawn was the specific memory that gutted him most, a vibrant contrast to the suffocating silence of the empty deck.

His throat closed up, a solitary tear cutting through the salt and stubble on his cheek. Steeling his posture, he brought his hook down one final time, carving a deep, jagged gouge directly into the crest of the bow's rail, facing the open water ahead.

He raised the vial, tipping it fully upside down to let the remaining ashes cascade into the open grain, emptying the glass completely. The runes along the bow flared—not with a gentle breath or a slow bleed, but with a sudden, blinding flash of electric blue that mirrored the lightning she used to command. The wood healed with a sharp, resonant snap, sealing the last fragment of her into the very vanguard of the ship.

The glass vial felt entirely weightless in his hand now, hollow and cold, a stark reflection of the empty space she had left in his arms. He stood there for a long moment, the empty vial still warm in his grip. Then, turned and headed for the gangplank.

Gangplank

He paused at the ship's rail, the night pressing close around him with the scent of salt on the wind, the hush of the tide, and the faint creak of the Jolly Roger settling against the wooden pilings. He gazed across the deck once more. The ship seemed to breathe in the dim lantern light, her timbers holding the quiet magic he had just carved into her bones. The companionway hood, the helm, the rail, the mast, the bow—all five sacred places held a piece of her now, sealed beneath the runes that had flared so brilliantly to accept her essence. She was part of the ship's core, a permanent passenger woven into the very structure she had once commanded.

A sudden gust of wind swept across the deck, stirring the rigging with a soft, mournful sigh. For a fleeting heartbeat, he felt her there—a warm, storm-touched presence brushing against his cheek like the ghost of a parting touch. A whisper of a memory. A quiet promise.

His fingers tightened around the empty glass cylinder. “Stay with me, love,” he murmured, his voice low and raw, carried away by the wind before it could reach the dark harbor water. “I will bring you home.”

The Jolly Roger answered with a gentle, familiar creak, a comforting sound—her sound. The ship that had witnessed their first kiss, their playful sparring, and their passionate nights in their cabin below. The ship that had held their laughter, their vows, and their shared breath beneath starlit skies. The ship that had accepted her as his equal from the start, now held her ashes, her memory, her storm.

Killian bowed his head, letting the moment settle deep into him like an anchor dropped into dark water.

After a long, heavy silence, he straightened his posture and slipped the empty vial deep into his leather coat pocket. Stepping through the boarding gate, he grasped the cold aluminum safety rail and descended the angled gangway stairs. The heavy soles of his boots clattered hollowly against the grated metal steps, clicking firmly against the rigid mesh and the black traction pads as he left the ship behind and set foot onto the damp concrete pier.

This time, the weight driving him forward was not only grief. It was purpose. It was promise. It was love that refused to die.

Regina’s Mansion

Regina descended the polished staircase, the sharp click of her heels echoing off the hardwood as her mind turned over the day's schemes. The doorbell’s sudden, insistent chime cut through her thoughts. She paused, raising an eyebrow as her lips pursed in irritation. Who would dare disturb her unannounced?

Crossing the foyer, she smoothed the lapels of her blazer and pulled the door open. Her expression instantly shifted to guarded surprise. Killian stood on the threshold, his black coat dusted with sea salt, his blue eyes so raw with grief that it made her breath hitch.

“Can I come in?” he asked. His voice was low, carrying the rough, fractured edge of a pirate entirely undone by pain.

Regina’s instincts flared—trouble followed Killian like a tailwind—but she stepped aside, gesturing him into the warmth of the foyer with a swift flick of her wrist. “Make it quick,” she said, closing the heavy door with a soft, final thud.

They moved into the living room, where the crackling fireplace cast long, dancing shadows across the plush rugs and dark leather furniture. Regina crossed her arms, her dark eyes narrowing as she closely studied him. “What do you want, Hook?” she asked. Her tone was sharp, but tinged with a quiet curiosity. She could feel the heavy, oppressive weight radiating off him.

He stood near the hearth, the firelight catching the sharp curve of his hook as he shifted his weight. His gaze remained unblinking despite the deep sorrow etched into his features. “I need a favor,” he said, each word deliberate and heavy with intent.

She arched a brow, intrigued despite herself. “A favor? What could the great Captain Hook possibly need from me?” Her voice dripped with her trademark sarcasm, but her posture locked. What could have driven him here?

“A bean,” Killian said. His voice was firm, though a violent tremor of grief undercut his resolve. “I have to return to Veyra.”

Regina’s eyes widened slightly, her mind racing to piece together his sudden desperation. “I thought you buried her this morning,” she said. Her tone softened, a rare, unbidden flicker of empathy breaking through her guarded facade.

Killian’s jaw tightened, his hook flexing sharply at his side. “There’s a marker by the sea, aye, but the grave is empty. I can’t leave her here, Regina. Her ashes belong in Veyra, where her storm was born.” His words carried a quiet, terrifying ferocity—a pirate’s final oath to honor his love.

Regina tilted her head, weighing the sheer danger of what he was asking. “Are you sure this is wise?” she probed, testing the depth of his conviction.

Killian’s eyes flashed, a sudden spark of his old, lethal fire cutting cleanly through his grief. “After all you did to us back then—all the meddling, the scheming, the endless attempts to tear us apart—you owe her this. You owe me. Do you have a bean or not?” His tone was a razor-sharp blade, unyielding, yet laced with a desperate plea that tugged violently at her conscience.

Regina held his gaze, her fierce resolve wavering under the crushing weight of their shared history. With a heavy sigh, she extended her right hand, a faint shimmer of violet magic coalescing into a single, iridescent green bean. She offered it to him, her expression completely softening. “Take it,” she said, her voice dropping to a whisper.

Killian took the bean, his leather-gloved fingers brushing hers, and managed a faint, hoarse, “Thanks.” He turned to leave, but Regina’s voice stopped him before he reached the foyer. “Killian.” He paused, his back to her, his shoulders tensing as she spoke. “I’m truly sorry. I know how much you loved her. And how much she loved you.”

“Aye,” he murmured. It was a simple, devastating acknowledgment heavy with unspoken ruin.

Regina spoke once more, her tone softer, almost hesitant. “You’ll be back, won’t you?”

Killian stood frozen for a beat, his hook tapping a slow, rhythmic pattern against his thigh as he considered the question. The future was a fog he couldn’t pierce. “Aye. I’ll be back,” he said finally. His voice was steady but completely distant, as if he were trying to convince himself as much as her. He exited the mansion, the front door clicking shut behind him.

Regina stood alone in the firelight, staring after him as her mind churned with a toxic mix of guilt and unanswered questions.

Unseen, Henry had crept halfway down the grand staircase. His sneakers had been perfectly silent on the runner, his eyes wide as he absorbed every word of the exchange. The sight of Killian—broken yet fiercely resolute—and the revelation of Desylva’s ashes sent a sharp, agonizing pang through his chest. He slipped back up the stairs, his heart racing against his ribs. Reaching his bedroom, he closed the door quietly and grabbed his storybook from his desk. A newfound determination set into the lines of his young face. He couldn’t let Killian face the dark realm of Veyra alone.

Town/Harbor

Henry slipped out of the mansion, the heavy front door clicking shut behind him as the cool night air swallowed his footsteps. He was chasing a tale he refused to let end.

He sprinted through the quiet, deserted streets of Storybrooke, his sneakers pounding the asphalt as he clutched the storybook tightly under his arm. The town’s iron lamplights cast solitary golden pools on the sidewalks, but his focus was singular.

The harbor. Where the Jolly Roger waited like a shadowed sentinel. The crisp breeze stung his lungs, his breath puffing in frantic white clouds as he wove past shuttered shops and dark alleys, his heart hammering with a volatile mix of fear and resolve. He couldn’t let Killian sail off alone. Not after losing Desylva. Not when the fairytale he believed in hung by a single, fraying thread.

The harbor’s sharp, briny scent hit him as he neared the waterfront, the towering masts of moored ships swaying gently against a star-streaked sky.

Docks

Leaving the concrete behind, Henry’s footsteps turned into a hollow, rhythmic thudding on the heavy wooden planks of the pier. The sudden noise drew the attention of Grumpy, who was lounging against a thick wooden piling with a flask in his hand.

The dwarf's bushy brows shot up in surprise as Henry bolted right past him, his small frame a blur of pure determination. "Oi, kid! Where's the fire?" Grumpy called out, his gruff voice tinged with immediate curiosity. But Henry didn't slow down. His eyes remained locked on the Jolly Roger. Grumpy scratched his tangled beard, watching the boy sprint toward the vessel. "What's that boy up to now?" he muttered, taking a slow sip from his flask. He watched as Henry scrambled up the angled metal stairs of the gangway. The dwarf's instincts prickled sharply. Something was afoot, and it smelled like trouble.

Jolly Roger

Henry slipped below deck into the dim, familiar layout of the cargo hold. His heart pounded against his ribs as he scrambled for a hiding spot, ultimately wedging himself into a tight corner among coiled hemp ropes and heavy wooden crates. He pressed the storybook flat against his chest like a shield.

The ship creaked softly around him, her enchanted timbers alive with the rhythmic rise and fall of the sea. He crouched low and kept his breath shallow, fully determined to stow away. He wasn't entirely sure what dark corner of the realm Killian was heading toward, but he knew one thing with absolute certainty: Desylva's story wasn't over. Not yet.

The ship's gentle, familiar sway lulled him into a tense, silent vigil. His young mind raced with tales of pirates, magic, and storms, desperately hoping he could help write a different ending to this chapter.

Granny's Diner

Killian pulled open the door, the bell jangling sharply above him as the heavy scent of hot coffee and fried onions washed over him. Ruby stood behind the laminate counter wiping it down with a rag, her red-streaked hair catching the diner's overhead light. She glanced up, her wolfish smile instantly fading at the sight of his drawn, haggard face.

The diner hummed with the routine chatter of locals, but Killian's presence drew immediate eyes. His black leather coat and glinting hook marked him as a man carrying a dangerous storm of his own.

He approached the counter, boots scuffing the checkered floor tiles, and leaned over. His voice was low but unyielding. "I need a favor, lass."

Ruby raised an eyebrow, tossing the damp rag aside as she crossed her arms, her eyes sharp with curiosity. "A favor?" Her tone started out playful but quickly laced with sharp concern, sensing the heavy gravity beneath his request.

Killian took a deep breath, resting his hook flat against the counter's edge, its metal curve reflecting the diner's warm lights. "I need you to keep an eye on Emma and Henry while I'm gone," he said. His words were measured, each one heavy with singular purpose.

Ruby's grin faltered entirely. Her brow furrowed as she leaned closer across the counter, lowering her voice to a tense whisper. "Gone? Where are you off to, Killian? You're not exactly the 'take a vacation' type."

He paused, his blue eyes flickering with a raw, unspoken weight. "There's something I've got to do. It can't wait. And it may take a while."

Her concern deepened, her acute wolf instincts picking up the unmistakable scent of his crushing grief. Killian's gaze dropped to the polished counter, his fingers flexing against the wood as he fought to keep his voice steady. "A debt to pay. A promise to keep. I can't say more, but I trust you to look after them." His eyes rose to meet hers again, a tiny, fleeting flicker of his old charm surfacing in a faint, grateful smile.

Ruby nodded slowly, her expression completely softening as she saw the sheer pain etched into his features. "Sure, Killian. I've got their backs. You know that." She reached out, briefly squeezing his forearm in a rare gesture of comfort. "Just… don't do anything too pirate-y, okay? We need you back in one piece." Killian managed a tight nod. "Thanks, Ruby," he murmured, turning on his heel to leave.

The door's bell jangled loudly as he pushed it open, nearly slamming the glass straight into Grumpy, who was just reaching for the handle from the outside.

The dwarf grunted, jumping back onto the sidewalk as Killian brushed past him, and eyed the captain's retreating figure with deep suspicion. “Why is everyone in such a bloody rush tonight?” Grumpy muttered to himself, finally grabbing the handle to pull the door open and shuffling inside toward the counter.

Harbor

Killian strode through the harbor, the crisp night air sharp with the tang of salt and the distant, lonely cry of gulls. His boots echoed a solitary rhythm on the concrete pier as he neared the berth.

Ahead, the Jolly Roger loomed like a magnificent ghost, her towering masts cutting stark, dark lines against the starry sky—a faithful companion ready to carry him across the realms. His long coat billowed in the rising wind, the bean a heavy, tangible weight in his pocket. The grief that clung to him was an unyielding tide, pulling him relentlessly toward Veyra, where he could finally lay Desylva’s memory to rest.

Gangplank

He climbed the stairs, the heavy metal clattering beneath his boots before he stepped onto the deck, the ship’s familiar, wooden creak offering a brief spark of comfort.

Main Deck

Salt clung to the night air in a fine, cool mist, the rigging whispering overhead as Killian moved across the deck with deliberate, heavy purpose. His deftly threw off the dock lines and untied the heavy rigging, his hook glinting in the dark. Every rope he tightened and every sail he checked felt less like preparation and more like a sacred ritual—each motion a quiet vow, a promise carved directly into the wood beneath his boots.

Finally, he walked up the quarterdeck steps and approached the helm.

Cargo Hold

Henry crouched deep in the shadows between the heavy cargo crates, the pungent scent of damp hemp rope and old wood filling his lungs. He pressed the storybook so tightly to his chest that his fingers ached against the leather cover.

Quarterdeck

Gleaming under his palm at the center steering column was the brass lever he had installed upon arriving in Storybrooke. He gripped the lever. With a single, firm flick of his wrist, he engaged the mechanism to automate the anchor. The heavy brass switch clicked, and a deep, mechanical clank echoed through the ship's timbers like a violent heartbeat as the heavy iron chain began to grind upward into the locker.

Cargo Hold

Suddenly, a loud, mechanical clank shattered the quiet below deck, followed by the heavy, rhythmic grinding of iron chain vibrating violently through the ship's wooden hull. Henry’s breath hitched. He recognized that sound—the automated anchor mechanism was lifting the heavy iron off the harbor floor. His heart hammered in response, not from fear, but from a fierce, unyielding resolve. The ship was unmooring. Killian was actually leaving. A profound determination shone in Henry's wide eyes; he genuinely believed he could help Killian find closure. He simply could not let him face the dark unknown alone.

Quarterdeck

The sound of the grinding anchor chain faded as the heavy iron finally locked into place. The mechanism worked flawlessly, yet as the ship freed itself from the harbor floor, Killian knew that no modern innovation could ever fill the shattering void she’d left behind.

Killian paused, the wheel looming before him like a silent sentinel. The night wind curled aggressively around him, cool and briny, carrying the distant, lonely cry of gulls and the rhythmic slap of dark waves against the hull. The emptiness of the deck pressed in on him. The silence wrapped around his shoulders, thick and absolute, amplifying the ache of his solitude until it felt as though the sea itself were holding its breath.

“Just you and me, old girl,” he murmured, laying his bare hand flat against the center of the wheel with a loving tenderness. His voice was rough, scraped completely raw by memories he couldn’t outrun.

The Jolly Roger answered him with a soft, resonant creak, her sails stirring as though she perfectly sensed the crushing weight in his chest and leaned forward, eager to bear it with him. Her timbers flexed like an old creature waking from an uneasy sleep. The horizon stretched out ahead in a dark, endless sweep, the moonlight carving fractured silver paths across the water. The ship rocked gently under his feet, as if urging him onward.

Killian reached deep into his leather coat pocket and drew out the bean. Its iridescent surface shimmered with an ethereal glow like a captured star, casting shifting, vibrant colors across his face—violet, blue, and green. Each hue caught brilliantly in the wet shine of his tear-stained eyes. The ancient magic hummed faintly, vibrating with a low pulse against his palm, a reminder of the raw power he was about to unleash.

His fingers tightened around the small object, his knuckles turning stark white as his resolve hardened into something unbreakable. His heart fixed entirely on Veyra. Steel settled deep into his spine as he prepared to cast the artifact, ready to tear open the fabric of the realms and return to where her storm was born. For her. Truly believing he was entirely alone in this grief-driven pilgrimage.

Cargo Hold

Henry held his breath in the stifling darkness, bracing himself as the ship began to pitch, ready to follow the captain into whatever darkness lay ahead.

Pawnshop

Regina swept into the pawnshop, the bell above the door chiming with a sharp, aggressive rattle. Her heels clicked fiercely against the polished floorboards as she marched toward the counter. Rumpelstiltskin stood behind it, meticulously polishing a silver goblet with deliberate, agonizing care. His trademark crocodile grin flickered across his face as he glanced up, his eyes glinting with mild annoyance. “To what do I owe the pleasure, dearie?” he drawled, his tone dripping with mock courtesy. He was already sensing trouble.

Regina’s lips tightened into a thin, dangerous line. Her dark eyes flashed as she leaned over the counter, her voice low and pointed. “Why? Why did you do it?” He set the goblet down, his movements slow and entirely calculated as he met her icy stare. “You know why,” he said, his voice smooth but heavily edged with steel.

He leaned closer across the glass display case, as if sharing a dangerous secret. “Haven’t you felt it? The Eclipse Syndicate is stirring again. We worked to stop them once, Regina, and for a time, we actually succeeded.” Her brow furrowed, a sudden flicker of deep concern creeping into her rigid expression, though she held her ground. “Are you certain?” she pressed, her voice steady, though a tremor of doubt betrayed her defense.

He nodded, his fingers tracing the smooth rim of the goblet. “They were dormant while Hook and Desylva were apart. Completely oblivious to this place. But their reunion sparked something. Her storm magic, his steel, their bond... it acted as a beacon to the Syndicate, actively feeding their realm’s power.” His voice darkened to a harsh whisper, his eyes narrowing. “As long as they were together, we were all in danger. Their connection draws the Syndicate’s gaze, threatening to spill their chaos directly into Storybrooke. Stopping her was the only logical way to keep us safe.”

Regina’s expression hardened, her arms crossing tightly over her chest as she leaned in. “But killing her? Was that truly the only path? Couldn’t we have just sent them back to the Enchanted Forest, far from here?” He shook his head, his smile thin, cold, and unyielding. “Returning wouldn’t stop it, dearie. Not with the prophecy’s second part rapidly unfolding.”

Her eyes narrowed, genuine confusion flickering through her anger. “Second part? You mean there’s more than ‘*The union of Storm and Steel shall set the tides in motion for our grand return”*?” His grin widened, a glint of pure triumph dancing in his eyes. “Oh, yes. The second part, Regina. *‘The child of Storm and Steel will open the door for our emergence.’* Their passion... had it continued, a child was an absolute inevitability. Desylva should have died that day in Veyra, but Hook, with his damned, insufferable hero complex, saved her.”

Regina’s jaw tightened, her voice turning completely sub-zero. “This is your fault. You gave him that hook centuries ago. You made him the steel to her storm. You set him on her path.” Rumpel’s eyebrow arched, his tone dissolving into a cruel, mocking chuckle. “My fault? He would have found her regardless, dearie. Hook or no hook. The steel would have been his cutlass, his heart, his bloody stubbornness. Fate doesn’t bend so easily to our whims.”

She stared at him, her gaze icy, but the sheer weight of his revelation left her completely speechless. The toxic burden of their choices hung heavy and suffocating in the cluttered, shadow-drenched shop.

Harbor

Emma raced through the harbor, her leather boots pounding the concrete pier as her breath came in ragged, frantic gasps. The cool night air stung her lungs, but she didn’t care. Ahead, the dark silhouette of the Jolly Roger loomed against the starry sky, her sails unfurled—a beautiful, terrifying promise of departure. She’d heard whispers around town and pieced together Killian’s desperate plan, her heart sinking deeper with every single step.

The harbor was mostly quiet, save for the low creak of moored fishing boats and the rhythmic lap of waves against the pilings. But the Jolly Roger's deck was alive with a subtle, urgent motion, and she could see Killian’s shadowed figure standing at the helm.

She sprinted toward the berth, her hair whipping violently in the sea breeze, pure desperation driving her forward. She reached the edge of the dock, her chest heaving as she prepared to scream his name. But she was too late.

Jolly Roger

The Roger pulled away, her hull slicing through the dark water with a terrifying grace that belied its urgency. Killian stood at the wheel, his long coat billowing behind him, completely unaware of her presence.

Pier

Emma's shout caught in her throat as a shimmering portal suddenly tore open right in the middle of the harbor basin—a violent, swirling vortex of iridescent green light and deep shadow that churned like a tempest’s heart.

Jolly Roger

The ship surged forward into the swell. Her prow dove straight into the portal’s glowing maw, her sails catching a sudden, otherworldly wind that filled the canvas. With a final, blinding flash, the vortex snapped shut in absolute silence, leaving the harbor entirely empty. The disrupted waves slowly settled back into an eerie, mocking calm.

Pier

Emma stood frozen, her hands clenched into tight fists as the crushing weight of Killian’s departure crashed over her. He was gone.

Beside her on the wooden planks, the metal gangway stood entirely alone against the night, its sturdy frame and steps catching the harbor’s misty sheen. It was a lone bridge to nowhere, forsaken by the Jolly Roger’s plunge into the unknown.

The night felt impossibly vast, the silent stars mocking her panic. She sank to her knees on the edge of the dock, her fingers gripping the rough wood of the pier as her mind raced. Where had he gone? Why would he take such a catastrophic risk now, after everything he had built here in Storybrooke? The dead emptiness of the harbor perfectly mirrored the ache blooming in her chest, but beneath the shock, a dangerous spark of resolve flickered to life. She was going to find out where he went, and why he had left them behind.

Granny's Diner

The air inside the diner was thick with the comforting aroma of fresh coffee and warm apple pie, the steady clink of dishes providing a familiar rhythm as Ruby wiped down the counter. Her red-streaked hair caught the light as she worked. A few stools down, Grumpy sat nursing a heavy mug, his usual grumbling subdued but ever-present.

The door opened, the overhead bell jangling violently, as Emma stormed inside. Her face was dangerously pale, her green eyes wide with raw urgency. She beelined straight for Ruby and Grumpy, her voice tight and breathless as she blurted, "He's gone, Ruby. Killian's gone."

Ruby pretended this was entirely news to her, hiding the fact that the captain had stood at this exact counter just a short while ago. Her rag paused against the laminate, her eyes narrowing as she leaned forward. "Gone? What do you mean, gone?" Her tone was sharp, her wolfish instincts flaring at the sheer distress radiating off Emma.

Emma's hands gestured wildly, her frantic words tumbling out. "The Jolly Roger… it dove straight into a portal. He's left Storybrooke, Ruby. I don't know where he went, or if he's ever coming back. He…" Her voice cracked, the suffocating weight of uncertainty choking the rest of her sentence.

Grumpy set his mug down against the counter with a heavy thud, his bushy brows knitting tightly together as he cut in. "He'll be back, Swan." His gruff assurance drew immediate, skeptical looks from both women. Emma rounded on him, her voice sharpening to a razor edge. "You don't know that, Grumpy. He's grieving, he's reckless, and he's entirely alone. He could be anywhere in the realms!" Grumpy held her frantic gaze, completely undeterred. "Trust me, lass. He ain't alone."

Emma and Ruby exchanged a fast, confused glance, their brows furrowing in perfect unison. "What are you talking about?" Emma demanded. "Henry's with him," Grumpy explained, his steady voice instantly cutting through their panic. Emma's face drained of what little color it had left, her hand tightly gripping the edge of the counter to steady herself. "Henry?" she whispered, fear and profound frustration warring in her eyes. "Saw the kid sneak aboard the Roger earlier," Grumpy said, rubbing his chin. "Thought he was just waitin' to talk to Hook, but if the ship's gone, the kid musta known Killian was plannin' on leavin'."

The words hung heavily in the air, a suffocating silence settling over the trio as the reality of the situation sunk in.

Ruby's expression softened, but her mind raced, quickly latching onto a vital operational detail. "Wait, a portal? He'd need a magic bean for that, and last I checked, Storybrooke's fresh out." She glanced back at Grumpy, who scratched his thick beard, piecing the town's inventory together. "Only two folks I know of in this town who might keep one stashed away," he said slowly. "And Hook wouldn't go to Gold. Not after what happened to his storm lass in the woods. That leaves…" Emma's eyes widened, her posture locking into place as realization struck. "Regina," she said firmly. She spun on her heel and headed straight for the door, a mother's fierce determination completely replacing her initial panic.

Ruby watched her go, then turned her worried gaze back to the dwarf. "Are you absolutely sure Henry was still on Roger when it left?" Grumpy nodded, his tone entirely resolute. "The kid looked like he was on a sacred mission. Storm girl meant the absolute world to him. He was completely gutted when she…" He trailed off, shaking his head. Ruby sighed heavily, her voice dropping to a soft, mournful whisper. "Yeah. He wanted their fairytale to last."

Grumpy leaned back against his stool, his mug completely forgotten. "Hook'll be back. Henry'll make sure of it. The kid's always had a knack for fixin' broken stories." A faint, bittersweet smile tugged at Ruby's lips, a tiny flicker of hope returning to her chest. "Maybe some time alone with Henry is exactly what Killian needs to heal."

Grumpy grunted, shifting his weight. "Let's hope so. The absolute last thing this town needs is Captain Hook goin' full pirate again."

Pawnshop

Inside the pawnshop, Regina and Rumpelstiltskin stood wrapped in a tense, suffocating silence. The air in the cluttered room hung heavy with the toxic weight of their conversation. She kept her arms tightly crossed over her

chest, her dark eyes piercing as she closely studied him. He leaned casually against the glass display counter, his fingers idly tracing the smooth surface of a crystal orb.

“We left the Eclipse Syndicate behind decades ago,” she said, her voice dropping to a tense whisper, as if speaking the name aloud might actively summon them to Main Street.

His lips curled into a thin, sharp smirk, his dark eyes glinting with a volatile mix of deep-seated regret and ruthless calculation. “I never thought we’d face them here, dearie. Hook and Desylva were entirely apart. He was across the realms, she was locked away here. I didn’t see him ever finding his way to Storybrooke. I certainly didn’t see your mother dragging him here. I simply didn’t think they would ever reconnect.”

Her expression tightened defensively, her voice snapping across the room. “They are true love, Gold. We saw it back then, and we can all feel it now. … What he has with Emma? A fleeting, ordinary spark. It isn't written in the stars. … But Desylva? Their pull is an unyielding tide that no realm can ever break. Once they found each other again, this was entirely inevitable. They are permanently bound—storm and steel. And murdering her was your grand solution? That’s an incredibly bold move, even for you.”

His calculating smile instantly vanished, his features hardening into a mask of pure steel. “It was entirely necessary, Regina. Their active bond directly fuels the Syndicate’s power and draws their eyes straight to Storybrooke. We couldn’t risk the town's safety.”

She leaned closer across the counter, her voice cutting like a razor-sharp blade. “I just hope this doesn’t reignite your ancient feud with Hook. He was finally shedding his pirate ways, letting go of his centuries of vengeance. But now? You may have just lit a devastating fuse.”

His eyebrow arched smoothly, his tone dissolving back into a cool, detached drawl. “Feud? Dearie, I’m protecting us all from an existential threat.” Regina chimed in without thinking. “Well, when he gets back—” He raised a sharp hand, his dark eyes narrowing as he ruthlessly cut her off. “Back? Where exactly has he gone?” Suspicion rapidly dawned across his face. “Regina... where is he?”

She hesitated for a fraction of a second, her cover story quick but visibly unsteady. “I don’t know. He just said he had to take care of something.”

Rumpel’s piercing gaze flicked down to the crystal ball beneath his palm. He brushed his hand across the glass, causing a magical image to suddenly shimmer to life within the depths. The Storybrooke harbor appeared, completely empty. The Jolly Roger was gone. He snapped his gaze back up to her, his voice dropping to a low, incredibly dangerous hiss. “The ship is gone. What did you do?”

Before she could formulate a response, the door burst open. Belle stormed into the room, her face a violent tempest of anger, betrayal, and raw hurt. Her trembling voice cleanly cut through the suffocating tension. “He’s gone, Rumpel,” she said, refusing to use his Storybrooke name as her eyes blazed. “Are you happy now?”

Regina stepped back from the counter, instantly sensing the catastrophic brewing storm between the couple. She expertly slipped toward the exit, murmuring, “I’ll leave you two to sort this out,” before quietly vanishing into the night.

Belle advanced heavily on him, her arms crossed tightly, her eyes overflowing with tears. “Why, Rumpel? Explain it to me right now!”

Rumpelstiltskin sighed, his hands spreading in a patronizing, defensive gesture. “Belle, please. There are ancient forces at play here that you couldn’t possibly understand.”

Her eyebrow shot up, her voice sharpening to a dangerous point. “Try me.”

His patience was visibly frayed, but he pressed onward, his voice tight. “Their love... their specific bond... it threatened the safety of everyone in this town. The prophecy—” Belle cut him off, her voice violently trembling with absolute conviction. “They were true love, Rumpel! … True love! That is the only thing that actually matters! Together, they could have faced whatever threat came their way. Haven’t you learned that by now?”

He opened his mouth to defend his calculations, but her blinding anger surged over him, completely drowning him out.

“No,” she whispered, shaking her head as tears spilled down her cheeks. “You’ve gone far too damn far this time. I don’t know if I can ever forgive you for this.” She spun on her heel and stormed out of the pawnshop, the door slamming shut behind her with a resounding crash that rattled the display cases.

Left entirely alone in the dim, shadow-drenched shop, his gaze slowly returned to the crystal ball. He stared down at the empty, quiet harbor, his voice a low, gravelly murmur. “Where are you, pirate?” The desperate question lingered completely unanswered in the heavy silence.

Regina’s Mansion

Emma sat on the stone front steps, the crisp night air cool against her skin as her mind churned with a volatile mix of worry for Killian and Henry. The overhead porch light cast a lonely, soft glow over the porch, but it did absolutely nothing to ease the twisting knot in her chest.

Regina suddenly appeared, striding up the concrete walkway from her car. The sharp click of her heels echoed off the pavement, her expression instantly shifting to pure exasperation the moment she spotted Emma waiting in the dark. “What now, Swan?” Regina asked, her voice sharp but visibly weary as she reached the threshold and unlocked the front door.

Emma rose to her feet, eyes intense and tone completely clipped. “Two questions.”

They entered the house, the door closing softly behind them as Regina led the way into the dimly lit living room. Her structured blazer rustled softly as she spun around to face Emma. “Well? Spit it out,” Regina said, crossing her arms tightly over her chest. Her patience was paper-thin. Emma didn’t flinch. Her voice remained entirely steady. “First… did you give Killian a magic bean?”

Regina’s lips pursed into a tight line, but she didn’t deny it. She gave a blunt, singular nod. “Yes.” Emma’s jaw tightened, immediately pressing the attack. “What? Why?” Regina’s guarded expression softened just a fraction, though she held Emma’s furious gaze without wavering. “He asked for one, and I gave it to him. What is your second question?”

Emma’s voice dropped, suddenly laced with a raw, suffocating fear. “Do you know where Henry is?” Regina’s left eyebrow shot up, a rare flicker of genuine alarm breaking through her pristine composure. “In his room, last I checked. Why?” Emma’s words came fast and urgent, slicing cleanly through the quiet room. “Grumpy saw him sneak onto the Jolly Roger earlier tonight.” Regina’s face drained of color, her voice sharpening to a panicked edge. “What?”

They bolted from the living room as one, their frantic footsteps thundering up the grand staircase toward Henry’s bedroom. Regina flung the door open with a resounding crack, her heart instantly sinking at the sight of the empty space.

There was no sign of Henry. No storybook on his desk. Just a wide-open window, letting the cool night breeze violently ruffle the curtains.

Emma’s breath caught painfully in her throat, her voice trembling as the reality settled in. “Any idea where Killian went, Regina? Or why?” Regina hesitated for a fraction of a second, the weight of her secret lie pressing heavily against her ribs. “No,” she said, her tone steady but forced. “He didn’t say.”

Emma pressed harder, her fear mounting into pure panic. “Did he say how long he’d be gone? Did you give him two beans, Regina? One to get back?” Regina shook her head, her voice strained as she held back the truth about Gold's prophecy and the empty grave. “Just one. He said he’d be back, Swan. As for how… well, Captain Hook has his ways, doesn’t he?”

Emma's eyes narrowed, a toxic mix of frustration and heartbreak flaring in her chest. "That's exactly what scares me. All the progress he's made here… all the walls he's torn down. It could all completely unravel now. And Henry is right in the middle of it."

Regina reached out, her hand resting briefly but firmly over Emma's arm. Her tone left absolutely no room for debate. "Henry will be fine, Emma. Killian will not let a single thing happen to him. He has lost far too much to ever lose that boy, too."

Emma gave a fragile nod, desperately clinging to the reassurance. But the suffocating uncertainty lingered between them like a physical presence—a dark, permanent shadow stretching across the empty bedroom as the wind continued to howl through the open window.

Day 55

Coast of Veyra - Sunset

The Jolly Roger swayed gently on the waves just off Veyra's wild, unforgiving coast. Her hull kissed softly by the incoming tide, the heavy air thick with the sharp tang of salt and the unmistakable ozone of a distant, brewing storm. The setting sun bled a brilliant cascade of gold and violet across the endless horizon. It cast long, dramatic shadows over the deck where Killian stood at the port railing, his long black coat fluttering like a tattered sail in the warm breeze. His blue eyes, raw and bloodshot with grief, remained fixed on a jagged, monolithic rock rising from the churning surf.

It was the exact rock where he'd first found Desylva, her storm-gray eyes daring the sea itself to claim her. In his hand, he tightly gripped the urn. Its cold, gray surface felt like a cruel mockery of her once-vibrant spirit, the ashes within a crushing physical weight that anchored him to memories far too vivid to bear. His hook rested heavily on the rail, glinting faintly in the dying, amber light—a silent, metallic witness to the love that still burned furiously in his chest, completely undimmed by loss. His mind drifted, each recollected memory behaving like a massive wave crashing directly against his heart.

Memories

He saw her clinging desperately to that jagged stone, a furious gale shrieking around them as jagged bolts of lightning illuminated her pure defiance. Her dark hair had been streaming like ink against the white foam, her gray eyes blazing with fire as he dove headfirst into the freezing, icy sea. He could still feel the cold spray as he pulled her aboard, his hook gently brushing her sodden hair away from her face, only to be met with her rasped, "Only one pirate's mad enough to dive headfirst into a maelstrom with that hook."

The memory sparked a visceral thrill he had never been able to shake.

He recalled the terrifying night she had thrashed violently in her alcove berth, her escalating nightmare actively summoning a wild squall out over the water. Her storm-mark had blazed a brilliant, electric blue as he shook her awake, instantly finding himself pinned flat beneath her fierce strength. His own teasing murmur, "If you wanted me beneath you, lass, you could've asked," had been met with her sharp, defensive, "In your dreams, pirate." Their immediate, biting banter was a familiar dance that had instantly warmed the ship's freezing planks.

Their very first kiss flared brilliantly in his memory—her lips fierce and demanding against his, sending a powerful, blinding true-love ripple washing violently across the entirety of the Jolly Roger. The sails had shimmered with sudden light as her tempest fused permanently with his sea-born soul.

Then shortly after, in the privacy of his cabin, they had made love for the first time. Her storm magic had crackled wildly in the air the moment he entered her, his hook resting cool against her bare thigh as she whispered against his neck, "You feel like home." The words had permanently sealed their bond while the rain pattered softly against the stern windows. Then, their second round had turned into a wild, tempestuous clash of passion. Her breathless cry, "Ride me like the storm's your mistress," had spurred him into a raw frenzy that shook the ship's very timbers.

He remembered his first proposal, three years later, on the deck of the Roger under the silver crescent moon. The driftwood ring, with its raw sapphire heart, had been trembling between his fingers right as Regina's dark wraiths ambushed them. Desylva's sudden, roaring thunder had scattered the monsters into nothingness, their subsequent kiss fierce and desperate amid the lingering smoke. Her tearful, "Aye, I'll marry you," was a sacred vow forged in blood, steel, and starlight.

Then, the kidnapping tore through his chest like grapeshot. He could still hear Rumpelstiltskin's high, mocking cackle and see the dark shadow vines violently dragging her backward into a swirling portal. Her echoing scream of "Killian!" still haunted his sleepless nights. He remembered lying bloodied and broken, staring helplessly at her abandoned dagger glinting on the cabin floor—a permanent, agonizing relic of his utter failure to save her.

Her sudden return in Granny's Diner burned bright and blinding. Her storm-gray eyes had locked instantly with his, their desperate reunion kiss sparking another massive true-love ripple that shattered the town's quiet.

Her birthday party on the Jolly Roger's deck followed shortly after. He could see her laughing beneath the glowing fairy lights as he fastened the storm-cloud necklace around her throat, its sapphire centerpiece a perfect twin to her ring. Her quiet whisper, "You mad, wonderful pirate," had sealed their slow dance under the stars.

That night, in the cabin, they had made love. Her sultry, breathless demand to "Pillage me, pirate," had ignited an absolute tempest between the sheets. Her storm magic gusted through the room as he entered her, their bodies aggressively reclaiming the forty-six agonizing years they had spent apart while the sea outside churned in perfect, violent rhythm with their shared passion.

Finally, his thoughts turned to his second proposal on Storybrooke's pier. He could still hear the resonance of their spoken vows: "With the sea as our witness, the stars as our guide." The words had sparked a blinding flash of lightning that illuminated the entire harbor, their kiss sealing a love completely unbroken by time or curses.

And then, Rumpelstiltskin's ultimate betrayal. Her horrific death was a gaping, bleeding wound far too fresh to even name, leaving him with absolutely nothing but this cold urn and a heart shattered entirely beyond repair.

Present

Tears streamed down Killian's face, salt mingling with the icy sea's breath as his chest heaved. He clutched the gray urn tightly to his chest, the suffocating weight of her absence a storm he simply couldn't outrun.

A soft, distinct creak of deck planks broke his agonizing reverie. He spun around, startled, his hook dropping toward his hip before his eyes widened.

Standing right beside him was Henry. The boy's young face was intensely earnest, and the leather-bound storybook was clutched tightly under his arm.

"Bloody hell, lad!" Killian exclaimed. His voice was rough, scraped raw by emotion as his hook flexed at his side. He quickly used the back of his leather sleeve to wipe his eyes. "What're you doin' skulkin' about my deck?"

Henry met his guarded gaze, entirely unflinching. His voice remained remarkably steady despite the heavy gravity of the moment. "I saw you with Mom at the house. I saw her give you the magic bean. I couldn't let you face this alone, Killian."

Killian's brow furrowed, a volatile mix of frustration and profound gratitude flickering in his blue eyes. "Does anyone else know you're here, lad? Your mothers'll have my hide for this."

Henry shook his head, a tiny, mischievous grin breaking through his somber expression. "Nope. But I had to make sure you'd actually come back to Storybrooke. Someone's gotta keep you from goin' full pirate."

Killian's lips twitched into a genuine smirk, his hand reaching out to fondly ruffle Henry's dark hair. The boy's fierce, unwavering loyalty felt like a lifeline in the suffocating fog of his grief. "Cheeky scamp," he murmured, his tone softening completely as a wave of warmth settled over his chest.

Henry stepped closer, his eyes reverently tracing the wild, jagged coastline where the monolithic rock gleamed in the fading amber light. “That’s Veyra, isn’t it?” he asked quietly. Killian nodded, his gaze turning distant. “That it is, lad.” Henry’s eyes fell to the urn, then traveled back out to the churning surf. His voice was quiet but resolute. “Right there, on that rock. You’re bringing her back to where it all started.” Killian’s throat tightened painfully, his nod slow and heavy. “Aye. Exactly that.”

As the sun finally dipped below the horizon, painting the sea in violent hues of fire and deep shadow, Killian motioned to the boy. His voice was thick but resolute. “Help me, lad.”

Henry carefully removed the urn’s lid, his hands staying perfectly steady despite the immense weight of the act. Killian lifted the heavy vessel, tilting it gently over the rail, releasing the ashes to the wind. They watched together as the gray fragments danced beautifully across the dark waves—a final, sacred offering to the sea that had bound them across realms. The ashes shimmered brilliantly for a fleeting second, as if catching Desylva’s electric storm-light one last time, before dissolving completely into the endless tide.

Henry replaced the lid with a soft click. His eyes glistened with unshed tears as he took a step forward, wrapping his arms tightly around Killian’s waist in a fierce, protective hug. Killian instantly returned the embrace, his hook resting lightly on the boy’s back as his voice fractured into a rough whisper. “Thank you, Henry. For standin’ with me.”

“I miss her too,” Henry said, his voice muffled against the salt-dusted leather of Killian’s coat. The words were a shared ache that bound them together in the quiet dusk.

They held the embrace a moment longer, listening to the sea’s rhythm behave like a gentle lullaby, then stepped back. Henry’s gaze drifted up the quarterdeck steps toward the helm. “Can you give me another sailing lesson?” he asked, a sudden spark of adventure lighting his eyes—a boy’s earnest attempt to lift the suffocating gloom. Killian chuckled, the sound low and gravelly as he wiped fresh tears away with the back of his hand. His roguish smirk finally returned. “Aye, lad, why not? Let’s see if you’ve got the makings of a proper pirate yet.” They moved to the helm together.

Quarterdeck - Helm

Killian’s hand gently guided Henry’s fingers on the spokes of the wheel. The Jolly Roger responded instantly with a comforted creak of her enchanted timbers.

“Where to, Captain Henry?” Killian asked, his tone teasing but incredibly warm, the paralyzing grief finally easing in the boy’s presence. Henry grinned, shrugging his shoulders. “Doesn’t matter. Just… somewhere cool and epic.”

Henry leaned on the wheel for a moment, his eyes scanning the steering column before locking onto the bolted teak box sitting directly beside the helm. Its polished bronze fittings caught the very last smear of the bleeding sunset. “What’s that thing?” he asked, his voice tentative. “The little box with the runes.”

Killian’s hand stilled completely on the wood. For the first time since scattering Desylva’s ashes, an entirely different emotion flickered through his features—something akin to fondness, heavily edged with old pirate pride. “That,” he said, nodding toward the structure, “is the Starward Compass. A relic I stole from a ghost-riddled galleon in the Astral Sea. Nearly cost me my hide, but she’s saved it more times than I can count.”

Henry’s eyes widened to dinner plates. “Astral Sea? Ghost galleon? Okay, you can’t just say something like that and not explain it.”

Killian chuckled, the rich sound completely warmed by the boy’s burning curiosity. “Picture a sea darker than midnight, lad. Fog thick enough to choke a lantern, and a massive ship burning with supernatural green fire. I boarded her with my crew—Smee squealin' like a stuck pig, Jack puffin’ smoke like a dragon, and Tom silent as a grave. Inside her captain’s quarters sat a heavy chest bound in ancient runes. And inside that chest… sat this very compass.”

Henry stepped closer, studying the weathered box as if it might suddenly breathe. “What does it actually do?”

Killian's voice dropped into something almost reverent. "She's a helmsman made of pure magic, Henry. Set a course, turn her on, and she'll hold it true—dodgin' hidden reefs, skirtin' violent storms, and keepin' the Roger perfectly steady even if every soul aboard is fast asleep or drunk off their arses. Saved us from a bloody mutiny once. Saved me from drownin' in a cask of rum more than once, too." He rested the flat edge of his hook lightly against the bronze casing, careful not to accidentally touch the carved coral toggle. The intricate runes running along the wood caught the fading light, glimmering faintly, silver as starlight—not yet fully awakened, just remembering.

Henry blinked, trying to process the magic. "So… it's basically like auto-pilot?"

Killian snorted, rolling his eyes. "Auto-pilot? Lad, this thing was forged by star-mages older than time itself. She feels the sea's literal pulse. Knows danger before it even shows its teeth. Under a full moon, she glows like molten silver. Near cursed waters, she trembles like a hound scentin' a demon. She's loyal, she's steady, and she's as stubborn as any pirate worth his salt."

Henry reached out, hovering his fingers just inches above the dormant markings. "Can I… try it?"

Killian's expression softened, his heavy grief settling into something much gentler and steadier. "Aye. Once she's switched on, she'll keep a course true, warn of dangers a mortal eye might miss, and help guide the ship through foul seas. Useful, certainly, but hardly unique. Any halfway respectable enchantment can hold a heading. The clever bit is what happens when no one's watchin'. Leave the helm entirely empty and she'll wake on her own, keep the Roger steady, dodge reefs, skirt storms, and sail as faithfully as any sailor I've ever hired. The moment someone takes the wheel, though, she knows her place and yields command right back to mortal hands." He took a step back, gesturing grandly with his hook. "Go on then, Captain Henry. Toggle her on."

Henry reached forward and firmly flipped the coral switch.

The ancient runes instantly brightened into a brilliant silver, a soft, resonant hum threading through the wheel, the deck planks, and the very air around them. The Jolly Roger shifted beneath their feet, a subtle but sure movement, as if the ship itself were acknowledging a brand-new helmsman.

Henry's grin spread from ear to ear, pure awe lighting up his young face. "She's alive." Killian rested his hook lightly on the boy's shoulder, the solid gesture steadying them both against the swell. "Aye, lad. And tonight, she'll carry us wherever your heart points. Somewhere cool and epic, was it?" Henry nodded quickly, his eyes shining in the dark. "Yeah. Somewhere epic."

Killian smiled, the crushing ache in his chest finally easing into a manageable peace as the compass hummed steadily beneath the gathering stars. "Then let's follow her lead."

Day 56-64

The days blurred into a wandering rhythm, the Jolly Roger carving a looping path around the wild edges of Veyra's coast, the sea shifting from turquoise calm to steel-gray turbulence as though echoing Killian's heart. The wind carried faint traces of Desylva's storm-magic, a subtle ozone tang that lingered in the sails, whispering through the rigging like a memory refusing to fade. Seabirds wheeled in raucous flocks, their cries mingling with the sea's ceaseless song. The air was thick with salt and the tang of ozone.

Each day was a balm against the raw wound of Desylva's loss, their shared laughter and lessons a fragile thread weaving purpose into Killian's grief. Some loud with laughter, Henry's shrieks as Killian splashed him during a swim, Others quiet, the grief settling over Killian like a fog. Henry never pushed. He simply stayed close, offering presence instead of words, a steadying anchor in the storm of Killian's heart.

Henry listened with bright-eyed hunger, absorbing each story like scripture. his storybook never far from reach, pages filling with sketches of cliffs, coves, and the Jolly Roger herself. The boy's presence softened the ache—never erasing it, but giving it shape, giving it breath, giving it purpose.

Day 56

The hidden cove shimmered like a jewel spilled from some forgotten god's pocket, its crescent shape cradling the Jolly Roger in waters so impossibly clear they seemed unreal. Overhead sunlight speared directly through the glass-like surface, illuminating the vibrant reef below in shifting patches of amber, violet, and emerald with every breath of the tide. Schools of tropical fish darted through the depths, silver needles flashing between towering coral spires, vanishing and reappearing like living sparks.

Killian stood at the port rail, deeply inhaling the briny sweetness of the cove. His gaze swept across the reef below before settling on a dark cluster of sea urchins clinging to a shelf of coral. "Mind those spines, lad," Killian warned, pointing his hook toward the black shapes below. "They'll prick you worse than a siren's scorn."

Henry leaned over the rail, his eyes widening at the impossible colors beneath the ship. "This place is incredible," Henry breathed, gripping the railing. "It's like somebody painted the ocean."

"Aye," Killian agreed with a faint smile. "And unlike most paintings, this one can bite back."

Killian reached into his coat and produced two leather cords. A softly glowing pearl hung from each, no larger than a grape. Henry frowned curiously. "What's that?" Henry asked, pointing toward the luminescent beads. "Siren's Pearls," Killian explained proudly, holding one up between his fingers. "Rare little treasures. Place one in your mouth once we're in the water, and you'll breathe the sea as if it were air." Henry blinked in disbelief. "You're joking," Henry said flatly. Killian arched an eyebrow. "Have we met?" Killian asked dryly. Henry laughed despite himself. "Seriously?" Henry asked, turning the pearl over in his palm. "I can actually breathe underwater?"

"Aye," Killian confirmed with a nod. "The magic tingles a bit against your tongue, but after that you'll be swimming like a fish." Henry slipped the cord over his head. "And if it doesn't work?" Henry challenged skeptically. "Then you'll have discovered a very exciting new way to drown," Killian replied with a wicked grin. Henry groaned. "That was not reassuring," Henry muttered. "It wasn't meant to be," Killian drawled.

With practiced ease, Killian tossed a rope ladder over the side. The wooden rungs slapped gently against the hull before dangling into the crystal water below. "Come on then," Killian said as he tested the ladder's security. "No sense breakin' your neck by jumpin' from the deck."

"I would've been fine," Henry protested while climbing over the rail. "That's exactly what people say right before they aren't," Killian replied.

Together they climbed down the rope ladder and slipped beneath the shimmering surface.

The instant Henry placed the pearl in his mouth, a pleasant tingling spread across his tongue. For a brief moment he panicked as water surrounded him entirely. Then he inhaled. Cool seawater flowed into his lungs as naturally as a spring breeze. Henry's eyes widened behind his goggles.

Underwater, he looked toward Killian and gave an enthusiastic thumbs-up. Killian laughed silently and returned the gesture. Freed from the need to surface, they descended deeper into the hidden reef. The underwater world unfolded around them like an alien kingdom.

Sunlight streamed through the water in golden columns. Massive coral towers rose from the seabed like colorful castles. Crimson fan coral swayed in the gentle current beside clusters of violet tube sponges and emerald anemones. A sea turtle drifted lazily overhead.

Henry practically vibrated with excitement. He pointed toward a school of brilliant yellow fish. Killian nodded and gestured for him to follow.

They glided through narrow passages between coral formations, weaving among flashes of silver and sapphire scales.

Killian moved through the water with practiced ease, more comfortable than many sailors were on land. His hook gleamed whenever a shaft of sunlight found it. He pointed toward a massive starfish clinging stubbornly to a submerged boulder. Henry examined it closely before grinning.

A little farther along, Killian tapped Henry's shoulder and directed his attention beneath a limestone overhang. An shy octopus sat tucked beneath the ledge. As it noticed them, its skin rippled from vibrant violet to mottled brown. Henry nearly laughed underwater. Killian merely smirked and pointed at his own eyes before gesturing toward the creature, silently reminding Henry to watch. The octopus watched them right back.

Eventually they drifted toward a quieter section of the cove where colorful coral gave way to smooth stone and white sand. Something green caught Henry's eye. He swam downward and plucked the object from the seabed. Even beneath the water, Killian immediately recognized what it was.

They surfaced together near a shallow reef shelf. Henry removed the pearl briefly and held up his discovery. A smooth shard of sea glass rested in his palm, its frosted green surface catching the sun. "Think Desylva would've liked this?" Henry asked quietly, his voice suddenly soft.

The smile faded from Killian's face. A familiar ache tightened in his chest. "Aye, lad," Killian answered gently, treading water nearby. "That she would. She'd have tucked it straight into her cloak and called it a storm's personal gift." He reached out and carefully touched the piece of glass.

The cool surface awakened an immediate memory. Desylva stuffing shells into overflowing pockets. Desylva collecting polished stones. Desylva insisting every feather, pebble, and trinket carried a story waiting to be discovered.

For a moment the memory hurt. Then it warmed. Henry carefully slipped the glass into a waterproof pouch hanging around his neck. "I'll keep it safe," Henry promised quietly. Killian nodded. "Good," Killian replied softly. "She would've wanted that."

They spent another hour exploring the reef before finally returning to the ship.

Later that afternoon, Henry sat on the deck sketching the layout of the cove in his storybook, shading the towering cliffs with careful, focused strokes. The sea glass rested nearby where sunlight occasionally caught its green edges.

Killian sat on a crate a short distance away, a piece of driftwood balanced against his knee. With patient concentration, he carved a small whale from the weathered wood. His hook remained remarkably steady as he shaped smooth curves into the figure. Each scrape felt less like craftsmanship and more like remembrance. A quiet tribute to her, hidden inside an ordinary task. When he finally finished, he turned the carving over once in his hand before extending it toward Henry.

Henry looked up from his sketchbook. "For me?" Henry asked, surprised. Killian shrugged casually, though a faint smile touched his lips. "Thought your map might need a whale," Killian said lightly. Henry accepted the carving with obvious care. "It's awesome," Henry said, turning it over in his hands. "Aye," Killian replied with mock confidence. "I'm rather talented." Henry laughed. The sound carried easily across the sunlit cove.

For the first time that day, the memory of Desylva felt less like a wound and more like something they were carrying together

Day 57

The Jolly Roger slipped silently into a hidden lagoon that twisted and turned like a living maze. Mangroves crowded both shores, their ancient trunks rising from the water like weathered sentinels. Massive roots coiled and tangled beneath the surface, weaving together into natural archways and shadowed tunnels. Sunlight filtered through dense canopies overhead in scattered shafts of gold, illuminating drifting leaves and small fish that flashed through the dark water like liquid silver.

The further they ventured inland, the quieter the world became. No crashing surf. No distant gulls. Only the soft creak of timber, the whisper of sails, and the occasional splash from something unseen moving beneath the roots.

Henry stood beside the helm, one hand gripping the rail while he studied the lagoon ahead. Killian pointed toward a faint shimmer dancing across the otherwise still water.

Killian pointed toward a faint shimmer dancing across the otherwise still water. "See that ripple there, lad?" Killian instructed, extending his hook toward the disturbance. "Barely visible. Most sailors miss it." Henry narrowed his eyes and studied the water. "The wind?" Henry guessed uncertainly. "Aye," Killian replied approvingly, nodding once. "She's shifting."

Another shimmer appeared farther ahead.

"The lagoon twists around those roots," Killian continued patiently, gesturing toward the tangled mangroves. "The wind bounces about like a drunken deckhand. Learn to spot those changes early, and you'll always be one step ahead." Henry nodded thoughtfully. "And if I miss it?" Henry asked curiously. Killian's grin widened. "Then we discover whether the Roger can fit sideways between mangroves," Killian answered dryly. Henry barked out a laugh. "I'm guessing that's bad," Henry said. "Oh, exceptionally," Killian replied with mock seriousness.

The ship rounded another bend.

"Now then," Killian commanded, stepping aside from the helm. "Your turn." Henry's eyes widened. "My turn?" Henry repeated nervously. "Unless you'd prefer I continue doing all the work," Killian drawled, folding his arms. Henry immediately grabbed the wheel.

The lagoon curved sharply to port.

A sudden gust swept through an opening in the trees. Henry hesitated. The sails snapped loudly. The ship drifted a little too close toward a cluster of jagged roots protruding from the water.

"Henry," Killian warned calmly, straightening beside the helm. Henry squinted ahead. "I see it," he insisted confidently. Killian raised an eyebrow. "You don't," he replied dryly. Henry tightened his grip on the wheel. "I do," he argued. Killian folded his arms. "You really don't," he informed him.

The roots loomed nearer.

Henry's confidence evaporated. "I don't," he admitted quickly. "No, you don't," Killian agreed. Henry glanced between the roots and the sails. "What do I do?" he asked urgently. Killian pointed toward the rigging with his hook. "Trim the mainsail," he ordered.

Henry lunged toward the rigging lines, tugging the heavy hemp with a surprising, newfound skill. The sail shifted. The gust caught it properly. The ship caught the gust perfectly. The Jolly Roger surged forward and slid past a cluster of jagged roots with barely a yard to spare, their sharpened points jutting from the water like spears. An ordinary hull would have been splintered to kindling.

Henry stared. Then grinned. Then laughed. "I did it!" Killian folded his arms. "Eventually." Henry pointed accusingly at him. "We didn't hit anything," Henry argued. Killian folded his arms. "A standard I generally strive to exceed," Killian replied dryly. Henry rolled his eyes. "I am getting good at this, Cap'n."

Killian leaned casually against the rail while his hook tapped a slow rhythm against the wood. "Not bad, lad. You only nearly crashed us once today." Henry pointed accusingly at him. "Once?" Henry repeated indignantly. Killian stroked his chin as if weighing the evidence. "Perhaps twice," he suggested innocently. Henry groaned. "It wasn't twice," he argued. Killian waved a dismissive hand. "We'll call it one and a half," he decided generously. Henry groaned louder.

Killian's smile widened. He leaned casually against the helm, his hook tapping a slow rhythm against the wheel. " Your knots are improving," Killian admitted. "Your sail handling's improving." He paused before adding with a teasing smirk, "But you're no pirate yet. Takes far more than one good gust to truly earn your sea legs." Henry folded his arms. "I successfully avoided turning the ship into kindling," Henry pointed out. Killian inclined his head concedingly. "A fair achievement," Killian agreed. "Though I generally prefer my helmsmen accomplish that without panicking first." Henry rolled his eyes. "You're impossible," Henry muttered. "Aye," Killian replied cheerfully. "I've spent over two centuries perfecting the craft."

Henry glanced back toward the jagged roots disappearing behind the ship. A thoughtful look crossed his face before a familiar smirk began tugging at the corner of his mouth. Killian saw the expression and immediately became suspicious. "What?" he asked warily.

Henry's smirk widened. "The Roger's enchanted. … We weren't actually in any real danger." Killian immediately pointed his hook at him. "That is entirely beside the point." Henry's grin widened further. "Still true, though." Killian sighed dramatically and grumbled. "You're getting far too clever."

Henry flashed a mischievous grin that was so unmistakably Hook-like it nearly made Killian regret every lesson he'd taught him. Killian knew that grin far too well. He'd worn it himself countless times, usually moments before winning an argument through nothing but stubbornness and technicalities. "I learned from you," Henry said proudly. Killian paused. "Fair," he replied and conceded reluctantly. Henry laughed. Killian's smile returned despite himself.

By evening they discovered a small sandbar near the heart of the lagoon. The Jolly Roger rested quietly at anchor between the mangroves while the fading sun painted the water in shades of copper and gold. Fishing lines dangled from the stern. For nearly twenty minutes nothing happened. Then Henry's rod bent violently.

"I'm hooked!" Henry shouted excitedly, nearly dropping the rod. Killian looked up from his own line and raised an eyebrow. "I should hope so," Killian replied dryly. Henry rolled his eyes. "No, I mean the fish!" he clarified. Killian nodded solemnly. "Ah. Good. I was concerned," Killian deadpanned.

Henry braced his feet and reeled furiously. Moments later a fat silver snapper burst from the water, thrashing wildly.

"Ha!" Henry cheered triumphantly, hoisting the fish into the air. Killian examined the catch with exaggerated seriousness. "Not bad," Killian admitted. Henry stared at him. "Not bad?" he repeated incredulously. Killian tilted his head. "Perhaps adequate," he amended. Henry held the fish higher. "It weighs like ten pounds," he argued. "Seven," Killian corrected immediately. Henry frowned. "You didn't weigh it." Killian shrugged with complete confidence. "A captain develops instincts." Henry narrowed his eyes suspiciously. "You made that up," Henry accused. Killian's grin turned positively shameless. "Almost certainly," Killian admitted.

A short time later, Henry stubbornly insisted he cook the fish himself. The results were...mixed. Flames leapt beneath the improvised spit. Smoke rolled across the beach. The smell alternated between delicious and vaguely alarming.

Henry poked the fish suspiciously with a stick. "It's supposed to be that color, right?" Henry asked skeptically. Killian leaned forward to inspect the heavily charred fish. "Depends," Killian replied thoughtfully. Henry frowned. "On what?" Henry asked. Killian pointed toward the blackened skin. "Whether you're aiming for dinner or arson," Killian answered dryly.

Henry snorted despite himself.

Despite appearances, the fish proved edible. Mostly. After taking a bite, Killian placed a hand dramatically against his chest. "Remarkable," Killian declared grandly. "Without question the finest seafood I've consumed in over two centuries." Henry laughed outright. "You're lying," Henry accused.

Killian feigned offense. "I am deeply offended," Killian protested. Henry pointed at the fish. "The outside is black," Henry noted. Killian nodded solemnly. "Flavor," Killian replied. Henry pointed at the center. "The inside is dry." Killian lifted a finger. "Character," Killian countered. Henry gestured toward another burnt section. "Half of it's charcoal." Killian spread his hands. "Texture," Killian concluded confidently. Henry shook his head. "You are impossible," Henry muttered. Killian grinned. "Aye," Killian agreed cheerfully. "I've been told."

Later, the fire crackled softly between them. Darkness settled over the lagoon. Fireflies drifted among the mangroves like wandering stars. Moonlight spilled between the branches, silvering the water. For a while neither spoke. The quiet felt comfortable.

Henry hunched slightly closer to the warmth. "Did you and Desylva ever come here?" Henry asked softly.

Killian's gaze drifted toward the darkness beyond the firelight. The mangrove roots twisted through the water, ancient and stubborn. A faint smile touched his face. "Aye," Killian answered. His eyes remained fixed on the trees. "We spent nearly a week here once."

Henry listened attentively. "She loved this place," Killian continued. "Always said those roots reminded her of storms Twisted. Stubborn. Completely impossible to tame." A quiet chuckle escaped him. "Much like her."

The fire crackled. The lagoon breathed around them.

Henry stared out at the roots, trying to imagine Desylva standing among them. Trying to imagine the woman Killian loved so fiercely. The woman he had only briefly known. He tucked the image away carefully. Another memory. Another piece of her. Something precious. Something worth keeping.

Across the fire, Killian watched the moonlight dance on the water. And for the first time since entering the lagoon, the tangled roots no longer looked quite so empty.

Day 58

The Jolly Roger swayed gently in a sheltered bay, her anchor buried firmly in the sandy seabed below. Heavy wooden crates, spare barrels, and coils of thick hemp rope had been deliberately scattered across the main deck until it resembled less a ship and more a chaotic obstacle course designed by someone with questionable judgment.

Specifically, Killian.

"Combat rarely happens on a nice, empty deck," Killian explained as he paced across the makeshift training ground. His wooden practice sword rested casually across his shoulder while his hook gleamed in the midday sun. "The sea's too inconsiderate for that. You're fightin' around cargo, crew, cannon, rigging, and whatever fresh disaster fate decides to throw your way."

Henry glanced around at the obstacles. “So you made this mess on purpose?" he asked skeptically. Killian lifted his hook in a grand gesture. "I prefer the term *educational environment.*" Henry snorted. "It looks like the ship exploded."

"Precisely," Killian said approvingly. "Excellent battlefield awareness." Henry rolled his eyes and raised his practice sword.

They began. The wooden blades cracked together in a sharp, rapid rhythm that echoed across the sheltered bay, as Killian taught Henry how to properly fight like a pirate.

Killian moved with fluid, dangerous confidence, circling Henry with easy grace. Old battle scars caught the sunlight whenever he turned. His grin remained sharp and thoroughly mischievous as he probed for openings. Henry attacked with considerably more enthusiasm than precision. Killian effortlessly sidestepped a wild swing.

"Use your surroundings, lad," Killian instructed, knocking Henry's blade aside with a flick of his wrist. "This deck is your battlefield. Every loose rope, every mast, every crate, every plank is a tool if you're clever enough to use it." Henry adjusted his grip. "A tool?"

"A weapon," Killian corrected. Henry glanced around. "Even a crate?" Killian pointed his sword toward a nearby barrel. "I once watched a pirate win a duel with a bucket." Henry blinked. "Seriously?" Killian replied dryly. "No. But you believed me for a moment."

Before Henry could retaliate verbally, Killian sprang onto the quarterdeck steps in a single smooth motion. The higher ground immediately gave him an advantage. "Come on then," Killian challenged with a roguish grin. "Take me down."

Henry charged uphill with a yell. His sword slashed through empty air. Killian sidestepped effortlessly. "You're cheating!" Henry accused between swings.

Killian laughed. "Cheating's just strategy, lad!" With a practiced motion, Killian caught a dangling line with his hook and swung across the deck. His coat flared dramatically behind him. His boots landed lightly beside the mainmast.

Henry stared for a moment before shaking his head. "You realize that only looked cool because you've spent two hundred years practicing it," he informed him. Killian pointed his practice sword at him. "Correct." Henry groaned. "That wasn't even a denial." Killian shrugged unapologetically. "It wasn't intended to be."

They resumed immediately. This time Killian advanced. The pirate tapped Henry's shoulder with the flat of his wooden blade. "Dead." Henry frowned and protested. "I'm not dead." Killian tilted his head thoughtfully and countered dryly. "You are in spirit." Henry lowered his practice sword and argued. "I'm very much alive." Killian flashed a shark-like grin, warning playfully. "For now."

Henry lunged. Killian backpedaled around a crate. "Most fools focus entirely on the sword," Killian explained while deflecting another swing. "A proper pirate uses everything." He kicked a loose coil of rope toward Henry's feet. Henry jumped aside.

"The deck," Killian lectured, circling him. Henry swung. Killian parried. "The rigging," Killian continued, batting Henry's blade harmlessly aside. Henry pressed forward again. Killian dodged. "The weather," Killian added, stepping around a crate. Henry attacked once more. Killian parried easily. "The sun," Killian finished with a grin. Henry squinted. "The sun?" Killian suddenly shifted just enough that the sunlight reflected from his hook directly into Henry's eyes. Henry winced. "Oh, come on!" Killian's grin widened. "Exactly."

Henry swung blindly. Killian stepped aside. The strike missed completely.

"Dirty trick," Henry complained, blinking away the spots in his vision. "Strategy," Killian corrected smugly. Henry pointed accusingly with his practice sword. "Cheating." Killian gestured with his hook and repeated, “Strategy." Henry shook his head. "You made that up." Killian's grin widened dangerously. "Strategy," he insisted. Henry laughed despite himself.

Killian seized the moment. He hooked another line and swung cleanly over Henry's head. Landing behind him, he tapped Henry gently between the shoulders. "Dead again," Killian declared.

Henry groaned dramatically as he rubbed the spot between his shoulders. Killian looked at him with entirely too much satisfaction. "I'm starting to notice a pattern," he remarked thoughtfully.

Henry narrowed his eyes suspiciously. "What pattern?" Killian pointed his practice sword at him. "You're losing," he replied cheerfully. Henry threw his hands into the air. That proved a mistake. Killian immediately tapped his chest. "And now you're dead twice."

Determined to improve, Henry attempted to imitate the rope swing. He sprinted toward a dangling line, grabbed it, and launched himself into the air. He immediately regretted the decision. Somewhere between leaving the deck and hurtling directly toward a barrel, Henry realized he had made several critical errors in rapid succession.

The result was less graceful pirate and more human cannonball. He swung directly into a barrel with a loud thud. The barrel rolled. Henry fell over it. The rope continued swinging without him. For a second there was silence. Then Killian burst into laughter. Not a restrained chuckle. Not a dignified captain's laugh. A full, bright, completely unguarded laugh, the sort Henry had begun hearing more often during their voyage.

Henry sat up rubbing his shoulder. "You weren't supposed to laugh." Killian wiped at the corner of one eye and replied, "Oh, I absolutely was."

Killian strode over and offered Henry a hand up. Once the boy was back on his feet, Killian tapped the fallen rope with the tip of his practice sword. "And now you'll remember not to make that mistake again," Killian pointed out. Henry rubbed the back of his neck. "That was the plan all along."

Killian snorted, then pointed his practice sword toward the maze of crates and barrels scattered across the deck. "That's the spirit, lad," Killian said approvingly. "Use those crates for cover. Think fast, or you're nothing but shark bait." Henry looked around at the obstacle course. "You realize most teachers don't celebrate their students crashing

into things," Henry pointed out. Killian shrugged. "Most teachers aren't pirates," Killian replied. Henry pointed accusingly. "I could've been injured," Henry grumbled. Killian glanced at the barrel. "The barrel appears to have survived the encounter." Henry groaned.

The lesson continued throughout the afternoon. Killian taught him footwork. Balance. How to retreat without stumbling. How to use the ship's motion rather than fight against it. How to think three moves ahead. By the time the sun began dipping westward, both of them were drenched in sweat. Henry's arms felt like lead. His legs burned. His shirt clung to his back.

Eventually they collapsed onto the deck together. Henry sprawled flat against the sun-warmed planks, breathing hard. "Ow," Henry groaned. Killian slid down the mainmast until he was seated beside it. "You'll discover muscles tomorrow you didn't know existed," Killian informed him. Henry turned his head. "Was this how you learned?" Henry asked curiously. Killian barked out a laugh. "Gods, no." Henry blinked. "No?" Killian stretched his legs. "I learned by getting hit." Henry laughed. "Repeatedly?"

"Repeatedly," Killian confirmed. Henry shook his head. "That explains a lot." Killian pointed his hook at him. "Careful, lad." Henry grinned.

Killian reached over and ruffled the boy's messy, sweat-soaked hair. "You'll make a proper rogue yet, Henry," he said fondly. Henry's flushed grin widened. "I'll be better than you someday," Henry declared. Killian's old pirate pride immediately flared. He smirked. "Dreaming big, lad." Henry folded his arms. "You're not saying no." Killian glanced toward the distant horizon. A small smile tugged at the corner of his mouth. "I'm not saying yes either." Henry laughed.

And for a moment, beneath the warm afternoon sun and the gentle creak of the Jolly Roger, neither of them seemed to mind the future taking its time to arrive.

Day 59

They ventured ashore onto a rugged, rocky beach strewn with deep tide pools, each one acting as an isolated world unto itself. Small crabs scuttled frantically across wet stones, disappearing into narrow crevices at the first hint of movement. Sea anemones pulsed beneath crystal-clear water like living jewels, their delicate tendrils swaying gently with every retreating wave.

Henry crouched beside one pool while Killian wandered nearby, his boots scraping against the rocks. "Look at this one," Henry called excitedly, pointing into the water. A tiny crab emerged cautiously from beneath a shell no larger than a coin. The moment it noticed them, it raised both claws. Henry laughed. "He's smaller than my hand." Killian leaned over for a closer look. "And yet fully prepared to fight us both," Killian observed approvingly. The crab waved its claws more aggressively. Henry grinned. "I think he likes you."

"Aye," Killian replied dryly. "Clearly he's recognized a fellow warrior." The crab promptly retreated beneath its shell. "Or not," Henry said. "Wise decision," Killian agreed.

They wandered the shoreline for hours, exploring pools hidden between the rocks. Henry filled several pages of his storybook with sketches of strange shells, colorful anemones, and particularly territorial crabs. Killian contributed absolutely nothing useful except increasingly ridiculous names for the creatures.

"That's a Royal Reef Crab," Killian declared confidently. Henry looked up from his sketch. "Is it?" Killian replied dryly, "No." Henry raised an eyebrow. "Then why did you call it that?" he asked skeptically. Killian shrugged. "It sounded official." Henry rolled his eyes.

By the time twilight settled over the beach, the tide pools had transformed into mirrors. The first stars emerged overhead, bright enough to reflect in the still water. They climbed onto a broad shelf of stone overlooking the sea. The ocean stretched black and endless before them. Above, the sky glittered with countless stars.

Killian leaned back against the warm rock and raised his hook toward the heavens. "There." Henry followed the gesture. "Where?" Killian raised his hook toward the bright cluster overhead. "The three stars in a line," he instructed, tracing the pattern through the darkness. Henry searched for a moment. "Got them."

"Orion's Belt," Killian explained. "One of the easiest constellations to find." Henry quickly sketched it into the margins of his book. "Did you really navigate by stars?" he asked. Killian snorted. "How else was I supposed to cross realms before every sorcerer started selling maps?" Henry laughed.

Killian pointed higher. "And there's Cassiopeia." The familiar W-shape glittered overhead. Henry studied it carefully. "The queen." Killian's voice softened. "Aye. Desylva loved that one." Henry glanced over. Killian continued tracing patterns through the sky with the tip of his hook. "She had a story for every constellation we passed." Killian smiled faintly at the memory. "Half were complete nonsense." Henry smiled. "Did that stop her?"

"Not remotely." Killian shook his head fondly. "She'd name them one by one while we sailed the deeper waters," he replied quietly, eyes reflecting starlight. "She always said they were nothing but her own storms frozen in light so she wouldn't lose them."

The two sat in silence for a moment. Overhead, the stars shone on.

Eventually Henry looked back at the sky. "That's actually kind of beautiful." Killian chuckled softly. "Don't let her hear you say that. It'll only encourage her."

The words slipped out instinctively. Both of them felt the absence immediately afterward. Neither spoke of it. Neither needed to.

Later they built a small fire between the boulders. Fresh clams hissed and cracked above the flames while driftwood burned with a rich, smoky scent. The waves rolled in and out beyond the rocks.

For a while they simply ate. Then Henry stared into the fire. "I always knew something was wrong," Henry admitted quietly. Killian looked up. Henry continued watching the flames. "I was the only kid in town who actually grew up."

The crackling fire filled the brief silence.

"My classmates stayed the same. My teachers stayed the same. Every birthday felt wrong." He picked at a piece of driftwood beside the fire. "At first I thought I was imagining it."

Killian listened silently.

"But then I started paying attention." Henry's voice grew quieter. "People repeated conversations they'd already had. They celebrated the same events. They told the same stories." He shook his head. "It was like living inside a photograph."

Killian felt his chest tighten.

Henry stared into the flames. "Every time I asked Mom about it, she'd change the subject. She never gave me a straight answer," he admitted, the old frustration still lingering beneath the words. "Eventually I stopped asking."

Henry stared into the fire for a moment. "I felt like I was going crazy until I got the book," Henry admitted quietly. "Then suddenly everything started making sense." A faint smile touched his face. "Not all at once. It was more like finally finding the edge of a puzzle and realizing the pieces actually fit together."

He poked at the sand beside the fire with a stick. "It didn't answer everything, but it explained enough. Suddenly all the strange things I'd been noticing weren't random anymore. I started looking at people differently after that. The book didn't tell me exactly who everyone was, but it gave me somewhere to start."

Henry paused, staring into the flames. "For the first time, I had a reason to trust what I was seeing."

Henry pulled one knee against his chest. "The worst part wasn't that nobody believed me." Killian raised an eyebrow, his voice soft. "No?" Henry shook his head. "The worst part was that everyone else seemed happy pretending nothing was wrong."

The fire crackled. The waves whispered against the shore. "You start questioning yourself after a while," he admitted quietly. "You stop trusting yourself." He paused, staring into the fire. "You start wondering if you're the problem… if everybody else is right." Killian's expression darkened. "A dangerous thing, that." Henry glanced over. "What is?" Killian poked at the fire with a driftwood stick, his expression distant. "Being told the truth in your head isn't real," he said quietly.

Henry stared into the flames. "Aye," Henry agreed after a long pause. "It makes you start doubting yourself." Killian nodded slowly. Neither spoke for a while after that.

Killian listened in silence, his expression softening as he realized the sheer loneliness the boy had carried while Storybrooke slept beneath the Dark Curse. A child against an entire town. A boy trying to convince everyone around him that reality itself was wrong. And somehow he'd persisted anyway.

The thought sat heavily in his chest. He knew isolation. He knew grief. He knew what it was to carry a truth no one else seemed willing to see. As he watched the firelight dance across Henry's face, Killian felt a profound surge of gratitude for the distraction the boy had brought into his life, and an even deeper appreciation for his steady, anchoring presence. Somewhere along the voyage, without either of them truly noticing, Henry had become the thing keeping him tethered to the world.

"That must've been bloody lonely," Killian said quietly. Henry stared into the embers. "It was," he admitted. The honesty in the answer hurt more than any dramatic speech ever could.

The fire eventually burned down to glowing embers. The stars wheeled slowly overhead. Henry yawned. The long day finally catching up with him. Without thinking, he leaned his shoulder against Killian's side. Killian glanced down. Then, equally without thinking, rested the flat, smooth curve of his hook lightly across the boy's shoulder. Protective. Comforting. Familiar. Neither mentioned it. They simply sat together beneath the stars Desylva had loved, listening to the waves and watching the heavens drift overhead. For the first time in a long while, the silence felt less empty.

Day 60

The morning had begun peacefully enough. The sea stretched calm and blue beneath a bright sky while the Jolly Roger carved a steady path across gentle swells. A warm breeze filled the sails, and the rhythm of the voyage settled comfortably around them. Then the wind died. Killian, standing near the helm, noticed immediately. His gaze shifted toward the western horizon. A dark bruise stained the sky. Small. Localized. Moving fast. Henry lingered near the starboard rail on the main deck, watching the dark cloud race toward them across the water.

Henry looked up. "What is it?" Henry asked, following Killian's gaze. Killian's expression tightened. "Storm." Henry blinked. "That little thing?" Killian snorted. "Never trust anything described as *that little thing* at sea, lad."

The first gust struck moments later. The temperature plummeted. The calm ocean suddenly shivered. The sky turned an aggressive, bruised charcoal, and the sea instantly churned into a wild, frothing gray, a violent, physical echo of Desylva's old magic in its raw ferocity. Whitecaps exploded across the water. The dark cloud expanded with unnatural speed, swallowing sunlight beneath it. The Jolly Roger groaned.

Henry hurried to his feet. "That doesn't look little anymore," he observed. "No," Killian agreed grimly. "Now it looks interested."

The storm hit. Rain slammed across the deck with enough force to sting exposed skin. Wind howled through the rigging. The sea transformed from blue to violent gray in seconds. Massive waves rose around them. The ship climbed one swell before dropping down the far side with a stomach-lurching plunge.

Henry grabbed the rail. "Whoa!"

Killian's voice carried down from the quarterdeck. "And that's only the introduction, lad!" Killian shouted over the wind. "Watch the sea. She'll tell you what she's about to do!"

Another wave crashed over the bow. Water surged across the planks. The ship shuddered.

Killian pointed toward the towering swell ahead. "Less gawking, more sailing!"

Another swell rolled beneath the ship, lifting the Jolly Roger so high Henry could suddenly see miles of storm-tossed water in every direction. Then the vessel plunged down the far side.

Henry's stomach followed a moment later, his grip tightening on the rail. Killian shouted over the wind, "Still think this looked small?" Henry wiped rain from his eyes. "Maybe a little less small than before!" Henry yelled back. Killian barked out a laugh. "Now you're learning!"

Another wave slammed against the hull hard enough to rattle the rigging.

"Helm!" Killian ordered.

Henry released the rail and scrambled up the quarterdeck steps. Killian, already at the wheel, braced against the storm.

As Henry reached him, Killian planted both hands on the spokes for a moment before forcing the boy's grip into position. "Hold her steady, lad!" Killian shouted over the gale. "Keep her nose pointed into the waves!" Henry nodded as rain streamed down his face. His knuckles whitened around the enchanted oak wheel.

Another swell rose beneath them. The Jolly Roger climbed. Rolled. Dropped.

Every instinct screamed at him to panic. Instead, something entirely unexpected happened. He grinned. A laugh escaped him. Then another. The ship surged over another wave.

"This is awesome!" Henry shouted, his voice nearly ripped away by the wind.

Killian stared. For half a second, he could almost see her. That reckless delight. That complete lack of fear. That wild joy in the middle of a storm.

Then he threw his head back and laughed. A real laugh. Loud. Unrestrained. The sound burst free before he could stop it, slicing through the suffocating grief he had carried for days. For a few precious moments, the storm was louder than the loss.

"Now there's the spirit!" Killian shouted over the gale, grinning despite the rain streaming down his face. "That's Veyra's blood in your veins, lad!"

Henry laughed harder.

Lightning split the heavens. For a brief instant the entire world turned white. Thunder answered with a deafening crack. The Jolly Roger rose upon another massive swell.

Henry adjusted the wheel. Remembering. Wind direction. Wave angle. Everything Killian had spent weeks drilling into his head. "Starboard wind!" Henry shouted. Killian looked up sharply. The boy was right. A grin flashed across the pirate's face. "And how do we compensate for it?" Killian shouted over the gale.

Henry glanced toward the sails, then back to the churning sea. "Turn to port!" Henry called back. Killian's grin widened. "Exactly!" Henry hauled the wheel. "How much?" he called back through the driving rain. Killian pointed toward the mountain of water rising ahead of them. "Enough to keep us alive and floating, lad!" Killian bellowed. Henry scowled. "That's not a measurement!" Killian flashed a grin through the storm. "Then stop askin' for one and steer!" Henry gritted his teeth and adjusted the wheel again.

The ship responded immediately. The sails snapped taut. The Jolly Roger cut cleanly through the swell.

"Like that?" Henry yelled. Killian shouted back, "Exactly like that!" Pride swelled in Killian's chest. Not because Henry was perfect. Because he was learning. Actually learning.

The storm raged around them. Rain hammered the deck. Wind shrieked through canvas. The sea threw wave after wave against the ship. And through it all, they worked together. Killian adjusted lines. Henry held course. The Jolly Roger danced. Minutes stretched into eternity.

Then, as suddenly as it had arrived, the squall began moving on. The rain softened. The wind weakened. The furious sea slowly surrendered. Dark clouds drifted eastward. Patches of starlight emerged overhead. The storm's fury faded into memory.

When the last of the rain passed, both of them collapsed onto the soaked deck. Henry sprawled across the planks, completely drenched. Killian dropped onto his back beside him.

For several seconds neither could do anything except breathe. Water dripped from Killian's hair. Henry's chest rose and fell rapidly. Then Henry started laughing. Killian joined him. The sound echoed across the quiet sea.

Above them, the clouds finally parted. A vast blanket of stars appeared overhead. Silver light scattered across the dark water. The sea looked peaceful again. As though the storm had never existed.

Henry turned his head toward the sky. The grin slowly faded into something softer. "She would've loved that," he whispered.

Killian followed his gaze. For a moment, he imagined Desylva standing at the helm. Hair whipping wildly in the gale. Laughing into the storm. Daring the sea to do worse. A familiar ache touched his chest. But it no longer felt quite so sharp. For those precious minutes in the heart of the tempest, the crushing weight of his grief had eased, replaced by the visceral thrill of survival and the raw, dangerous joy of the sea.

"Aye, lad," Killian replied quietly. "That she would." The stars reflected in his eyes. A faint smile touched his face. "She'd have ridden that maelstrom like a bloody queen."

A soft laugh escaped Henry. "She probably would've tried to make it bigger," Henry said. Killian glanced toward the stars. "Without question," Killian agreed. Henry smiled. "And then she'd tell everyone she planned it." Killian's answering chuckle was quieter now. "Aye," Killian replied fondly. "And somehow she'd convince half the crew it had all gone exactly according to schedule." Henry laughed softly. "That does sound like her."

Neither spoke after that.

Together they lay beneath the stars as the dark sea rolled gently around them. The storm was gone. The stars remained. Killian still missed her. He always would. But for the first time since her passing, the memory didn't feel quite so much like a wound. It felt like company.

The Jolly Roger sailed onward beneath a sky washed clean by the storm.

Day 61

They navigated the Jolly Roger's skiff along the base of a towering cliff, following a narrow channel between jagged rocks and crashing surf. Ahead, a dark opening yawned in the stone. Half-submerged by the rising tide. Barely wide enough for the small vessel.

Henry eyed the gap suspiciously while holding a brass lantern across his lap. "You're sure this is safe?" he asked doubtfully. Killian guided the skiff toward the darkness with steady strokes of the oars. "Absolutely not," he replied cheerfully. Henry sighed. "You know most people don't find that reassuring," Henry pointed out dryly. Killian flashed a grin over his shoulder as he declared, "Then most people are fools."

The skiff slipped beneath the overhanging stone. Darkness swallowed them. The sounds of the ocean faded behind them. Water dripped somewhere ahead. For several long seconds there was nothing but shadows. Then the cavern began to glow. Blue light spread across the walls like liquid starlight. Bioluminescent algae clung to every surface, illuminating the chamber in an eerie sapphire radiance.

Henry stared openly. "Whoa," Henry breathed.

Even Killian paused. The glowing patterns stretched endlessly through the cavern, winding across jagged rock in veins of living blue. The light looked hauntingly familiar. Like Desylva's cursed mark at its brightest.

The skiff drifted deeper into the cave. Silent. Surrounded by shimmering light. Eventually they reached a broad stone shelf rising above the waterline. Killian secured the skiff to a natural outcropping. Henry set down the lantern and opened the small cargo compartment built into the bow. Inside sat a worn leather satchel. He slung it over one shoulder before climbing onto the rocks. Killian stepped out after him, one hand resting near the cutlass hanging at his side. The cave was beautiful. It was also completely unknown. Years at sea had taught him not to trust beautiful things. Especially beautiful things hidden inside caves.

They ventured deeper.

The lantern glow mingled with the blue radiance spread throughout the cavern. Every step revealed something new. Strange rock formations. Shimmering pools. Clusters of glowing moss. Henry crouched beside a patch of luminous stones no larger than his fist. The pebbles glowed with the same soft blue light as the walls. He picked one up carefully. The stone felt warm against his palm.

"Think there's anything cool left in here?" Henry asked hopefully as he examined it. "Like ancient pirate treasure?" Killian arched a brow. The blue light flashed across his hook. "With our particular brand of luck, lad, it'd be a hibernating kraken," Killian replied. Henry immediately looked around. Killian laughed. "I'm joking." Henry narrowed his eyes. "That wasn't reassuring either." Killian agreed. "Aye. But keep your eyes peeled."

As they continued deeper into the cave, Henry began slipping glowing stones into the satchel whenever he found particularly beautiful ones. Killian noticed. He said nothing.

Farther inside, the cavern widened dramatically. The ceiling disappeared into darkness overhead. Blue light rippled across the walls.

Killian glanced upward. His voice dropped to a low rumble as he recounted an old tale of high-seas survival. "Desylva's lightning sent a sea serpent diving once," he said, a wistful, quiet smile tugging at the corners of his lips. Henry immediately looked up. "Seriously?" Henry asked. Killian smirked. "Lad, I've learned that whenever someone begins a question with *seriously,* the answer no longer matters." Henry rolled his eyes. "That means yes."

"Aye," Killian admitted as he stepped over a cluster of rocks. "The beast had teeth longer than my forearm. Half the crew wanted to abandon ship. Desylva walked straight to the bow, looked the thing in the eye, and asked whether it intended to pay for the damage it'd caused." Henry barked out a laugh. "She didn't." Killian's grin widened. "Oh, she absolutely did." Henry shook his head. "What happened?" Henry asked. Killian lifted his hook. "The serpent looked confused," Killian replied. Henry stared. Killian's grin turned positively wicked. "Then she hit it with lightning." Henry laughed so hard his voice echoed through the chamber. "That sounds exactly like her." Killian agreed fondly. "It truly does."

Eventually they reached the deepest part of the cave. There the water pooled into a mirror-still basin. The glowing blue walls reflected perfectly across its surface, making it almost impossible to tell where reality ended and reflection began. Killian stopped walking. The ambient blue glow reflected perfectly in his eyes.

For several moments he simply stared. "She'd have loved this place," Killian murmured.

Henry nodded softly as he looked around the cavern. "Because of the glowing rocks?" Henry asked. Killian's smile deepened as he shook his head faintly. "Because she'd have decided they were magical," Killian replied fondly. Henry raised an eyebrow. "And they aren't?" Henry asked skeptically. Killian glanced around the shimmering cavern. A faint smile tugged at his mouth. "I didn't say that," he replied.

Henry laughed quietly. Then he reached into the satchel. Several glowing stones rested inside. The blue light spilled across his fingers. He studied them for a moment. "Desylva's stars," Henry said softly.

Killian looked down at the stones. Something tightened in his chest. Not pain. Not entirely. The name simply felt right. "Aye," Killian agreed quietly. "Desylva's stars."

Neither spoke for a while. The cave glowed around them. The still basin reflected an endless sea of blue light. Far above, unseen waves crashed against the cliffs. They found no chests of gold. No forgotten pirate treasure. No ancient, long-forgotten hoards. Yet somehow, standing beneath the blue glow with a satchel full of stars, it felt as though they had discovered something far more valuable. And neither of them was eager to leave just yet.

Day 62

The strait appeared shortly after sunrise. Towering cliffs rose from the sea on either side, their jagged walls funneling wind and current into a narrow channel barely wide enough for the Jolly Roger to pass through safely. White water churned between scattered reefs. Kelp forests swayed beneath the surface like dark fingers reaching up from the depths.

Henry stared ahead from the helm. "That looks reassuring," Henry remarked dryly. Killian barked out a laugh. "Aye. Nothing says safe passage quite like enough rocks to sink a fleet." Henry glanced sideways. "Sometimes I genuinely can't tell when you're joking." Killian folded his arms. "Neither can I." That did not help.

As the ship approached the mouth of the strait, Killian stepped in behind Henry at the helm. His hand rested steadily on the boy's shoulder while the narrowing channel stretched before them.

The current immediately caught the hull. The Jolly Roger shifted several feet sideways. Henry tightened his grip. "Okay. Now I'm paying attention," he said. "A wise decision," Killian replied.

Killian's hand remained steady on Henry's shoulder as he studied the water ahead. "The sea's speaking to you every second, lad. Most sailors simply never learn to listen." Henry squinted at the water.

Killian continued the lesson, pointing his hook toward a patch of drifting kelp. "Watch the kelp. It'll tell you where the current's moving." His hook shifted toward the waves breaking farther ahead. "Listen for the silences between the waves. Sometimes what you don't hear is just as important as what you do." Henry frowned. "That sounds suspiciously like a riddle," he observed. Killian's grin appeared instantly. "That's because the sea enjoys riddles." He pointed his hook toward the water. "And learn the colors. What color do you see?" Henry frowned. "Blue." Killian looked unimpressed. "Outstanding observation." Henry rolled his eyes. "You know what I mean." Killian instructed patiently. "Aye. Look deeper."

Henry studied the water. The strait contained dozens of shades. Some dark. Some pale. Some almost green. Understanding slowly dawned. "The colors mean something." Killian's grin widened. "There he is." He pointed toward a stretch of water ahead. "Deep midnight blue means safety." The hook shifted. "Pale green means trouble."

Henry studied the shifting shades beneath the surface. "Reefs?" he guessed. Killian nodded toward the pale green water. "Usually," he replied. His hand squeezed Henry's shoulder briefly. "It's like reading a book, lad. The sea's got stories written all over her. You just have to know how to turn the pages." Henry squinted ahead. "It's like a map." Killian nodded approvingly. "Aye. Only the map keeps changing."

The Jolly Roger entered the channel. Wind howled between the cliffs. The current pulled against the rudder. Henry adjusted course. A patch of pale green appeared ahead.

Henry's eyes widened. "There." Killian followed his gaze. "Good." Henry pointed. "Reef?" Killian flashed a proud grin. "Sharp eyes, lad."

The ship altered course. Moments later jagged stone flashed beneath the surface exactly where Henry had indicated.

Henry's confidence immediately grew. "I saw that." Killian nodded and confirmed, "Aye." Henry's grin widened as he pointed out, "You saw me see it." Killian folded his arms and admitted, "I did." Henry grinned. "I'm getting good at this." Killian snorted. "Let's not get carried away."

Farther into the strait, the water changed again. The waves grew strangely calm. Too calm. The realization hit Henry almost immediately. He looked around. "No waves." Killian raised an eyebrow. "And?"

Henry hesitated. Then remembered the storm from the other day. Remembered the sea. Watch the sea. She'll tell you what she's about to do. His eyes widened. "The current's changing."

Killian's grin widened dramatically. "Exactly."

Henry pointed toward a dark ribbon twisting through the channel. "There." Killian followed his gaze. "Current's pushing us toward starboard."

Henry corrected the wheel before the current could grab them. The ship remained steady.

For a moment neither spoke. Then Henry glanced toward Killian. "Did I get it?" he asked hopefully. Killian looked genuinely impressed. "Aye." The pride in his voice was impossible to miss.

The final stretch proved the hardest. The channel narrowed. Sharp rocks crowded both sides. Current hammered against the hull. The Jolly Roger threaded the passage with only yards to spare.

Henry's knuckles turned white. The massive wheel fought him every inch of the way.

Another reef appeared. Henry spotted it immediately. Adjusted. Corrected. Moved past it. By the time the open sea finally appeared ahead, he was breathing almost as hard as he had during the storm.

"Little warning next time would be nice," Henry informed Killian through clenched teeth. Killian laughed. "Where's the fun in that?"

Then the channel opened. The current released them. The cliffs fell behind. And the Jolly Roger surged into calm water.

For a moment there was silence. Then Henry threw both arms into the air. "We did it!" Killian laughed. "Aye, we did."

The pride in Killian’s chest arrived unexpectedly. Not because they'd crossed the strait. He'd crossed dozens in his lifetime. No. The pride came from watching Henry reach the conclusion before being told. Watching him understand. Watching him learn. The ache of grief loosened its grip a little more beneath the afternoon sun.

Later they sat together on the quarterdeck rail with a ration of dried fruit and hardtack, the danger safely behind them. Henry bit into a piece of hardtack. Immediately regretted it. His face twisted. Killian watched with poorly concealed amusement. "This is awful," Henry declared. "It tastes like cardboard."

Killian leaned comfortably against the rail. "Authentic pirate fare, lad. Builds character." Henry stared at the hardtack. "Pretty sure it's removing character." Killian laughed dismissively. "Nonsense." Henry tried another bite. A shower of crumbs exploded everywhere. He immediately started coughing.

Killian nearly dropped his dried fruit. "Careful." Henry pointed accusingly at the biscuit. "It's actively fighting back." Killian smirked as he pointed at the hardtack with a piece of dried apricot. "Also authentic pirate fare," he informed him.

That only made Henry laugh harder. The sound echoed brightly across the water. And for the first time all day, the strait behind them felt far less impressive than the journey still ahead.

Day 63

They anchored the Jolly Roger beside a tiny, uninhabited sandbar where shallow turquoise water stretched lazily between scattered rocks. With the day's chores complete and the afternoon sun hanging low overhead, Henry appeared on deck carrying two wooden practice swords.

Killian took one look at him and smiled. "Planning a mutiny, lad?" Henry tossed him one of the practice blades. "Rematch." Killian caught it easily. "Confident." Henry folded his arms. "I've been practicing." Killian raised an eyebrow. "Have you now?" Henry pointed toward the lower deck. "Every night." That actually caught Killian's

attention. The pirate studied him for a moment. The boy looked serious. Determined. "Then let's see what you've learned."

Unlike previous lessons, Killian offered no immediate instruction. No advice. No demonstrations. Just a nod. The signal to begin.

Henry attacked first. Wood cracked against wood. Killian parried automatically. Henry adjusted and attacked again.

Killian's eyebrow rose slightly. Better. The improvement was immediate. More controlled. More deliberate. The wild enthusiasm that had defined earlier sessions remained, but now there was purpose behind it.

They circled each other. The Jolly Roger rolled gently beneath their feet. Henry moved first. A feint. Then a second strike. Killian blocked both. But not by much. The pirate stepped back. Interesting.

"You're holding back," Henry accused. Killian laughed. "You wouldn't survive it if I wasn't." Henry tightened his grip on the practice sword. "Try me," Henry dared. Killian's grin sharpened immediately. Henry pointed the practice sword at him. "Don't go easy on me." For a moment Killian simply watched him. Then he nodded once. "As you wish."

The difference was immediate. Killian advanced. Fast. Very fast. The wooden blade came from an angle Henry had never seen before. Henry barely blocked it. Another strike followed. Then another. Killian's hook suddenly entered the fight. Not striking. Controlling. Redirecting. Trapping. The curved metal caught Henry's wrist for half a second. Just long enough. The practice sword tapped his shoulder.

"Dead," Killian declared. Henry groaned. "That doesn't count." Killian looked delighted. "It counts twice."

They resumed. This time Henry was ready. When the hook appeared, he anticipated it. Adjusted. Escaped. Killian's grin widened. Now the lesson had become interesting. Wood cracked together. The rhythm quickened.

Henry used the railing. The capstan. A cargo crate. Everything Killian had spent weeks teaching him. The sea breeze whipped through the rigging overhead. The fight stretched longer. Much longer. Long enough that Killian stopped thinking about teaching. And started thinking about winning.

Henry saw it. An opening. Tiny. Brief. Gone almost immediately. But it existed. Everything slowed. The shifting deck. The rolling sea. The movement of Killian's shoulders. The stories written across the water. The lessons. All of it. He moved. The strike landed. A sharp tap against Killian's ribs. Nothing powerful. Nothing dangerous. Just enough.

The sound echoed across the deck. For a moment both froze. Henry blinked. Killian looked down. Then back up. Silence. Henry's eyes widened. "Did I just..." Killian stared at him. Then, very slowly, a smile spread across his face. "You did." Henry laughed. "I got you." The pride in Killian's voice was impossible to miss. "Aye. You did."

Killian watched the grin spread across Henry's face. The sight stirred a familiar warmth in his chest. Somewhere during the voyage, without either of them truly noticing when it happened, the boy had become his anchor. His compass. His reason to keep moving forward when grief threatened to pull him beneath the waves. And now, watching Henry beam with pride over a single successful strike, Killian found himself absurdly proud as well.

Several minutes later they collapsed onto the warm deck. Both breathing hard. Henry stared at the sky. Killian settled beside the mainmast, the practice sword resting across his knees.

Henry glanced over. "So..." he began carefully. Killian already knew where this was going. "No," he replied immediately. Henry frowned. "No?" Killian gestured vaguely with the wooden sword. "You are not better than me," he informed him. Henry pointed upward dramatically. "I hit you." Killian remained entirely unimpressed. "You surprised me." Henry pointed again. "I hit you." Killian waved a dismissive hand. "You got lucky." Henry sat up on one elbow. "I hit you." Killian sighed dramatically. "A tragic lapse in professional standards," he declared.

Henry laughed so hard he nearly dropped the sword. Killian found himself laughing too. And for quite some time afterward, neither of them seemed particularly concerned about who had actually won.

Day 64

The Jolly Roger drifted peacefully in a mirror-calm sea, the distant horizon melting into a soft, dreamlike blur of gold and deep violet. The deck glowed with a rich, amber warmth in the late afternoon light, the heavy air thick with the sharp tang of salt and the faint, unexpected sweetness of sea hibiscus drifting from a nearby islet.

Killian sat on the main deck, patiently teaching Henry the intricate art of tying traditional sailor's knots. He used the blunt, curved edge of his hook to guide the thick rope as he explained, "A bowline's your best friend out on the open water, lad. It holds entirely fast under tension, yet it comes undone easy when the work is through."

Henry's fingers fumbled clumsily with the hemp, but he grinned broadly when the loops finally clicked perfectly into place, holding up the finished knot like a triumphant trophy. "Desylva loved this knot, didn't she?" he asked, his dark hair ruffled by the gentle sea breeze as his eyes shone with curiosity.

Killian's smile was bittersweet, his voice dropping to a low rumble as he leaned his back against a nearby wooden crate, his long black coat draped loosely over the capstan. "Aye, lad. That she did. She could knot a heavy line faster than any seasoned sailor I ever commanded. Had a bit of her own storm right in her fingers." His blue eyes softened, traveling back out toward the jagged horizon where the monolithic cliffs of Veyra loomed in the distance. The sharp memory of her deft hands was a fleeting, comforting warmth against the baseline of his grief.

They settled comfortably on the sun-warmed deck planks, sitting cross-legged near the base of the towering mainmast while the ship's ancient timbers creaked softly beneath them and the gentle sea lapped at the hull. Henry pulled his heavy storybook from his satchel, its leather cover beautifully worn and scuffed from their travels. He flipped open the thick parchment to a fresh, clean page, his pencil tucked securely behind his ear.

"I've been working on something," Henry said. His voice was intensely earnest but tinged with a nervous excitement, his young face lit with a profound sense of purpose. "Two poems. One's about us, sailing across the realm. The other one... it's about Desylva. Do you wanna hear them?" His eyes flicked tentatively to Killian, seeking permission, a boy's raw hope mingling with the heavy weight of their shared loss.

Killian's left eyebrow arched smoothly, a faint, genuine smirk tugging at the corner of his lips, though his throat tightened at the mention of her name. "Poems, eh? Look at you, a regular high-seas bard, lad. Let's hear what you've wrought from that brilliant mind of yours." He leaned back against the mast, his hook resting casually on his knee, his gaze warm but shadowed as he braced himself for the inevitable flood of memories Henry's words were about to unleash.

Henry cleared his throat, his fingers tightening firmly against the edges of the storybook. He took a steadying breath and began to read the first piece, his voice steady but rising with a passionate rhythm. ***The Pirate's Path - by Henry Mills***

The sea's a book, its waves a pen,
And Killian's tales write it all again.
I stowed away, a kid with a spark,
To sail with a pirate and help him through the dark.

Veyra's cliffs stood sharp and high,
Where seabirds screamed in a storm-gray sky.
Her ashes sailed on Veyra's breeze,
Her storm's a light that will never cease.

Killian's grief was a silent cry,
But I saw hope in his sea-blue eye.
We dove through reefs where corals gleamed,
Like Desylva's stars in the dreams she dreamed.

Wood swords clacked on the Roger's planks,
We fought like rogues, no fear, no ranks.
His hook flashed bright, his grin was sly,
"Use the deck, lad," he'd shout, "or you're shark bait, aye!"

I bravely challenged him to a rematch,
Certain my practice now would catch.
I landed one hit and thought I'd won,
He called it luck and spoiled my fun.

A squall roared in, the sails went tight,
I gripped the wheel through the howling night.
"That's Veyra's blood," he said with a grin,
As waves climbed high in the storm-dark wind.

I write it down, each wave, each star,
Her storm, his hook, the seas they spar.
A kid and a pirate, sailing as one,
Our story's alive, it's never done.

Killian's chest tightened painfully, his blue eyes glistening with a sudden layer of tears as Henry's spoken words vividly painted the exact reality of their nine-day journey. A single tear slipped down his cheek, catching in the dark stubble of his jawline. He quickly wiped it away with the back of his hand, his voice rough but incredibly warm.

"Bloody hell, lad," he murmured, his hook flexing tightly against his knee. "You've captured it all. Every single bit of it. It's like you've got a piece of her own lightning trapped right in your words." His lips curved into a proud, pained smile, the boy's poem behaving like a lifeline threading through his suffocating grief, binding their current adventure permanently to her lingering memory.

Henry beamed with pride, a bright flush rising in his cheeks, but his eyes held a quiet, unshakable resolve as he slowly turned the heavy parchment page. "There's another one," he said softly, his voice steadying as he began the second poem.

His tone turned deeply reverent, as if he were speaking directly to Desylva's spirit waiting out in the waves. ***Desylva's Storm - by Henry Mills***

Her eyes were gray like storm clouds high,
A spark that danced 'neath Veyra's sky.
Desylva, fierce, with lightning's grace,
She carved her mark in every place.

Her magic roared where waves did crash,
A witch who turned the seas to ash.
Her cloak held stars, her dagger bright,
She ruled the tides throughout the night.

Killian said she loved the fight,
Her thunder lit the darkest night.
In caves where algae glowed like flame,
She'd laugh and call the storm by name.

I saw her tale in his blue eyes,
A love that burned 'neath crimson skies.
Her sapphire ring, her stormy art,
Still beats within his pirate's heart.

We sailed to reefs where corals sing,
Her spirit rode on every wing.
I sketched her storms in my book's page,
To keep her fire through every age.

She fought the dark, her lightning bold,
Her stories in the stars are told.
Like the Jolly Roger, her name did soar,
A force no curse could hold ashore.

Her stars still glow beneath the sea,
Small lights she left for him and me.
The stars above burn just as bright,
Her storm still shining through the night.

Though now she's gone, her storm's still near,
In waves that whisper, sharp and clear.
I'll write her tale, her spark, her might,
A storm-witch shining through the night.

For Killian and me, she'll always stay,
Her tempest guides us on our way.
My book will hold her, fierce and free,
Desylva's storm lives on in me.

Killian's gaze dropped briefly to the open storybook resting in Henry's lap. His breath caught sharply in his throat. His hand trembled as he gripped the edge of the wooden crate, tears streaming completely free now down his face. For a moment he couldn't speak. His blue eyes locked entirely onto Henry as the boy's poetry beautifully wove Desylva back to life. Her laugh. Her stubbornness. Her storms. Her fire. Her unyielding, untamed spirit. Somehow Henry had found all of it and captured it between ink and parchment.

The poem's final lines hit him like a physical wave, her storm suddenly alive in Henry's breaking voice, a permanent testament to the love that anchored them both. "Lad," he rasped, his voice cracking under the emotional weight. "That's… that's her. Every single bit of her. You've gone and made her completely immortal in those pages." He leaned forward, pulling Henry into a fierce, tight hug. His hook rested lightly on the boy's shoulder as his tears dampened Henry's dark hair. "She'd be so bloody proud, Henry. Proud as the sea is deep."

Henry hugged him back with equal force, his heavy storybook pressed flat between them, his voice muffled but bright against the leather coat. "I wanted to keep her with us, you know? So we'd never forget." He pulled back, his own eyes glistening but his wide grin firmly returning. He reached down to pick up his notebook and carefully, deliberately tore the two pages straight from the binding. "Here," Henry said, offering the pages to Killian, his young hands remarkably steady. "One for you. Keep 'em down in the cabin, maybe with her stuff. So she's always close."

Killian took the pages, his fingers gently tracing the careful, youthful script, his throat far too tight to form words. He gave a slow nod, his blue eyes shimmering with a profound, unpayable gratitude. He carefully folded the poems and tucked them safely into his inner coat pocket, resting them right next to the small vial of her ashes. "Aye, lad," he murmured, his voice thick with emotion. "I'll keep 'em safe. Just like her." He reached out and fondly ruffled Henry's hair, his classic smirk finally returning, though his eyes still glistened in the twilight. "You're a poet and a pirate, Henry Mills. Desylva'd be absolutely cheering you on."

They spent the rest of the evening swapping stories by the light of the ship's lanterns, Henry eagerly recounting Desylva's lightning blasts in the Labyrinth of Echoes while Killian added tales of her fierce defiance against the moon wraiths. As the deep night finally fell across the open water, they lay flat on their backs on the main deck, staring up at the endless blanket of stars.

Henry's voice was soft in the quiet. "She's up there, right? Watching us?" Killian's throat tightened, his hand resting firm and protective on Henry's shoulder. "Aye, lad," Killian replied softly. "Her storm's in every star above us." His gaze drifted skyward. "I think she always will be."

Day 65

The Jolly Roger rocked gently on the calm surface of the sea, her sails furled and her dark hull gleaming beneath the rising sun. The crystal water lapped softly against her enchanted oak planks, the cool morning air fresh with the scent of salt and a sharp hint of distant pine blowing from a far shore.

Killian stood at the helm, his black leather coat open to the sea breeze, his hook resting lightly on the wheel as his blue eyes surveyed the horizon. Henry stood close beside him, his gaze bright with pure anticipation.

Beneath Killian's steady posture, however, something quieter stirred—a sudden warmth he hadn't felt in some time. Dawn had always been Desylva's favorite hour. She used to say the sea breathed differently at sunrise, that its first sigh of light revealed the exact truths the night tried so hard to hide. The memory brushed against his cheek like a ghost of a wind, soft but unmistakable.

Henry didn't notice his internal shift. He was far too full of excitement, entirely ready to leap toward whatever adventure waited beyond the next horizon.

"Ready for a proper look beneath the waves, lad?" Killian asked, his voice deeply warmed by a pirate's pride. Henry nodded eagerly, his storybook already tucked securely under his arm. "The Tidal Veil! Yes! I've read about it, and Smee's told me stories. Am I really going to see it in action?"

Killian smiled—a real one, bright and unguarded—though a flicker of something much softer passed through his eyes. Henry's burning enthusiasm reminded him so much of her. He could still see the way she would lean breathlessly forward whenever ancient magic stirred, her storm-gray eyes completely alight with a hunger for the unknown. He could almost feel the way she'd tightly grip his arm and whisper, "Show me something impossible."

"Aye, lad," Killian murmured. Reaching out, he targeted the heavy brass lever bolted near the center steering column. The sharp tip of his hook tapped the cold metal once in a quiet, reverent habit before he firmly grasped the handle and pulled it downward in a smooth, practiced arc.

The orb below responded instantly. A deep, resonant hum shivered violently through the ship's ancient bones, rising straight up from the keel like a heavy heartbeat. Intricate runes carved deeply into the deck planks flared to life, glowing a brilliant, molten amber. Then, the Tidal Veil erupted outward. A shimmering dome of sapphire and emerald light blasted from the hull, rippling like living water as it rapidly expanded to enclose the Jolly Roger in a translucent, flawless sphere. The protective bubble instantly held back the weight of the ocean, allowing the vessel to begin descending smoothly beneath the surface. The displaced sea pressed hard against the barrier, sliding harmlessly off the dome's exterior in sheets of gold-flecked blue, while the morning sunlight fractured beautifully through the shield, bending into shifting, hypnotic patterns as their descent deepened.

Underwater

Henry gasped, the sound bright, high, and completely unrestrained. Killian felt it pierce straight through him like a physical spark in his chest—a sudden, grounding reminder that genuine wonder still existed in the realms, even after the most shattering losses.

Once the ship leveled out and hung stable beneath the crushing weight of the waves, Killian led Henry away from the helm and across the strangely quiet deck.

As they descended the quarterdeck steps, a soft crystalline chime echoed through the steering column. The Starward Compass awakened automatically, taking control of the ship's course now that neither captain nor helmsman stood at the wheel.

Henry glanced back over his shoulder. "Still strange watching her sail without anyone steering." Killian smirked faintly. "Aye. Took me months to stop arguing with the thing."

"This is the Tidal Veil," he explained, raising his arm to gesture toward the translucent, glowing canopy that encapsulated them. "Merfolk craft. Proper, ancient magic, lad. Took a near-fatal dive, three furious mermaids, and more luck than sense to get my hands on it. One of the greatest treasures I've ever hauled out of the sea. It tricks the ocean into thinking we aren't even here. It keeps the entire sea at bay, letting us breathe, speak, and move

across these planks as if we're still sunning ourselves on the surface. Notice how the amber runes flare along the deck with each passing swell? That's how you know the orb deep in the keel is singing."

Henry's pencil flew across the thick pages of his storybook, his eyes darting frantically from the glowing shield to his paper. "It's incredible. Like the ship is traveling inside its own pocket dimension."

Killian watched him for a quiet moment, the boy's unshielded awe beautifully reflected in the sapphire and emerald contours of the shimmering dome. The sight stirred a raw place deep within his chest, a knot where fresh grief and old pirate pride tangled together. Desylva had been absolutely enchanted by this. He could see her clearly, pressing her bare palm flat against the rippling barrier, closing her eyes to feel the raw vibration of the runes, and whispering directly to the deep ocean as though it were a loyal, old friend.

Shaking himself from the thought, he guided Henry over to the starboard side. "And here are the firing slots." At his command, a rune-etched slit in the bulwark shimmered open, parting smoothly like living, liquid tissue. It provided a completely clear line of sight through the Tidal Veil while magically keeping the crushing exterior water at bay. "We can fire a cannon, a flintlock, or a crossbow straight through the shield from inside without a single drop flooding the deck. Watch closely how the perimeter runes flare into a violent gold right when it opens."

Henry leaned in close, his face illuminated by the magical energy as he sketched the mechanics with rapid, precise lines. "And the egress point?" he asked, his voice filled with absolute fascination. Killian turned, pointing his hook toward a shifting, spectral oval humming near the port rail. "That's our doorway in and out of the bubble. The Veil parts for us automatically when we need to plunge into the open water beyond the ship's perimeter. It lets you move freely through the barrier while the Jolly Roger stays completely dry and protected."

Henry's boundless excitement was completely infectious. It physically pulled Killian forward, dragging him away from the heavy, stagnant ache in his ribs and forcing him into the bright present moment—toward the boy who looked at him not as a ruthless pirate, not as a fairytale legend, but simply as a mentor worth learning from.

They spent the next few hours navigating the deep, silent underwater realm together. The ship drifted with a ghostly grace through massive, swirling schools of silver fish that darted around the perimeter of the Veil like a galaxy of living stars. Luminescent coral reefs glowed in soft, vibrant pastels far below them, and the gargantuan, distant shadows of prehistoric sea creatures glided harmlessly past the translucent shield.

Killian meticulously pointed out every maritime detail—the way the internal amber runes pulsed in perfect sync with the shifting deep-sea currents, how the emerald dome rippled and flexed when a stronger, heavier wave pressed hard against the barrier, and the steady, low-frequency hum of the orb that kept their air pure and their light bright in the crushing dark.

Henry's energy never once flagged. "I can't wait to write this all down tonight! The colors, the strange pressure, the way the light completely bends through the water—it's epic!"

Killian smiled, but this time, the expression carried a heavy, long shadow. He wished with every fiber of his soul that she could see this. He wished she could see the raw joy lighting up Henry's face, the spectacular glow of the Veil, and the beautiful way the massive ocean bowed completely around them like a sunken cathedral of light. The ache inside him was gentle now, but it remained entirely present, humming alongside the magic of the ship.

After several hours spent submerged in the peaceful depths, Killian returned to the helm, took the wheel, and the Jolly Roger began her smooth, upward ascent.

Surface

The Tidal Veil shimmered as the Jolly Roger breached the surface, explosive sheets of ocean water cascading off the dome as they broke back into the open air. Blinding midday sunlight instantly flooded the main deck, illuminating the soaked wood.

As Killian reclaimed the helm, a soft crystalline chime echoed through the steering column. The Starward Compass yielded control without protest, its guidance settling quietly back into dormancy beneath his hand.

He firmly pushed the Veil's brass lever back up to its starting position, reversing the magical pulse. The immense translucent dome flickered, its vibrant emerald and sapphire hues folding inward, melting down the rigging lines like a fast tide pulling back to the open sea.

As the ship settled lazily onto the rolling surface waves, Killian stood perfectly still beside the wheel, waiting for the final operational sign. A second later, a soft, crystalline chime resonated from the core of the deck planks—the telltale acoustic signal marking full deactivation. The very last ambient ripple faded from the grain of the wood. The Tidal Veil slept once more.

Henry instantly bolted toward the companionway, his sneakers skidding slightly on the wet deck. "This notebook's too small!" he called out over his shoulder, his voice bright with panicked inspiration as he disappeared below deck with a frantic clatter of footsteps.

Killian watched him go, a genuine, fond smile tugging at the corners of his lips—and beneath it, a quiet, unbidden swell of emotion. Henry's pure, uncomplicated joy was behaving like a soothing balm on his raw spirit. It was a profound reminder that even the most destructive storms eventually left a quiet room for dawn to break.

A few minutes later, Henry scrambled back on deck clutching his storybook. He slid down against the base of the mainmast, crossing his legs and settling comfortably against the sturdy timber. He flipped open the thick parchment to a completely fresh page, his pen flying across the paper with an intense, breathless focus as he began to meticulously catalog every single detail—the weight of the descent, the fluid mechanics of the firing slots, the glowing port egress point, the hypnotic shimmer of the Veil, and the quiet wonder of the hidden hours they had just spent beneath the sea.

As Killian walked down the quarterdeck steps, a soft crystalline chime drifted from the steering column behind him. The Starward Compass awakened once more, quietly reclaiming responsibility for the Jolly Roger's course now that her captain had stepped away from the wheel.

He reached the main deck and leaned his back against the port rail nearby. Crossing his arms over his chest, he simply stood in the quiet, watching the boy work.

The warm afternoon sun beat down, heating his shoulders as Henry's quiet, rhythmic murmurs began to fill the open space between them. "The runes sang when the slot opened… the egress oval glowed just like starlight…" The boy's relentless enthusiasm remained a bright, living spark on the otherwise calm, silent deck.

Killian's blue eyes softened with a deep, quiet pride, entirely content to play the role of the silent sentinel while the lad captured their shared across-the-realms adventure in ink. For the very first time in days, the suffocating, tight ache inside his chest truly eased—not gone entirely, but gently tempered, replaced by a fragile, beautiful spark of hope.

A few hours later (Early Afternoon)

The sharp midday brightness had mellowed into a warm, honeyed glow—the kind of light that softened the hard edges of the world and turned the open sea into a vast sheet of molten gold. The Jolly Roger rocked lazily on the calm swells, her ancient timbers sighing after the long hours spent beneath the waves, as though the residual magic of the Tidal Veil were still humming faintly in her bones.

Killian stood quietly at the rail, his long leather coat draped casually over his shoulders as he watched the dark waves lap against the hull in soft, rhythmic breaths. The ocean itself felt remarkably quieter now, as if the water too were settling after the shared wonder of the morning's descent.

Henry sat a few paces away on an upturned wooden barrel, his storybook splayed open across his lap. The parchment pages were already heavily crowded with intricate diagrams, running footnotes, and an excited, youthful scrawl. His pencil scratched across the grain with a relentless, driving energy, pausing only when he lifted his head to revisit some remarkable sight from their journey beneath the sea.

“You’ve been at it for hours, lad,” Killian said with a low, gravelly chuckle. He walked over from the rail, balancing two steaming tin cups of warm apple cider. He extended one toward Henry, who blindly accepted the metal mug without even looking up, his eyes still burning with absolute focus. “Get it all down true, then?”

Henry finally glanced up, his eyes wide and brilliant, his cheeks still deeply flushed with a writer's enthusiasm. “Every single bit of it. The way the sunlight filtered through the green dome, the low hum of the amber runes, the way the entire ship felt alive down there.” He took a slow sip of the cider before eagerly flipping back through his fresh notes, using the tip of his pencil to tap a detailed sketch of the bulwark firing slot. “This is going to be one of the best chapters I've ever written. I can still see it... the way the colors completely shifted when we passed those luminescent coral fields.”

Killian watched the boy, a profound, quiet fondness washing over his features. As the warm breeze gently tugged at the lapels of his open coat, he murmured, “You’ve a remarkably sharp eye, Henry. You see the true wonder in things.”

Henry grinned, carefully setting the tin cup down on a nearby crate so he could write one final, definitive line of prose. “That’s only because you showed me how. The hours we spent down there… it wasn’t just an adventure. It was magic.” He closed the storybook with a satisfied, resounding thump, but his fingers lingered on the cover, his thumb gently tracing the contours of the scuffed, worn leather as if physically sealing the memory inside the book for all time. He looked up, his gaze steady. “Thanks, Killian. For letting me see it all in action.”

Killian smiled, reaching out with his hand to fondly ruffle the boy’s messy dark hair. “Anytime, lad. Anytime at all.”

Henry’s smile softened into a peaceful expression, and for a fleeting moment, the entire main deck felt beautifully suspended in a warm, timeless stillness—the rare kind of quiet that always follows a profound, shared wonder. The sea breeze curled lazily around the masts, and the ship creaked gently beneath their boots, as if settling into a well-earned rest. He tucked the book securely under his arm and slid off the barrel, moving over to sit cross-legged near the starboard rail to quietly sketch the blending horizon.

Killian turned back to the lines, deftly adjusting a loose knot on the rigging. The silence that settled between them was deeply companionable, tightly threaded with the lingering, beautiful awe of the morning’s journey.

A few hours later (Late Afternoon)

The comforting warmth of the day began to fade as the afternoon drifted toward evening with a slow, unhurried grace. A cool, sharp breeze whispered across the deck. The sea had settled into a gentle, monotonous rhythm, each small wave brushing the wooden hull like a soft, weary exhale.

Henry’s pencil danced quietly across the page. Nearby, Killian’s gaze lingered on him with a quiet, fierce intensity. A strong sense of pride warmed his chest, but beneath it, something heavier stirred. Something quieter. Something that tugged steadily at his soul like an unyielding tide pulling at a buried anchor.

Henry was still entirely absorbed in capturing the shimmer of the Tidal Veil, the rhythmic pulse of the amber runes, and the way the glowing coral fields had illuminated the dark beneath the sea. But eventually, Killian’s profound silence drew his attention. He glanced up, his young brow furrowing slightly. “You okay?” he asked, his voice soft.

Killian blinked, his head snapping up as though he had just been pulled from a distant, dangerous shore. “Aye, lad. Just thinkin’.”

Henry didn’t press, but he didn’t look away either. He watched Killian the way only someone who cared deeply could—quietly, attentively, without demanding immediate answers. It was the exact same way he’d watched Emma after brutal battles, or Regina after shattering heartbreaks. Through his years with his family, Henry had learned how to perfectly read the heavy pauses, tracking the precise way Killian’s shoulders tightened whenever his thoughts drifted toward a painful memory.

Killian offered a faint smile, but the warmth never reached his eyes. For a striking moment, he looked significantly older—not in physical years, but in sheer weight. In the toll of his memories.

The Jolly Roger creaked softly beneath them, settling into the quiet that always follows immense wonder—the dangerous kind of quiet that deliberately makes room for the exact thoughts a man has been desperately avoiding.

Henry returned to his storybook, but his movements were slower now, his pencil strokes gentler against the paper. The ecstatic excitement of the morning had completely softened into something deeply reflective. The ship itself felt entirely different too—less like a grand vessel of adventure and more like a space suspended between worlds. Between joy and sorrow. Between what had been tragically lost and what still stubbornly lingered.

The sun dipped lower toward the horizon, stretching long, jagged shadows across the deck planks as the light shifted from a bright gold into a heavy amber, the vast sky rapidly deepening into its evening hues.

Henry finished a line, closed the book with care, and rested his palm flat against the leather cover, his expression thoughtful. “Magic,” he murmured. But this time, the word carried an entirely different tone—less about wonder, and far more about a quiet reverence. It was as though the boy finally sensed that magic wasn’t always bright and triumphant. Sometimes it was unbearably heavy. Sometimes it was nothing but memory.

Killian reached out to ruffle his hair again, but this time, the familiar gesture lingered. His hand trembled just slightly before dropping back to his side.

A little bit later

The breeze shifted. The residual magic of the morning still clung tightly to the ship, but now it mingled with something far softer and significantly heavier. The sea’s rhythm slowed, the deep colors of the water deepened, and the entire world seemed to let out a long, weary exhale. The Jolly Roger creaked softly, as though her ancient timbers perfectly felt the agonizing shift in her captain’s heart.

Killian leaned heavily on the port rail, the vial of Desylva’s ashes clenched in his hand. The grief wasn't new. It had lived in his chest since the moment he lost her. But some days it rose without warning. Today had been one of those days. The Tidal Veil. The glowing coral. Henry's wonder beneath the sea. The poems.

Every part of the day felt like something Desylva should have been standing beside him to witness. He stared out at the dark horizon. Not seeing the water. Seeing her. Storm-gray eyes bright with mischief, sparking with electricity whenever she laughed. Lightning dancing at her fingertips. Her hands planted firmly on her hips, her chin tilted high, daring the entire world to disappoint her. The way she'd stand at the rail and demand the sea show her something impossible. The way she’d look at him—as if she could see straight through every single defensive wall he had spent centuries building.

His grip tightened around the vial. The ache in his chest deepened. She should have been here. The thought struck with quiet, relentless certainty. Not as guilt. Not as anger. Just absence. A terrible, endless absence. Raw grief didn't care about fairness; it only cared about the empty, agonizing space where she should have been standing. He bowed his head, his shoulders curling inward as if physically breaking.

Henry glanced up, his pencil stilling completely. He carefully closed the storybook, having sensed the shift in the air. The way Killian's shoulders had tightened. The way his gaze had gone distant. "Killian," Henry called softly.

Killian didn't look up. He couldn't. His throat was too tight. His chest hurt too much. He forced a breath, but it shuddered out unevenly.

Henry slid off the wooden crate and approached slowly. Not cautiously. Respectfully. "You don't have to pretend with me," Henry said softly.

The boy's steady voice cut through the fog of his sorrow like a lantern in a squall. His quiet presence behaving like a lifeline thrown to a drowning man.

Not alone, Killian realized. *Not tonight.*

He finally forced his head up and looked down at Henry, his blue eyes glistening heavily with unshed tears. Killian forced a breath. It hurt. But it came. "She should be here," he whispered, his voice cracking down the middle. "Gods,

Henry... she should be here. She'd have absolutely loved today." His voice faltered. "She'd have stood right here, lad. Right where you're standing. Laughin' at the entire sea as if she bloody owned it." Henry's eyes softened. "I know."

Killian's grip on the vial loosened slightly. "I keep thinkin'..." he began, then his voice dropped to a ragged rasp. "I keep thinkin' I'll turn around and she'll just be there. Leanin' against the mainmast. Smirkin' at me. Tellin' me I'm takin' too long to set sail." His jaw tightened. "But she's not." Henry stepped closer and placed a steady hand on Killian's sleeve. "It's okay to miss her, Killian."

Killian closed his eyes. The words were simple. But they landed harder than he expected. Not because they were new. Because they were true. And because Henry offered them without pity. Only understanding.

When Killian opened his eyes again, he didn't look away. He didn't try to hide his tears behind his pirate bravado. He didn't force a smile. The grief was too deep, too honest. For the first time in days, he simply let himself feel it. All of it. Without running. Without drinking. Without pretending. Without insisting he was fine. "She was my everything, Henry," Killian murmured, his voice thick with emotion. "And now... the sea just feels so quiet."

Henry gave a slow nod. His reply was barely above a whisper. "Then we make a new storm. For her."

Killian looked at him. Really looked at him. And something deep inside his fractured soul steadied. Not healed. Not yet. But anchored. He let out a broken laugh, the rare kind that carried both an intense pain and a profound gratitude. He raised the back of his hand to roughly wipe at his eyes. "She'd call me a pathetic fool for cryin'," he said, his voice still thick with tears. A faint smile touched his lips. "Then she'd kiss me for it."

Henry smiled gently. "Sounds exactly like her."

A few hours later (Sunset)

The vast sky burned with a spectacular brilliance, bleeding heavy hues of amber and deep violet across the horizon. The setting sun cast long, dramatic shadows across the main deck, where coiled hemp lines glowed like buried copper in the fading light.

The Jolly Roger's ancient timbers creaked softly against the swell, their low groans blending with the evening wind like distant memories carried across the sea. A gentle, cooling breeze swept across the open planks, and the brass lanterns began to sway softly from the rigging, their warm internal flames flickering in the twilight like small, fragile hopes.

Killian leaned his weight against the port rail, the sharp curve of his hook glinting like a crescent moon in the dimming light. His blue eyes, heavily shadowed with a baseline of grief, drifted past the boy, past the towering mainmast, and past the shimmering silver trail of their own wake, locking onto the dark horizon where Veyra's cliffs loomed. The jagged stone structure rose like a permanent scar against the sky—a brutal physical reminder of the monolithic rock where he'd first pulled her from the maelstrom. He could still vividly see her storm-gray eyes daring the sea to claim her, that fierce defiance a spark that had permanently ignited his frozen heart.

The glass vial in his hand felt heavier than it should. He turned it slowly between his fingers, watching the last bleeding rays of sunlight catch against the gray ashes inside. His breath hitched in his throat. He hadn't intended to take it out at all. Somehow, it had simply found its way into his hand. His thumb brushed the cool surface of the glass, and a quiet tremor ran through his frame.

Henry sat cross-legged on a nearby wooden crate, his storybook splayed wide across his lap. His pencil scratched softly against the parchment, his young face earnest but etched with the same quiet, reflective sorrow that clung so heavily to Killian. The boy's sneakers were scuffed with sand from their islet training, his dark hair ruffled by the cooling breeze, and his eyes flicked rhythmically between his pages and the open sea, as if he were actively searching for a trace of her out in the rolling waves.

A gull's sharp, lonely cry pierced the quiet, breaking the spell. Killian's gaze shifted away from the horizon and landed on the child. When he spoke, his voice cleanly broke the stillness—low, rough, and rich with the natural lilt of the sea. "Time to head back, lad. Your mums'll be absolutely frantic by now. Emma's likely plottin' my public

demise as we speak.” He forced a classic, roguish smirk onto his lips, but the expression faltered almost instantly. The ache of Desylva's absence was far too great in his chest.

Henry looked up from his writing, his pencil pausing mid-stroke. His eyes widened with a potent mix of defiance and deep concern. “They’ll understand.”

He closed the storybook with care, its leather cover thumping softly against his knees, and slid off the crate. He stood tall, lifting his chin with a boy’s stubborn resolve. “But… can we even get back right now? Mom only gave you one magic bean. Have you got another one stashed somewhere secret, Cap’n?” His tone was playfully teasing, but his brow furrowed, a sudden flicker of real worry betraying his absolute faith in Killian’s pirate cunning.

Killian’s lips twitched upward into a genuine, roguish grin. His hook flashed in the lantern light as he raised it with a theatrical, grand flourish, the physical gesture a brilliant spark of his old, untouched fire cutting cleanly through the dense fog of his sorrow. “Not at the exact moment, lad, but I’m Captain Hook, aren’t I? I happen to know a few ports across the realms, incredibly shady ones, mind you, where a magic bean or two might be had for the right price,” his voice suddenly rich with a dangerous mischief.

Henry's eyes widened. “So that's your plan?” Killian shrugged. “It's either that or explain to your mothers why I accidentally misplaced their son in another realm.” Henry winced. "If that happened, a kraken would seem like a kitten." Killian stared at him for a moment. "You know, lad, that's actually disturbingly accurate." Henry grinned. "I've met my family." Killian nodded solemnly. "That's why finding a bean seems the safer option." He paused, then continued, “Besides, every proper pirate voyage should end with a questionable decision and a stop at a criminal port.” Yet beneath the bravado, his blue eyes held a tiny glint of uncertainty. The path ahead of them was completely uncharted.

Henry’s entire face instantly lit up. His wide grin split across his face, the grand promise of an uncharted adventure completely banishing his doubt like a sharp gust clearing away stagnant storm clouds. “Then let’s go find one!” He shouted, bouncing eagerly on his toes, his hands gesturing wildly through the air while he clutched the storybook under his arm. He was already imagining lawless taverns filled with rogues and ancient relics. “There’s gotta be a pirate hideout out here with a bean! Just like in the old stories! Maybe a place like… Tortuga, but filled with real magic! You’ve been to places like that before, haven’t you?”

Killian let out a low, warm chuckle—a rich sound that truly eased the heavy ache in his ribs. He reached out, his hand fondly ruffling Henry’s dark hair as he leaned his back comfortably against the mast. “Aye, lad. I’ve seen my fair share of wretched dens. Ports where the ale’s as cursed as the company you keep. Blackbeard’s Hollow, the Siren’s Shroud... dangerous waters, to be sure, but a bean’s never entirely impossible.” He paused, his gaze drifting back down to the vial in his hand, his voice softening until he was almost speaking to himself. “Desylva absolutely loved those dives. She’d waltz straight into the room, lightning cracklin’ in her eyes, and every single rogue in the place knew better than to cross her path.”

A bittersweet smile tugged at his lips as a massive wave of memories flooded back into his mind. He could clearly hear her sharp, triumphant laugh echoing through a smoky tavern; he could see her dagger flashing under a lantern as she bested a cheating smuggler at cards, her raw storm-born magic sending a drunkard’s table crashing to the floor whenever he got a bit too bold.

Henry caught the sudden shift in Killian’s tone. His young face softened into an expression of quiet respect as he stepped closer to the rail, his voice quiet but incredibly firm. “She’d want us to find that bean and get home safely, Killian.” He reached out, his small hand brushing firmly against Killian’s leather coat sleeve—a powerful gesture of solidarity that anchored the pirate cleanly in the present moment. “She’d probably look at us right now and say something like, ‘Don’t just stand there, pirate. Sail or sink!’” His youthful imitation of Desylva’s sharp, biting Veyran accent was intensely earnest but hilariously slightly off, drawing a sudden, genuine laugh from Killian—the sound rare, raw, and full of life.

“Aye, that’s her, lad,” Killian said, his voice thick with emotion as his blue eyes glistened in the dark. “Always pushin’ me to chase the next horizon.”

For the first time all day, the thought didn't hurt quite as much. The horizon ahead no longer felt like something separating him from her. It felt like something she would have demanded he keep chasing.

With a slow, deliberate movement, Killian tucked the vial safely away inside his inner coat pocket—not to hide it away out of shame, but to keep it pressed close to his heart as a weight he actively chose to carry. He straightened his shoulders slowly, the grief still heavy but no longer paralyzing. “Right then,” he said, his voice gaining structural strength. “Shall we go hunt ourselves a magic bean and write the next grand chapter of this tale?” he asked, his tone teasing, his eyes holding a spark of gratitude.

Henry pumped a fist sharply into the night air, his grin completely infectious and his voice bright with determination. “Let’s find the shadiest port out there and get that bean. I bet I can haggle a better price than you can anyway!” He puffed out his chest, hilariously mimicking Killian’s classic, rolling pirate swagger, though his scuffed sneakers and the leather storybook tucked under his arm completely undercut his bravado.

Killian raised a sharp eyebrow, his roguish smirk returning in full force as his hook tapped against the wood of the mast with a soft, metallic clink. “Haggle better than me? Bold words, Henry Mills. I’ve swindled treacherous merrows and outwitted dark wraiths across the oceans. Let’s see you try your hand at it.” He turned, gesturing grandly toward the quarterdeck stairs. “Take the wheel, lad. Set a course due west. There’s a hidden port, Shadow’s Cove, where the local rogues trade in things far more valuable than gold. Might be our absolute best shot.” Moving with a pirate's fluid efficiency, Killian stepped to the rigging, deftly loosening the lines as the heavy canvas sails caught the evening breeze with a sharp, resonant snap.

Henry scrambled up the steps to the helm, his small hands gripping the spokes of the wheel with excitement as he turned it. The Jolly Roger responded instantly, her hull giving a gentle, eager lurch into the waves. “Shadow’s Cove, huh? Sounds like a place Desylva would’ve loved,” Henry said, his tone tinged with a deep reverence as he glanced back over his shoulder at the captain. “Did you two ever go there together?”

Killian paused on the deck, his hand resting on a heavy rope line as his gaze turned distant. He could see Desylva’s storm-gray eyes glinting in the dim light of a tavern corner, her electrical magic sparking as she pinned a smuggler’s hand to a wooden table with her dagger, her breathless laughter echoing as they fled through the back alleys with a stolen relic. “Aye, lad,” he said softly, his voice a low, gravelly rumble. “Once, in the early days. She bartered a cursed coin for a navigator's map. Outdrank three seasoned pirates to do it, too. Nearly set the entire establishment ablaze when the owner tried to cheat her at the door.” He shook his head, a fond, beautiful smile cleanly breaking through his grief. “She was an absolute force, my storm.”

Henry nodded, turning his eyes back to the dark horizon ahead, his hands holding the wheel perfectly steady. “We’ll find that bean for her,” he said, his voice quiet but entirely resolute—a boy’s sacred promise to honor the woman who had been their tempest. “And when we get back to Storybrooke, I’m writing all of this in the book. Every adventure, every story, and every single day... so she’s never really gone.”

Killian’s throat tightened painfully as he walked up the steps and rested his calloused hand firmly on Henry’s shoulder. His hook gleamed in the flickering lantern light as he squeezed gently. “You do that, lad. You keep her storm alive in those pages.” He looked out over the open bow, watching the vibrant colors of the ocean reef fade completely into a deep, indigo twilight while the first stars began to wink into existence above. “Let’s sail, then. For Desylva.” His voice was entirely firm—a captain’s command beautifully laced with a lover’s eternal vow.

The Jolly Roger surged forward into the dark swell, her sharp prow cutting through the waves with a renewed, unyielding purpose. Heavy grief and brilliant hope intertwined, guiding them straight toward Shadow’s Cove—toward danger, toward possibility.

A short while later (Late evening)

Henry stood tall at the helm, his small hands remarkably steady on the wheel as the swinging lantern light caught the dark strands of his hair. The Jolly Roger cut smoothly through the twilight sea. Above them, the heavy canvas sails billowed softly, their fabric whispering quietly in the steady evening breeze.

The entire world around them had completely quieted. The rolling waves were gentler now, the vast sky was deepening into a rich, velvety indigo, and the first stars were beginning to prick through the fading light like distant, silver promises.

Killian lingered just a few paces behind the boy on the quarterdeck. His hook braced firmly against the wooden rail, his hand rested near the heavy coat pocket where the glass vial lay tucked safely against his chest. The grief still pressed hard at his ribs, but the raging tempest inside his soul had finally softened into a low, aching hum.

He watched Henry steer, noting how the boy's posture was proud, careful, and perfectly mimicked the exact way Killian himself always stood at the helm. The sight stirred something deep and fragile within his weathered heart.

Henry glanced back over his shoulder, offering a small, comforting smile. "We're holdin' perfectly steady," he said, his voice quiet but confident. Killian gave a slow nod, stepping a pace closer to the steering column. "Aye, lad. You've got the wheel well in hand." Henry turned his eyes back to the dark horizon, and Killian finally let himself breathe.

In the quiet, he could almost see her standing there, leaning forward over the wheel, daring the horizon to give her something worth chasing. He remembered the way she'd laugh whenever the waves rose, mockingly calling the ocean a "lazy beast" if it didn't actively challenge her magic. A familiar ache bloomed in his chest. But this time, he didn't look away from the memory. He simply let it wash over him like a warm tide.

She'd stand right here, he thought, the internal words forming with a bittersweet, piercing clarity*. Hands gripping the wheel, hair wild from the wind, smirkin' as if she bloody owned the entire sea.*

The ship creaked softly beneath his boots, as though answering his thoughts. The dark water murmured a rhythmic song against the hull, and the brass lanterns swayed in the rigging, casting warm, protective pools of light across the deck planks. Everything felt gentler now—as though the physical world itself finally understood the immense weight he was forced to carry.

Henry shifted his stance, adjusting the spokes of the wheel with careful precision. Killian watched him. Something in the simple sight profoundly steadied him—a vital reminder that raw grief didn't erase purpose. It didn't erase deep human connection. It didn't erase the future.

Henry spoke up without turning his head. "She'd be incredibly proud of you, you know." Killian blinked, his breath catching sharply in his throat. "Aye?" His voice was rough, but steady. Henry nodded against the wind. "You're still sailin'. Still fightin'. Still takin' care of people." He glanced back, his young eyes soft in the lantern light. "She'd really like that."

Killian swallowed hard against the lump in his throat. The boy's words hit significantly deeper than Henry could ever possibly know. Stepping closer, he rested his hand firmly on the boy's shoulder. "You've a remarkable way of speakin' the absolute truth, lad," he murmured, his tone thick. "Even when it hurts."

Henry smiled faintly, his hands turning the wheel. "That's just what family does." Killian's breath trembled—not from a surge of fracturing pain this time, but from something far gentler. Something genuinely hopeful. He looked out past the bow at the horizon, watching the stars brighten brilliantly above the darkening sea.

The Jolly Roger sailed on into the night, steady and sure, guided smoothly by Henry's small hands and Killian's quiet, unyielding resolve. The heavy grief remained—honest, permanent, and deep—but it no longer threatened to drown him. It lived beside him now, a burden carried with a sacred purpose, carried with an undying love. And as the ship cut cleanly through the waves toward the uncharted black markets of Shadow's Cove, Killian felt a sensation he hadn't experienced in days. It was a fragile, flickering spark of forward motion. It was a quiet promise that the wild storm inside him might someday find its calm.

Later

The main deck had completely quieted. Henry remained at the helm, humming softly under his breath as his small hands kept the Jolly Roger steady on her westward course. Above them, the brass lanterns swayed gently in the rigging, their warm amber glow flickering across the dark planks like drifting fireflies. The sea whispered softly against the hull, gentle and rhythmic now, as though the ocean itself perfectly understood the profound need for silence.

Killian stepped quietly away from the helm, his boots soft against the wood. He moved toward the port rail, where the night wind was cooler and the vast world felt wider. Resting both his bare hand and the flat edge of his hook on the damp rail, he let the breeze wash over his face. Slowly, he reached deep inside his leather coat. The vial slid into his palm with a familiar weight. Too familiar. Far too heavy. He held the cylinder up to the flickering lantern light. The ashes inside shimmered faintly, catching the amber glow like scattered flecks of silver. His breath caught in his throat. Every single time he looked at it, the suffocating ache returned—sharp, immediate, and entirely merciless.

Desylva…

Her name formed in his mind like a silent prayer he didn't quite know how to finish. He turned the vial slowly between his fingers. The glass was cool against his skin, but his hand trembled violently around it. He hated it. He absolutely hated how raw grief made him shake, how it could still bring him to his knees after a lifetime of surviving. But he couldn't stop it.

Bringing his hand up, he gently pressed the cool glass directly to his forehead, his eyes closing tight. The gesture was purely instinctive—a sailor's silent kiss to a holy relic, a lover's desperate plea to a lingering memory. "I'm tryin', love," he whispered, his fractured voice barely audible over the rush of the wind. "I'm tryin' to keep breathin'. To keep movin' forward." His throat tightened to a stranglehold. His breath shuddered violently against his ribs as the ocean blurred behind his closed eyelids. "But gods… it's so damn hard without you."

He bowed his head, his shoulders curling inward as the grief surged over him again. It wasn't the sharp, sudden kind of pain that struck cleanly like lightning; it was the slow, crushing weight that felt like a dark tide pulling him directly under the surface. He gripped the wooden rail tightly with the curve of his hook, his knuckles whitening on his other hand, as though the ship itself were the only physical entity keeping him upright. "I should've saved you," he murmured into the dark. "I should've found a way. I should've—"

His voice broke down the middle. He swallowed hard, forcing the desperate words back down his throat. He knew his guilt was a liar. He knew with absolute certainty that she wouldn't want him drowning in self-reproach. But knowing the truth didn't stop the ache. Knowing didn't stop the phantom memory of her electrical magic flickering out in the woods, or her beautiful storm fading into nothingness.

He opened his eyes, staring at the vial. At her ashes. At the piece of her he carried closest to his heart. "I miss you," he whispered to the glass. "More than I ever know how to say."

The ocean wind brushed suddenly against his skin, cool, gentle, and deliberate—like a warm hand resting flat on his cheek. For a fragile, impossible heartbeat, he imagined it was truly her. He imagined her standing proud right beside him, lightning dancing in her eyes and a wicked smirk playing on her lips, calling him a pathetic fool for crying on his own deck. He let out a broken, raw laugh. It was soft, entirely unshielded. "You'd tell me to stop mopin'," he murmured, a tiny smile fighting through his tears. "To get off my arse and finally do somethin' useful."

He turned his head, looking back across the deck toward the helm. There stood Henry, tall, determined, and holding the massive steering wheel steady as he guided the ship through the deepening sea.

Killian exhaled slowly, letting the breath go. The crushing ache didn't vanish from his chest. But it shifted, gently tempered by the simple sight of the boy who believed in him, the boy who refused to let him face the dark alone.

His eyes lingered on Henry for a moment longer. The poems. Desylva's Stars. The pages filled with stories, sketches, and memories. The boy had spent the voyage gathering fragments of her and carrying them forward. Somehow, that mattered more than Henry would ever realize.

With a deliberate movement, he tucked the vial back into his coat pocket, pressing it close to his heart. He straightened his spine slowly, his shoulders squaring against the gale as the wind caught the heavy edges of his leather coat.

Turning away from the rail, he walked back toward Henry, the flickering lantern light catching brilliantly in his blue eyes.

Day 69

Shadow's Cove - Arrival

Night swallowed the realm entirely, wrapping the harbor in a fog so thick it felt like wet velvet against the skin. The jagged silhouette of Shadow's Cove rose from the horizon — a cluster of black cliffs jutting from the sea like the ribs of some ancient beast. Lanterns flickered along the shoreline, their dim orange glow barely piercing the fog that curled around the rocks. The air grew colder as the Jolly Roger approached, the breeze carrying the faint scent of smoke, old pitch, brine, rot, stagnant swamp water, and something metallic — magic, old and restless.

The docks rose high above the waterline, built to withstand the violent tides that battered the Cove. Their planks were a patchwork of warped, uneven boards, iron nails glinting like teeth in the dim light—a crooked welcome.

Killian stood at the helm, hand steady on the wheel. The steel of his hook caught the faint, sickly green glow of the bioluminescent water below. Henry leaned forward, eyes wide, shoulders tight with anticipation, voice hushed with awe. "Is that it?" he whispered, though the Cove seemed to demand quiet even without being asked.

Killian's hand rested firmly on the wheel, eyes fixed on the looming cliffs. "Aye, lad," he murmured, tone low and reverent. "Shadow's Cove. A sanctuary for those who prefer the dark."

The name alone carried a certain gravity. A place of secrets. A place of bargains. A place where the sea itself seemed to hold its breath.

"Keep your eyes sharp, mate," Killian murmured, his rich voice dropping to a low, cautious rumble that barely carried over the eerie creak of the rigging.

Henry stepped to the railing, shivering in his jacket. He peered into the soup of gray mist, where ghostly, skeletal shapes of sunken masts jutted out of the black water around them. "It's completely silent," he whispered. "Are you sure we'll even find a bean here?"

A soft glint appeared in Killian's eyes for a fraction of a second before hardening back into captain's steel. "When you're lookin' for something that can tear open a hole between worlds, you don't look in respectable marketplaces. You look where the scum of the realms trade their forbidden treasures. This wretched port is our best place to start. We ask the right questions, we offer enough gold, and we may get ourselves a bean."

The Jolly Roger glided between two towering rock spires, their surfaces slick with moss and carved with runes so old they had eroded into ghostly shapes.

Henry's gaze darted from one to the next. "Those markings… are they…?" he asked, voice trembling with curiosity.

Killian's eyes tracked the runes, jaw tightening. "Warnings," he said softly, tone grim. "Or invitations. Depends on who's readin' them."

As the ship approached the dock, Killian's gaze drifted upward, toward the cliffs, the lanterns, the shadows that moved between them. His hand brushed unconsciously against the pocket where the vial rested, pressing against his ribs like a heartbeat.

You loved this place, he thought, the words forming with a bittersweet ache. *Dangerous. Loud. Full of fools who thought they were clever.*

He could almost see Desylva striding down the dock, lightning sparking at her fingertips, daring anyone to challenge her. The memory hit him hard, sharp, sudden, and he gripped the wheel tighter to steady himself.

Henry noticed. He always did. "You okay?" he asked quietly, his voice gentle as his eyes searched Killian's face. Killian straightened, forcing a breath. "Aye, lad. Just… rememberin'," his voice rough with emotion.

Henry nodded as he glanced ahead. "It looks different than I imagined."

Killian’s lips twitched into a faint smirk. “Ports like this rarely match the stories. They’re worse.” His voice lacked its usual swagger. The grief still clung to him, softened but present, like a bruise beneath the skin.

The Jolly Roger glided through the mist, a silent ghost ship.

Out of the fog, a massive, towering shape materialized like a rising leviathan. It was the pier—a monolithic, black-timber quay that climbed twelve feet straight out of the water, built for ancient warships and looming flat and high, perfectly level with the ship’s main deck.

From Henry's position, the top of the dock was a seamless, elevated platform stretching into the fog. "The dock is right there!" he said, panic creeping into his voice. "I can't see where it ends!"

Killian narrowed his eyes at the thickening, shifting wall of fog ahead that hid every point of reference a sailor relied on. The Jolly Roger drifted in a slow, treacherous slide, the current nudging her like a hand trying to push her off course, as the dock loomed, unseen, somewhere ahead. He adjusted his stance at the wheel, jaw and shoulders tightening with the kind of focus Henry had learned to recognize — the moment when bravado gave way to a captain’s deadly precision. The ship creaked, drifting just a hair too far starboard.

“She’s drifting… damn this cursed fog... The Cove’s playing tricks,” he muttered, more to himself than to Henry. “No wind, no sound, no horizon. She wants us blind.”

Henry stepped closer, clutching the railing. “Can you still dock her?” Killian huffed a quiet breath, not quite a laugh, his voice steady. “Of course I can. … But not the usual way.” His gaze sharpened. “We’re going to club haul her.” Henry blinked. “Club haul? What does that mean?”

Killian kept his eyes forward, voice low and steady, his bravado fading into sharp focus. “It’s a maneuver you only use when you’re half blind and out of options. … Old war captains used it when the sea tried to kill them. … We drop the anchor hard on one side, force the bow to catch, and use the sudden drag to swing the ship sideways before we ram straight into whatever’s hiding in front of us.” His voice dropped into a low, warning rumble as he tapped the wheel with his hook. “It’s violent. Fast. And risky. ... But in this soup, it’s the only way to keep our hull intact.”

Henry’s breath hitched. “Sounds dangerous.”

“Aye.” Killian’s jaw flexed as he glanced at Henry, expression grave. “Hold onto something, lad.”

Henry braced his sneakers against the deck.

Killian flashed a roguish, self-satisfied smirk, gesturing with his hook toward a brass apparatus mounted beside the wheel, then looked at Henry, gauging his expression. “Would you like to flip the switch?” he said, voice low but steady.

Henry’s eyes widened, excitement and nerves tangling together. “Yes. I do,” he said as he stepped closer to the wheel, eyes flicking to the toggle beside it.

Killian nodded once, tone tightening. “Then listen close, lad — timing is everything. If you flip it even a heartbeat too early, we’ll crash straight into the dock. You wait for my word. The exact moment I tell you.”

Henry swallowed hard and braced himself, hand hovering near the switch.

Killian stared into the fog, calculating the invisible drift. He waited for the exact apex of the turn, then he issued the command, his voice sharp and urgent, “NOW!!!!” Henry slammed the switch down with a sharp, decisive motion.

A mechanical clunk echoed beneath the deck. A pneumatic hiss followed. The massive starboard anchor plunged into the black water with a sudden violent splash. The chain rattled out like a waking monster, sparks spitting into the fog.

The bow caught hard. The Jolly Roger's stern whipped around with violent momentum. Killian spun the wheel furiously, fighting the rudder's resistance. The ship groaned, a great wooden sigh echoing into the mist as she slid sideways, skimming parallel to the massive pier.

With a low, heavy thud, the Jolly Roger lurched against the rotted dock. She rocked once in protest, then came to a dead stop.

The main deck sat perfectly flush with the elevated pier. There was no need for a gangplank; the dark, ancient planks of Shadow's Cove met the deck of the Jolly Roger like a continuous, fog-covered floor.

Killian flipped a second switch, locking the anchor chain tight, then adjusted the lapels of his leather coat, his cutlass at his hip. "Never doubt a man who has navigated the dark for nearly three centuries, mate," he said, though his eyes kept darting to the shifting shadows on the pier. A grim, dangerous smile touching his lips as he checked his pockets for the gold required for the trade.

Henry, his breathing ragged, looked at the empty, fog-drowned dock. A single, rusted lantern flickered in the distance. "It feels like a trap," he whispered, "If someone wanted to steal a pirate ship, this is exactly where they'd do it." Killian stopped mid-stride. "Steal my ship? Not while I draw breath."

Killian flipped the latch on the chest bolted near the helm. Inside, nestled against a folded cloth, lay a dagger and a dark leather holster. "You'll need these," Killian said quietly, tone protective. "Shadow's Cove isn't a place for bare hands."

Henry lifted the dagger and holster, the leather cool against his palms. Killian knelt beside him, guiding the holster to Henry's belt, tightening the strap until it sat secure against his hip. Henry slid the dagger home with a soft, certain click. "Thanks," he whispered, voice small but steady, fingers lingering on the hilt as the shadows deepened and the Cove waited.

Killian reached inside the chest again and pulled out a glowing, amber-hued stone—a yellow tower crystal that pulsed with a faint, warm magic against the bleak fog. Henry stared at it, stepping closer. "What is that?"

"A protection crystal," Killian explained, turning the sharp, geometric stone in his palm. "Once activated, it will place an invisible protective shield around the Jolly Roger, keeping unwanted people off. Think of it as a magical deadbolt." He looked down at the gem with a wry smile. "It once belonged to your grandmother."

Henry blinked, a look of sheer confusion crossing his face. "My grandmother? I have three. Which one, Cora, Snow, or Milah?" Killian's smile turned a bit more guarded, his voice dropping slightly. "Cora."

"Cora?" Henry repeated, stepping back a half-inch. "How did you get a protection crystal from the Queen of Hearts?"

"She left it on the ship," Killian said simply, slipping the crystal into a custom brass bracket on the map table. "I've only used it once before, and truth be told, she was actually on board at the time. We had... a brief alliance, you could say." He pressed down on the top of the tower crystal, causing the yellow light to flare violently. A silent, iridescent ripple rushed over the masts and down the hull, vanishing into the deep. "There," Killian said, dusting off his leather cuffs. "The charm is set. Once active, only you and I will be able to step foot on this deck. The ship will be perfectly safe while we're gone."

Killian headed down the quarterdeck stairs, his boots clicking softly on the damp deck as Henry followed close behind. Together they approached the rail, the fog swallowing the world beyond the ship in a seamless gray wall.

The Jolly Roger settled flush against the towering pier with a low, steady groan. Killian exhaled once, grounding himself, then let his hand rest on the rail for a brief, centering heartbeat before stepping onto the dock with Henry at his side.

Dock

Killian stepped onto the elevated dock, boots landing on the uneven planks with a hollow thud. Henry hopped down beside him, the wood groaning under their combined weight, a long, low creak swallowed quickly by the fog.

Killian moved automatically to the mooring lines, but there was a heaviness to him, a subtle drag in each motion, as though memory itself clung to his limbs. He turned toward the Jolly Roger, the fog curling around her hull, “Lines,” he murmured, fingers tightening around a rope, eyes distant.

Henry nodded—an instinctive, quiet acknowledgment. He straightened, shoulders squaring as if bracing against the weight Killian wasn’t voicing, a silent promise that he’d match whatever steadiness was needed. His hand found the nearest coil of rope, ready before Killian even reached for the next.

Together, they worked, looping thick mooring ropes over iron cleats driven deep into the ancient timber. The planks groaned under Killian's boots as he hauled each line taut, as though every knot demanded more effort than it should.

Killian exhaled, slow and controlled, then resumed tying off a line with a practiced snap, though the movement lacked its usual sharpness — grief pulling at the edges of every gesture.

Henry tied off the final rope, glancing at Killian. The captain’s expression was unreadable, carved from shadow and memory.

Killian put an arm around Henry’s shoulder, guiding him away from the Jolly Roger as the fog curled thickly around their legs. The mooring lines creaked behind them, the ship fading into a dim silhouette as they walked down the uneven dock toward the boardwalk. Each step carried them farther from the familiar shape of the vessel and deeper into the shifting, blue-lit haze of Shadow’s Cove, where the planks groaned underfoot and distant, unseen voices murmured through the mist.

For a moment, the Cove was silent. Then a sharp “Bloody hell!” rang out behind them.

Killian and Henry spun around.

A pirate lay sprawled on the dock beside the Jolly Roger, clutching his forehead and groaning. “What in the seven seas did I hit?” he muttered, rubbing the rising welt.

A second pirate sprinted toward the ship, reaching out, but his hand struck empty air, repelled by the invisible barrier. The impact threw him backward as though he’d run into a wall of iron. He hit the dock hard, landing flat on his back, wheezing. “What… What was that?!” he gasped, staring up at the ship as though it had bitten him.

A third pirate, apparently deciding brute force was the answer, let out a battle cry and charged with his sword pointed straight ahead. The blade struck the shield. A crackling burst of yellow static shot up the metal, racing into the pirate’s arm. He shrieked as the shock rattled through him, dropping the sword as he stumbled backward, hair standing on end.

All three pirates scrambled to their feet and bolted into the fog, tripping over each other in their desperation to escape.

Henry blinked. “Well… that worked.” Killian’s lips twitched into a smug, satisfied smirk. “Aye. Cora’s charms tend to be effective.”

They exchanged a look, half amusement, half relief. Killian ruffled Henry’s hair, guiding him forward. “Come on, lad. Let’s see if we can find our ticket home.”

Fog curled around their boots as they turned toward the deeper dock. The planks ahead stretched into a long, narrow boardwalk disappearing into the mist, lanterns flickering weakly in the damp air.

A shadow shifted in the mist ahead — a presence watching.

Henry swallowed. Killian’s jaw tightened as his hand drifted subtly toward his cutlass.

They moved forward, the fog thickening around them, the air growing colder as the silhouette ahead resolved into a tall, broad-shouldered figure with a crooked hat and a lantern whose flame flickered blue instead of gold.

The figure stepped out of the fog with deliberate slowness, the blue flame in his lantern flickering like a living thing. The crooked hat cast his face in shadow, but Henry could see the glint of teeth beneath the brim — a smile that wasn't friendly.

Killian's posture shifted subtly, shoulders angling, hook lowering just enough to be ready.

Lantern-Man stopped a few paces away, lantern held high, boots planted wide, his stance wary. The eerie light cast shifting colors across his scarred cheek. His eyes glinted beneath the brim, sharp and assessing. The lantern's flame inside guttered, then flared, casting warped shadows across the dock.

"Well, well, well" he drawled, voice rough as gravel, lantern lifting slightly. "If it isn't the Jolly Roger and Captain Hook. … Been a while since you was last here. Rumor had it you were dead."

Henry stiffened, his hand brushing the dagger at his hip. Killian stepped forward, shoulders squared, hand resting lightly on the hilt of his cutlass, grief tucked behind the familiar steel of his pirate's posture. "Rumors tend to exaggerate," he said, tone sharp, voice calm but edged.

Lantern-Man's eyes darted past Killian toward the Jolly Roger, toward the spot where the pirates had been repelled. "What happened to them?" he asked, voice low and suspicious, "Your ship just threw three men halfway across the dock." Killian didn't break stride. "Protection charm," he said simply. Lantern-Man tilted his head. "Protection charm?" His tone sharpened. "Looks more like sorcery. Or dark magic." Killian's jaw tightened. "It's neither."

Lantern-Man's smile widened. "Then what is it? The ship possessed? You dabblin' in spells now? That why you vanished? That why everyone thought you were gone for good?"

Henry felt Killian tense beside him — not with fear, but with irritation.

Lantern-Man stepped closer, lantern swinging slightly. "That shield wasn't natural." Killian shrugged, tone dry. "Neither is this place." Lantern-Man's nostrils flared. "You walk into Shadow's Cove with a child and a ship wrapped in sorcery. You think that won't raise questions? … The Cove doesn't take kindly to surprises, Hook. And you just brought a big one." Killian's voice dropped to a cold rumble. "I'm not here to discuss my ship," he said, voice low and controlled. "Or my so-called death." Lantern-Man studied him for a long moment, the blue flame reflecting in his eyes. "But you are here for somethin' … You'd best tread carefully, Hook. Magic like that draws attention."

Killian shifted slightly, placing himself between Henry and the lantern's glow. "Aye. And trouble like you does the same." Lantern-Man's lips curled into a thin smile. "We'll see," he said as his gaze flicked to Henry, then back to Killian. "Dangerous place for a kid," he said, tone flat, eyebrow raised. Killian stepped forward, placing himself squarely between Henry and the lantern's glow. "If you've got business with me, speak it. If not, get out of my way."

Lantern-Man chuckled, a sound that didn't reach his eyes. "Straight to it, then." He leaned in slightly, the blue flame reflecting off Killian's coat. "You're lookin' for somethin'. Somethin' valuable. Something dangerous. Something rare." Killian's voice dropped to a low steady rumble, his tone controlled, eyes unblinking. "Aye. A bean."

Lantern-Man's expression didn't change, but the air did. The fog seemed to thicken. The lantern flame sputtered. Somewhere deeper in the Cove, a gull cried, sharp and distant. Henry glanced at Killian, excitement and fear warring in his eyes.

Lantern-Man tilted his head, his tone cautious. "A magic bean's a rare thing these days. Hard to come by. Costly. Dangerous." Killian's gaze hardened, his tone firm. "I know." Lantern-Man's eyes narrowed. "And you're willin' to pay the price?" Killian didn't look away. Didn't flinch. Didn't hesitate. His jaw set. "Money's no object."

Lantern-Man's smile sharpened. "You'll want to see the Collector."

Henry stiffened as he stepped closer, hand brushing Killian's coat.

Lantern-Man gestured with the lantern toward a narrow path branching off the boardwalk — a trail leading into the trees, where the fog thickened into a wall of silver. “She’s waitin’. And she already knows you’re here.” Killian’s eyes narrowed. “How?” Lantern-Man shrugged. “Magic whispers. And yours just screamed.”

Henry felt a chill crawl up his spine. Killian stepped forward, voice steady. “Where can we find her?” Lantern-Man studied them both, the grief in Killian’s eyes, the determination in Henry’s, then jerked his chin toward the shadows. “Follow me,” his tone curt.

Killian guided Henry forward, hand firmly on the boy’s shoulder. “Stay close, lad,” he murmured in a protective tone. Henry nodded, heart pounding.

They followed Lantern-Man down the path into the fog leading deeper into the Cove, toward the Collector, toward the danger waiting in the shadows, toward the price they didn’t yet know they’d have to pay.

Boardwalk

Lantern-Man led them down a narrow boardwalk that wound like a spine between jagged rocks and crooked shacks. Fog clung to the Cove like a living thing, curling around their boots, swallowing sound until even their footsteps felt muted.

The boardwalk stretched ahead in a wavering line, its lanterns casting pale halos through the fog. A colder chill settled over them with each step, the mist swirling in slow, deliberate curls as though something moved within it.

The deeper they went, the more the Cove seemed to change — as though the shadows themselves were watching. The air grew heavy with brine and old magic. The wood beneath their feet creaked and groaned, warped by years of salt and secrets. Every plank felt like it had a story, and none of them were kind.

Henry stayed close, fingers brushing Killian’s coat every few steps, as though afraid the shadows might reach out and take him. Killian didn’t blame him. The dagger at Henry’s hip felt heavier now, its weight a steady reminder of the danger pressing in from every shadow.

Killian kept his hand near his cutlass, thumb hooked over the guard, eyes scanning every doorway and crevice. Every instinct screamed caution. Shadow’s Cove had that effect on people, a way of making even seasoned sailors feel like prey.

They passed shacks with warped doors and windows glowing faintly with sickly green light. Strange whispers drifted from cracks in the wood — half-formed words, breathy murmurs, the kind of sounds that made the hair on Henry’s arms stand on end. Something skittered across a rooftop, too fast to see, leaving only the echo of claws on wood. Runes carved into posts pulsed faintly, reacting to their presence. Some glowed a soft blue as they passed, others flared red, then dimmed as though disappointed. Henry slowed, staring at one rune that flickered like a heartbeat.

Killian gently tugged him forward. “Don’t stare too long,” he murmured. “Some of them stare back.” Henry shivered. "This place feels... alive," he said, his voice hushed as his gaze darted from shadow to shadow. Killian nodded once, hand tightening on his cutlass, his tone grim. “It is.”

A gust of cold wind swept through the boardwalk, rattling loose shutters and sending a shiver down Henry’s spine. Lantern-Man didn’t react. He simply kept walking, his blue flame flickering in a rhythm that felt almost like a pulse guiding them deeper. The boardwalk twisted again, narrowing until Henry had to walk single-file behind Killian. The fog thickened, swallowing the edges of the world. Somewhere in the distance, a low moan echoed, not human, not animal, something in between.

Henry whispered, “We almost there?” Killian’s jaw tightened. “Aye. And that’s the part that worries me.”

Clearing

The boardwalk opened into a small clearing where a cluster of buildings leaned together like conspirators, their warped silhouettes tilting at odd angles, windows glowing faintly like watchful eyes. The fog thinned just enough to reveal crooked rooftops, buckled walls, and lanterns that flickered in indigo deepening at the edges, emerald flaring

at the core —colors that seemed to study rather than illuminate. A thin pulse of pale gold throbbed at each flame's center, a heartbeat-like shimmer that suggested the Cove itself was taking measure of those who entered.

Killian noticed the colors immediately. The lanterns were speaking the Cove's silent language as surely as any harbor signal. He didn't particularly like what they seemed to be saying.

At the center stood a tavern—if one could call it that. Its roof sagged under the weight of years, its windows gleamed with a sickly green radiance, and its sign—a splintered plank carved with a serpent-like symbol—hung crookedly from rusted chains, swaying gently in the windless air. The wood was warped, the paint peeling, and the door looked as though it had been kicked in more times than opened. Lanterns dangled from rusted hooks along the exterior, their flames sputtering in bruised purples and washed-out blues, each hue carrying the dull ache of magic long misused. A tarnished yellow flickered at the edges—an anemic warning light that clung stubbornly to life. Their glow pooled across the warped boards of the porch, casting long, distorted shadows. The door itself was heavy, reinforced with iron bands older than the building, runes etched into the wood—faint until the corrupted lantern-light caught them and made them shimmer like fresh ink.

A faint hum of magic radiated from the building, prickling Henry's skin. The air around it felt charged, like the moment before lightning strikes. Killian felt it too — the same electric tension he'd felt in Desylva's storms, though colder, harsher, wrong.

Lantern-Man gestured toward it. "The Siren's Tooth," he said, tone matter-of-fact. "You'll find her in there. … Good luck," he turned to walk off muttering under his breath, "you'll need it."

Henry swallowed. "This place looks… cursed." Killian's hand settled on his shoulder. "But it's where we need to be."

Henry didn't move. His eyes stayed fixed on the tavern's crooked door, where faint shadows shifted behind the warped wood. Something scraped against the inside, a chair? A claw? He couldn't tell.

Henry reached out, fingers hovering near the door's carvings. "What do they mean?" Killian gently grabbed Henry's hand and lowered it. "Best not touch anything in Shadow's Cove unless you know what it does." Henry nodded, stepping closer to Killian as the fog curled around their ankles like living smoke.

A low murmur drifted from inside — indistinct voices, clinking glass, the creak of chairs. But beneath it all was something else… a hum. A pulse that vibrated through the boards beneath their feet. A rhythm that didn't belong to any tavern Henry had ever known. Magic. Old magic. The lanterns outside flickered in response, their flames bending toward the door as though drawn to whatever waited within.

Killian rested his hook against the door, testing its weight. "Stay close, lad. … Keep your wits sharp. … And don't touch anything unless I tell you." Henry nodded, his hands trembling.

As Killian stepped forward, the fog seemed to recoil from him, curling back like wary fingers. The runes stitched into the tavern's sign flickered, reacting to his presence. The green glow in the windows pulsed once — almost like a heartbeat — then steadied.

Killian pushed open the door. The hinges screamed. Henry, skin prickling, took a breath, squared his shoulders, and followed Killian inside.

The Siren's Tooth

A warm, dim light swallowed them as Killian and Henry stepped inside. The tavern's interior was a maze of shadows and crooked beams. Lanterns burned in deep violet, storm-blue, and molten amber, their flames curling like spellfire — alive, responsive, bending in slow arcs as though listening to the magic humming beneath the floorboards. The air carried a wave of stale ale, spiced rum, smoke, damp wood, seaweed, and old enchantments left to rust. The floorboards creaked under their weight, the atmosphere dense with old magic, vibrating with secrets that felt very much awake.

Every head turned toward them.

The room was crowded but hushed, patrons hunched over tables carved with runes and scars. Rogues, smugglers, sorcerers, and sailors filled the space — each one rougher than the last. A merrow woman with scales along her jaw leaned over a table, eyes gleaming like wet pearls. A man with runes carved into his arms nursed a drink that smoked faintly. A pair of dwarves argued over a map that pulsed with faint red light. A hooded figure in the corner stirred a bowl of shimmering liquid that whispered as it moved. A pirate with a jaw made of polished bone sharpened a serrated dagger, each scrape echoing like a warning. A witch with ink-black eyes and silver hair traced symbols in the air, her fingers leaving trails of violet smoke that curled like serpents.

Henry's breath caught as he pressed closer to Killian. "Everyone's staring." Killian's hook settled on his shoulder in a steady, protective hold, grounding him with quiet certainty. "Aye," Killian murmured. "Shadow's Cove doesn't get many visitors who walk in on purpose."

They moved deeper into the tavern. Conversations resumed, though quieter now, as though the room itself was listening. Killian's hand hovered near his cutlass as he scanned the crowd, searching for familiar faces or dangerous ones. He found both.

A few pirates muttered under their breath, eyes flicking toward Killian's hook, then toward Henry. One man with a jagged scar across his cheek spat into a cup, the liquid hissing as though reacting to the tavern's magic. Another sat half-hidden in the corner, a scar carved across the bridge of his nose and a cloudy white eye fixed on the newcomers. A pirate with a jagged hook of his own smirked over the rim of his mug, tapping metal against wood in a slow, deliberate rhythm. Killian ignored them all.

But Henry didn't. His eyes darted from face to face, taking in every strange detail — the glowing drinks, the shifting shadows, the runes that pulsed faintly on the walls. He felt the weight of the dagger at his hip, suddenly grateful for it.

Killian guided Henry through the tavern, boots thudding softly on the warped floorboards. The hum beneath their feet deepened, vibrating through Henry's bones.

Bar

Killian approached the bar, where a broad-shouldered barkeep wiped a mug with a rag dirtier than the mug itself. The man's eyes were pale and sharp, like chips of ice. "What'll it be?" he asked, tone flat, unimpressed. Killian leaned forward slightly. "Information." The barkeep snorted, tone dismissive. "Costs extra." Killian slid a coin across the counter. The man caught it without looking.

Killian lowered his voice, his tone quiet but firm. "We're lookin' for a bean."

The barkeep froze. The tavern seemed to still with him. Henry felt the air shift, heavy, tense, electric. Even the unnatural lantern flames flickered lower, as though listening. The barkeep's gaze sharpened, tone wary. "Dangerous thing to be askin' for." Killian's jaw tightened, his tone steady. "I know."

The man studied him, his tone shifting to recognition. "You're Captain Hook." Killian didn't flinch, his tone neutral. "Aye." The barkeep's eyes flicked to Henry, tone probing. "Who's the kid?" Killian's voice dropped to a low protective rumble. "He's with me." Henry straightened, trying to look braver than he felt.

The barkeep exhaled slowly, the sound thin and weary, the resignation of someone who'd answered the same question too many times. "There's only one person in this Cove who deals in beans." Killian leaned in, the movement deliberate, shadow cutting across his face. "We know. The Collector." The barkeep's brow lifted, a single skeptical arch, his gaze sharpening as though weighing whether they were fools or trouble. "But she doesn't just sell to anyone. Very particular."

Killian's pulse kicked hard. His voice came out quick, edged, a blade drawn without thinking. "Where can I find her?"

The barkeep jerked his chin toward the back of the tavern, where a curtain of tattered black fabric hung over a doorway. "Good luck," he muttered, his voice carrying a dark warning.

Henry whispered, his voice light, “That sounds ominous.” Killian’s lips twitched as he pushed off the bar. “It usually is.”

The barkeep called after them, “You’re either brave,” he rasped, “or mad.” Killian didn’t look back. “Bit of both.”

They approached the curtain. The closer they got, the stronger the pulse became — a rhythm that felt almost alive. The tavern seemed to quiet around them, as though the room itself held its breath. Even the patrons who had been glaring now watched with a strange mix of curiosity and fear.

Killian paused, hand hovering near the fabric, cutlass shifting at his hip. Henry felt the tension radiating off him — not fear, but respect. Whatever lay beyond that curtain wasn’t just dangerous. It was powerful.

Killian pushed the curtain aside.

Collector’s Chamber

The chamber felt smaller once the curtain fell behind them, the tavern’s noise muffled into a distant uneasy hum. It was colder than the main area. Quieter. Older. The air hummed with magic, old and restless.

Lanterns hung from the ceiling in a perfect circle, each flame suspended in mid-air without a wick, burning in colors Henry had no name for. Their light wove together, casting rippling patterns across the floor. Another lantern, silver, flickered on a central table, casting shifting shadows across shelves packed with relics — bones etched with runes, jars of swirling mist, coins glowing faintly with remembered curses, feathers that shimmered like oil, shards of crystal humming with dormant spells.

Henry stayed close, eyes wide as he took in the array of artifacts. His hand hovered near the dagger at his hip, though he didn’t touch it.

Killian scanned the room with a practiced eye. He recognized some items — cursed coins from a Leviathan’s Hoard, a siren’s tooth necklace that pulsed faintly, a vial of stormwater that crackled with lightning. Others he didn’t recognize at all, and those were the ones that worried him.

At the center of the room sat a woman. The Collector. She watched them with a predator’s stillness, her posture perfectly composed. Her hair was black as ink, braided with thin strands of metal that glinted faintly. Her eyes glowed like embers beneath ash. Her cloak was stitched with runes that shifted when she breathed. She lifted her chin slightly, her gaze sharp enough to cut. “So,” she said, voice smooth as dark water, tone cool and assessing, eyes narrowing. “The pirate and the boy.”

The Collector’s gaze drifted. “I heard about the commotion at the docks. Your ship carries a charm strong enough to repel grown men. Interesting.”

Henry stiffened, his shoulders rising. Killian stepped forward, hand brushing the hilt of his cutlass in a subtle, instinctive motion. “We’re not here to discuss my ship. … We’re lookin’ for a bean,” he said, his tone steady, his gaze locked on hers.

The Collector’s lips curved into a slow, knowing, dangerous smile. “Of course you are,” she murmured, her tone amused, fingers steepling as she studied them. Her gaze drifted, lingering on Henry. Her eyebrow lifted, her tone sharp. “You bring a child into my den?”

Killian’s jaw tightened. Henry straightened, trying to look braver than he felt. “I’m not a child, and I’m not afraid,” his voice small but determined, chin lifting.

The Collector’s smile deepened. “Bold,” she said, her tone silky. “Or foolish.”

Henry’s eyes widened. The lantern flame flickered. Killian’s breath tightened, his hand shifting closer to his cutlass. “We’re here for a bean,” he repeated, tone clipped, “We were told you have one.”

The Collector leaned back, fingers steepled. “Tell me, Captain… what price are you willing to pay?” Her eyes gleamed — not with greed, but with calculation. She was measuring them. Weighing them. Deciding what she could take.

Killian didn’t look away. Didn’t flinch. Didn’t hesitate. “Name your price,” he stated.

She rose from her seat with a slow, deliberate grace. Her cloak shifted like smoke, runes glinting faintly as she moved. She approached a shelf and selected a small wooden box, its surface carved with spiraling patterns that seemed to shift under the lanternlight. She set it on the table between them. “Open it,” she said, her tone commanding, stepping back with a slight tilt of her head.

Killian hesitated. Not out of fear, but out of instinct. Magic this old demanded respect. He lifted the lid carefully. Inside lay a single bean, no larger than a thumbnail, pulsing faintly with a soft green glow, as though it held a heartbeat.

Henry inhaled sharply. “That’s it,” he whispered, his voice breathless as he leaned forward. Killian’s chest tightened. The weight of the vial pressed against his ribs.

The Collector watched him closely. “You understand what you’re asking for, Captain,” her tone low, her eyes narrowing. “A bean is not merely a tool. It is a tear in the fabric of worlds. A door that should not be opened lightly.”

Killian met her gaze. “I know what it is.” He reached for the gold coins in his pocket. “How much?” he asked, his tone firm, his hand already halfway out.

The Collector’s smile deepened, as she raised a hand, stopping him. “Times have changed. Beans are no longer bought with gold,” she said, her tone soft but dangerous. “They are bought with sacrifice.”

Henry’s breath caught. “Sacrifice?” he asked, his voice trembling, his eyes darting between them.

The Collector turned her gaze to him. “Magic of this magnitude demands balance. … Requires sacrifice. … Requires truth,” she said, her tone instructive, her hands clasping behind her back. “A bean can take you home… but it requires something of equal weight.”

Killian’s pulse quickened. “What kind of weight?” he asked, his tone low, his jaw tightening.

The Collector stepped closer, her eyes glowing faintly, her tone almost gentle. “Something you value. Something you fear losing. Something that binds you.”

Killian’s breath stilled. His hand drifted unconsciously toward his coat, toward the vial. The Collector’s gaze followed the movement. “Ah,” she said, her tone soft, her smile sharpening.

Henry looked between them, confusion turning to alarm, his voice rising, his brows knitting. “Killian…?”

Killian forced his hand away from his coat, shook his head and said, “No,” his tone firm.

The Collector circled him slowly, like a shark tasting the water. “You carry grief. Heavy grief. It clings to you like a brand, Captain. I can smell it on you,” she said, her tone analytical. “The storm you lost… the ashes you keep close.”

Henry’s eyes widened, his voice cracking as he spoke, “She means—” Killian cut him off gently, “I know what she means,” he said, his tone soft but pained, then glared at the Collector, “We’re not here to discuss my past.”

The Collector lowered her voice, her tone reverent. “But your past will decide whether the portal opens … Your love for her is powerful. Old magic clings to it. … It would make a fine offering.” Killian’s breath trembled, his eyes flashed, his tone sharp. “Her ashes are not a bargaining chip.” The Collector’s smile faded, her tone tuned cool. “Pity. … Then choose something else.”

“Take something of mine,” Henry said, stepping forward despite the fear in his eyes. Killian’s heart lurched, his tone warning, as he reached for him. “Henry—”

“No.” Henry shook his head fiercely. “Take something of mine.” His hands balled into fists. “If somebody has to pay for this, it shouldn't be you.”

Killian knelt in front of him, hands gripping the boy’s shoulders. “Lad, listen to me,” he said, his tone urgent, his eyes locked on Henry’s. “Magic like this doesn’t take small things. It takes pieces of you. Pieces you don’t get back.”

Henry’s eyes glistened, his voice breaking again. “But you’ll lose her again.” Killian’s throat tightened. The words hit like a blade.

The Collector watched them with unreadable eyes. Killian rose slowly, turning to face her, his voice steady. “There must be another price.”

There was a long silence. The Collector watched him. Not speaking. Not blinking. Measuring. Weighing. Calculating.

Killian's jaw tightened. "Well?" he asked, irritation beginning to edge into his voice.

The Collector lifted a single finger. Silence. Wait. Killian bit back the next question. Only when she seemed satisfied did she speak, her eyes glowing brighter now, her tone solemn. "A memory."

Henry frowned, his voice small. “A memory?” She nodded. “A memory of great weight,” she started, her tone reverent, “Great love. Great pain. Something that anchors you. Something you refuse to let go.”

Killian’s breath stilled. Henry saw the change in his face and shook his head, his voice cracking again. “You can’t. You…” Killian swallowed hard, his voice trembling. “If it gets you home, … if it gets us both home…” Henry’s voice broke, his tone pleading, “She wouldn’t want that.” Killian’s eyes burned, his tone soft. “She’d want you safe.”

The Collector folded her hands. “So. The price is set. A memory of the storm you loved.”

Killian closed his eyes. The grief surged — sharp, merciless — but beneath it rose something steadier. Resolve. He opened his eyes. “Show me how.”

Henry grabbed his arm. “Killian, please…” Killian rested a hand on Henry’s head, gentle and steady. “I’ll still remember her, lad. Just… not everything.” Henry’s voice broke. “But you’ll lose the best parts.” Killian’s thumb brushed Henry’s cheek. “Then you’ll help me remember,” he said, his tone soft. Henry’s breath hitched as tears welled.

The Collector looked at Killian. “The memory, Captain,” her tone commanding. Killian touched his chest, over his heart, his voice quiet. “The memory’s here.” The Collector nodded once, her tone final. “Then let us begin.”

The Collector extended her hand, palm up, runes glowing faintly beneath her skin. The silver lantern flickered, casting long shadows across the relic-lined walls. Henry stood close to Killian, his breath shallow, his eyes wide with fear.

“Place your hand in mine,” the Collector said, her voice calm. “And give me the memory.”

Killian swallowed hard. His heart hammered. He stepped forward. Henry grabbed the back of his coat. “Killian, don't.” The pirate froze. Henry's voice shook. “We can find another way.” Killian looked down at him, the grief in his eyes softened into something gentler, his voice tender. “Lad… this is…”

Henry shook his head fiercely, his voice pleading. “No. Not like this.” He stepped around him, planting himself between Killian and the Collector. “We can go somewhere else. This can't be the only bean in all the realms. We'll keep looking. We'll sail somewhere else. We'll search every port in every realm if we have to.”

The Collector watched in silence.

Henry turned back toward Killian. Killian's chest tightened. “Henry—” he started, before the boy cut him off. “You said stories matter,” Henry said as tears gathered in his eyes. “Then let this be one of those stories where we don't trade something important away.”

The Collector's lips twitched faintly.

Killian knelt in front of him. “Lad...”

“You aren't supposed to do this.” His words hit harder than shouting ever could. “You already lost her.”

Killian closed his eyes.

“You don't have to lose more,” Henry said quietly, his voice shaking.

For a moment neither of them spoke.

Then Killian placed a hand gently against Henry's cheek. “She'd tell me to do it.” Henry's face crumpled. “She'd tell you there has to be another way. There is always another way.” Killian almost smiled. “Aye.” His voice trembled. “She probably would.” Henry stared at him. “Then listen to her.”

Killian looked away for a moment. He could almost hear her. Refusing to give up. Refusing to surrender. Demanding he keep moving no matter how impossible the odds seemed. The grief in his eyes softened. “I am.”

Henry's breath caught. Killian pulled him into a fierce embrace. “If it gets you home, lad... then it's worth the risk.”

Killian stepped toward the Collector and placed his hand in hers. The lantern flame flared silver. The runes on her cloak ignited. The air hummed with ancient magic. Henry flinched as the temperature dropped cold enough to sting his skin.

The Collector’s eyes glowed brighter, her voice echoing with layered tones. “Show me the memory.”

Killian closed his eyes and let himself fall inward. He saw Desylva standing on the bow of the Jolly Roger, lightning crackling at her fingertips, storm-gray eyes blazing with defiance. Her hair whipped wildly in the wind. The sea churned around them. Thunder rolled across the horizon. She looked as though she belonged to the storm itself. Then she laughed. Bright. Fearless. Alive. The sound cut through him with painful clarity. She turned toward him, eyes shining. “Come on, pirate.” Her smirk widened. “Show me something impossible.” Killian remembered the way his heart had stumbled the first time she'd said it. The way the world seemed larger whenever she smiled. The way every impossible thing suddenly felt within reach.

Killian gasped. The memory flared brighter. Too bright. The wind shifted. Desylva's laughter echoed strangely, stretching across the water. The edges of the memory blurred. Killian frowned. Something was wrong. The storm around her began to unravel into silver strands of light. The sea darkened. Her smile flickered. For a heartbeat he couldn't remember what she'd been smiling about. "Des?" Panic shot through him. No. Something was taking her away.

The lantern flared. The runes blazed brighter. Magic tightened around Killian's chest.

Henry cried out. “Stop!” He lunged forward. “You’re hurting him!”

The Collector's voice echoed through the chamber. "Yes." The silver strands tightened.

The memory pulled away from him. Desylva seemed farther away now. Not across a deck. Not across a sea. Across something colder. The sound of her laughter faded. The scent of rain vanished. The warmth in his chest began to thin. For the first time since she'd died, he couldn't quite remember the sound of her voice. Terror ripped through him. "No," he breathed. He reached for her. His hand passed through silver light as though she were already becoming a ghost.

The Collector's grip tightened. "Give it all to me."

Henry froze. All. Not one memory. All. A chill shot through him. He knew magic. He'd seen memory curses. False memories. Stolen memories. He'd watched magic take things it was never supposed to take. He knew what balance looked like. And this wasn't balance. This was hunger. This was Dark Magic. The silver lantern was growing brighter. Too bright. The runes beneath her skin spread farther up her arms. The relics on the shelves rattled. The magic wasn't stabilizing. It was feeding. Realization slammed into him. The Collector wasn't taking a memory. She was taking every memory connected to it. Every laugh. Every kiss. Every storm. Every sunrise aboard the Jolly Roger. Every impossible adventure. Everything.

“Killian!” he yelled as he grabbed the pirate's arm with both hands, pulling with all his strength, trying to free him. “She's lying!”

The Collector hissed, her eyes blazing, her tone sharp as she snapped, “Child—”

“She's taking all of it!” Henry shouted, panic flooding his voice.

Henry turned to the Collector. “You said one memory!” The lantern flickered violently as he repeated, “One!”

The Collector's eyes flashed with anger. “Let go.”

“No!” Henry pulled harder. “You aren't taking her!”

The Collector's face twisted. “Child, do not interfere.”

Henry looked at Killian. His eyes were unfocused. His body shaking. His lips moving soundlessly. “Killian!”

The pirate's breath shuddered. “Henry...” Fear slammed through him.

For a heartbeat Henry imagined Killian opening his eyes and not knowing who Desylva was. Not remembering the Jolly Roger. Not remembering their voyage. Not remembering the stories. Not remembering why he'd crossed the realms to bring her ashes home. “No!” His voice cracked. “Fight her! Don't let her take her!”

The Collector inhaled deeply, eyes closed. “Yes. … Give it to me. … I want more. … I need more!”

Henry held on tighter, his voice a fierce cry as he glared at her, “He loves her! … You can’t take her!” Then he looked at Killian again. “She is trying to take everything. Fight. Don’t forget her! Don’t let her erase her. Please. You can’t lose her again.”

The lantern flickered violently. The runes sputtered. The magic wavered.

Henry’s voice broke. “You don’t have to forget her,” he cried, “You don’t have to lose her again.” Killian’s heart lurched.

The Collector snarled. “The ritual is complete!”

Henry held tighter as he screamed. “No!”

The lantern’s flame snapped, extinguished. The room plunged into darkness. Magic recoiled like a struck serpent. The Collector staggered back, clutching her hand. Killian collapsed to his knees, gasping. The ceiling lanterns flared.

Henry dropped beside him. “Killian! Are you okay?” he asked, his voice shaking, his hands on Killian’s shoulders. Killian’s breath trembled as his eyes fluttered open. Henry’s heart stopped. Killian looked up at Henry, tears gathering, and whispered softly, “Desylva.” Henry’s breath caught, his voice trembling, “You… you remember her?”

Killian nodded slowly, tears starting to flow, his voice thick with emotion. “Aye, lad. Every piece.” Henry let out a shaky breath he hadn't realized he was holding. “But the ritual…” Killian touched his chest, over his heart. “True love doesn’t break that easy.”

The Collector stared at him, stunned. “Impossible. I took the memories. I felt them leave you.” Killian rose slowly, steadying himself on the table. “You tried,” his tone soft and quiet as he composed himself. Her eyes narrowed. “No one resists my magic.” Killian’s voice softened. “She was my everything. My heart. My soul.” Her expression flickered, confusion, then awe, then something like fear. “A bond like that… it... it should not exist,” her tone hushed.

Henry helped Killian to his feet. Killian looked at the bean on the table, still glowing faintly, untouched by the chaos. The Collector exhaled slowly, her tone resigned. “Take it.” Henry blinked, momentarily confused, “What?”

“You earned it,” she said quietly. “Magic bends for true love. It always has.”

Killian reached out, hand steady now, and closed his fingers around the bean. The glow brightened, warm, gentle, alive. Henry hugged him, smiling through tears. “You didn’t lose her.” Killian pulled him close, pressing a kiss to the top of his head, his tone warm. “And I never will.”

The Collector stepped back, her voice barely above a whisper. “Go. Before the Cove realizes what happened.” Killian nodded, his tone sincere. “Thank you.” The Collector shook her head, her tone distant. “Don’t thank me. Thank the storm that loves you. And the ties that still bind.” Killian tucked the bean safely into his coat, beside the vial. He looked at Henry, “Let’s go home.” Henry nodded.

Together, they stepped back through the curtain, leaving the Collector staring at the extinguished lantern — silver smoke curling upward like the last breath of a broken spell.

Main Area

The curtain fell shut behind them like a severed tether, muffling the Collector’s chamber into a distant, eerie hum.

Henry stumbled slightly, breath still shaky from the ritual’s intensity. Killian steadied him, his own face pale beneath the lantern-light.

The tavern beyond was louder now — raised voices, rough laughter, clinking mugs, muttered curses, the scrape of metal on wood, boots thudding against warped planks. But something had changed. The air felt different. Charged. Watching. Every head turned toward them. Again. Only this time, the looks were sharper. Hungrier. Word traveled fast in Shadow’s Cove.

The bartender froze mid-pour, the liquid hovering unnaturally in the air before splashing into the cup. A pirate near the hearth muttered a prayer under his breath. Even the lantern flames seemed to lean toward Killian and Henry, drawn by the lingering magic clinging to their skin.

Henry swallowed. “They’re all staring again.”

“Aye,” Killian murmured. “They felt it.”

The hum beneath the floorboards pulsed once — a deep, resonant thud — then faded.

Henry stayed close to Killian’s side, fingers brushing the dagger at his hip. His heart hammered, but his steps were steady. Killian’s presence anchored him — the solid weight of the pirate captain beside him, the quiet promise in the way Killian’s hook hovered protectively near his shoulder. The Collector’s words echoed in his mind.

Magic bends for true love.

The memory of Desylva still burned bright in his chest. Untouched. Unbroken. Fierce.

They stepped into the tavern proper. Killian scanned the room, eyes narrowed.

The witch with ink-black eyes whispered something to her companion. The pirate with a bone jaw smirked. The merrow woman’s scales glinted sharply, her pupils narrowing as she leaned forward, watching. The rune-scarred man’s drink smoked darker, curling up like a warning. The dwarves stopped arguing mid-sentence, eyes locked on Killian’s coat. Even the hooded figure in the corner paused, the whispering liquid in his bowl falling silent.

Henry felt the shift — the way the room tightened, the way the air thickened, the way danger coiled like a serpent ready to strike. His breath hitched. Killian tightened his grip.

The pirate with the jagged hook rose from a corner table, eyes narrowing. “Hook,” he growled, his tone hostile as he stepped forward. “Didn’t expect to see you crawl back into the Tooth.”

Killian’s jaw tightened. “Didn’t expect to see you sober,” his tone dry, his eyebrow lifting.

A few patrons snorted. The pirate’s lip curled. A voice cut through the tension, low, rough, familiar. “You made a mistake comin’ here,” Lantern-Man said, his tone hungry as he stepped forward with his blue lantern flickering violently, casting warped shadows across the tavern walls.

Killian turned, his eyes narrowing.

Lantern-Man smiled, slow and sharp, “You went to the Collector,” he said. “And you came out alive.”

Henry swallowed. “Is that… unusual?”

Lantern-Man’s smile widened, his tone turning dark. “No one leaves her chamber with what they came for.”

Killian stepped forward, placing himself between Henry and Lantern-Man. His hand drifted to his cutlass. “We’re leavin’,” he growled, tone sharp and cold.

Lantern-Man's grin widened, his tone triumphant. "Not with the bean, you're not."

Around the room, chairs scraped. Boots shifted. Hands drifted toward weapons. The tavern shifted — bodies turning, eyes narrowing. The room seemed to close in around them, shadows tightening like a noose. The air vibrated with the promise of violence.

Henry’s breath hitched. Killian’s voice dropped to a low protective rumble. “Stay behind me, lad.”

Lantern-Man lifted his lantern. The blue flame flared, casting eerie light across the tavern. “Hand it over, Captain,” he stated, his tone sharp, “Or we take it off your corpse.”

Killian’s cutlass gleamed as he drew it, blade catching the sickly green light. “You can try,” he quipped, his tone deadly.

Lantern-Man lunged.

Killian shoved Henry aside and met the strike head-on. His cutlass clashed against the lantern’s metal frame, sparks flying.

Henry scrambled behind a table, heart pounding so hard it hurt, but he never took his eyes off Killian. Around him the tavern erupted into chaos — shouts, curses, bodies surging forward. With shaking fingers, he pulled the dagger from its sheath. The blade suddenly felt much smaller than it had aboard the Jolly Roger. He tightened his grip anyway.

A burly pirate spotted him and lunged across a table. Henry yelped and slashed instinctively. The dagger sliced across the pirate's sleeve. Not enough to seriously hurt him. But enough to make him recoil with a curse. Henry stumbled backward, staring at the dagger in shock. "Right," he muttered breathlessly. "That actually worked."

Killian fought like a storm unleashed. He ducked a blade. Parried a hook. Kicked a pirate backward into a stack of crates. But more came. His cutlass flashed, slicing through the air with practiced precision.

A dwarf swung a hammer toward his knee. Killian caught the blow on his hook, pivoted, and shoved the dwarf into a nearby table. Bottles shattered. Lantern light burst across the floor. "You'll have to try harder than that, mate."

The rune-scarred man raised a hand, symbols blazing across his skin. Killian spotted the spell a heartbeat before it formed. He kicked a chair across the tavern, sending it crashing into the man's chest. The spell fizzled as the man crashed backward into a shelf of relics. "No magic, if you don't mind."

A witch swept her arm forward, releasing a ribbon of violet smoke that hissed through the air like a serpent. Killian snatched a mug from the nearest table and hurled it through the spell. Ale exploded everywhere. The witch cursed as her concentration shattered. Killian ducked underneath the smoke and grinned. "Now that's just rude."

A merrow woman hissed, lunging with clawed hands. Killian twisted and snarled, “Back off,” his tone fierce. His cutlass slashed across her arm, sending her stumbling.

Henry's panicked voice rang out. "Killian!" Killian spun. A pirate was charging straight for Henry, dagger raised.

Henry jerked backward, bringing up his own blade instinctively. The pirate knocked it aside with a snarl. For one terrible heartbeat, Henry knew he wasn't fast enough.

Killian moved. One moment he was fending off attackers across the tavern. The next he was there. He caught the pirate by the collar and slammed him into the wall hard enough to rattle the boards. The man's dagger clattered from his hand. Killian drove his cutlass to the pirate's throat. "Touch the boy again," he growled, eyes blazing with fury, "and I'll gut you myself."

The room seemed to hesitate. The pirate froze.

Killian shoved him aside and immediately turned to Henry. His expression shifted the instant he looked at the boy. "You hurt?" Henry shook his head. "No." Killian let out a sharp breath. Then he grabbed Henry by the shoulder and pulled him close. "Stay with me." Henry nodded, trembling but determined.

Around them, the tavern surged again, bodies pressing forward despite the warning. Killian backed toward the door with Henry pressed against his side. “We’re leavin’,” he snarled, his tone sharp. Lantern-Man stepped forward again, flame blazing. “You can’t outrun the Cove, Hook,” he snarled. Killian’s eyes hardened, tone icy cold. “Watch me.” He grabbed Henry’s hand and bolted.

Outside Tavern

They crashed through the tavern door, splinters exploding outward as the fog swallowed them whole. The air outside was colder than before, sharp, wet, clinging to their skin like icy fingers. The clearing stretched before them, warped lanternlight flickering through the mist like dying stars.

Suddenly the door burst open behind them. Shadows poured into the clearing. Shouts erupted. Boots thundered. Steel clattered. Voices rose in a chaotic chorus of rage.

“HOOK!”
“Get the boy!”
“Don’t let them reach the ship!”

Killian didn’t look back. He grabbed Henry’s hand, fingers locking tight. “Run, lad,” he growled, his voice fierce and breathless. “Don’t stop.”

Clearing

They sprinted across the clearing, fog whipping around them in violent curls. Henry’s dagger bounced wildly at his hip, each step jarring his ribs. He stumbled once, nearly going to one knee before Killian hauled him upright without breaking stride.

Behind them, the mob surged into the clearing. Lantern-Man’s voice cut through the chaos like a blade. “AFTER THEM!” Killian risked a glance over his shoulder. Shadows swarmed the clearing, shapes moving fast, weapons raised. The blue lantern flame burned like a beacon of fury.

“Killian!” Henry gasped, voice tight with fear. “I see them,” Killian said, his tone low, controlled, deadly. “Keep close.”

The boardwalk loomed ahead — narrow, crooked, slick with seawater.

Boardwalk

The boardwalk twisted between jagged rocks and crooked shacks. Killian pulled Henry onto it, boots pounding against the warped planks. The fog thickened, curling around their boots, swallowing the world around them until only the sound of their footsteps and their ragged breathing remained. The runes lining the posts flared as they passed, reacting to the bean and the lingering magic from the ritual. Ahead, one of the old support posts cracked. The planks dipped sharply. "Jump!" Killian barked. Henry launched himself forward just as a section of the walkway splintered and dropped into the fog below. Neither slowed. Behind them, the same runes flashed again as their pursuers thundered onto the boardwalk.

Henry’s breath hitched. “They’re getting closer!” Killian tightened his grip. “Then we run faster. Don’t let go,” Killian said, his tone fierce, his breath sharp as he pulled Henry along. Henry stumbled but kept pace, the dagger bouncing lightly in its holster. “Don’t worry, I won’t!” he said, his voice breathless, clutching Killian’s coat with his free hand.

They tore down the boardwalk, the Cove rising behind them like a living nightmare.

Dock

The Jolly Roger loomed ahead, her dark silhouette rising from the water like salvation carved from shadow. Killian’s heart hammered against his ribs. The bean pressed against his chest. The vial pressed against his heart. Fog parted just enough to reveal the dock, slick with seawater.

They reached it just as Lantern-Man burst from the mist behind them, his blue flame blazing like a furious star. “HOOK!” he roared, voice cracking with rage.

Killian spun, positioning himself between Henry and the threat. His hook gleamed. His cutlass flashed. His shoulders squared with lethal intent. “Stay behind me,” he ordered, voice low and protective.

Lantern-Man hurled the lantern with a violent swing. "The Cove doesn't let miracles leave!" he shouted, his tone wild.

Killian reacted instantly. “DOWN!” he barked, shoving Henry aside.

The lantern struck the dock with a deafening CRACK. Blue fire erupted outward, splintering wood, sending shards flying like shrapnel. Magic crackled across the planks, racing in jagged lines toward Killian’s boots.

Henry screamed, “Killian!” Killian grabbed Henry’s arm, pulling him toward the ship. “Move!” he growled, voice sharp with urgency.

The dock groaned under the weight of the explosion. Flames licked up the posts. Shadows danced violently across the water. Pirates surged through the fog behind them, weapons raised, eyes wild.

Killian shoved Henry forward. “Go, lad! GO!”

They sprinted the last few feet, the Jolly Roger waiting before them like a guardian.

Jolly Roger

They leapt onto the Jolly Roger just as the dock behind them erupted in another burst of blue flame. The shockwave rippled across the water, sending waves slamming against the hull. Killian landed hard, immediately rising to his feet, and pointed at the ropes. “Cut the lines!” he roared, voice sharp and commanding. Henry scrambled to the nearest rope, pulling the dagger from his holster. His hands shook, but he sliced through the thick line with a fierce, desperate cry. “Got it!”

Killian raced to the helm, cutlass still in hand. He flipped the switch to raise the anchor. The chain rattled violently, sparks flying as the mechanism strained.

Henry sliced through the final rope. “Lines are free!” he shouted, voice high with adrenaline.

Dock

Pirates swarmed the dock, shouting curses, weapons raised. Lantern-Man stood at the edge, fury twisting his face.

Jolly Roger

Killian lovingly stroked the wheel with a trembling hand. “Come on, girl,” he whispered, voice tender and urgent. “Fly.” He gripped the wheel hard, muscles straining, and spun. The Jolly Roger lurched — but the wind was weak, barely a whisper. The ship drifted only a few feet from the dock. Killian's stomach dropped.

Behind them, boots thundered across the planks.

Dock

Lantern-Man snarled, “You’re not leaving!”

Jolly Roger

Killian braced himself at the helm, jaw clenched, eyes fierce. “Hold fast!” he said, tone commanding. Henry grabbed the railing, bracing himself.

A sudden gust of wind hit the Jolly Roger with a force that felt almost deliberate — a shove, a push, a command. A violent, impossible wind. It roared out of nowhere, tearing through the fog. Not a natural gust. Not a shift in weather. Something else. The sails snapped taut, cracking like thunder. The ship surged forward with explosive momentum.

Killian felt it before he understood it — a familiar pressure in the air, a crackle that danced across his skin like static before a storm. The wind curled around the Jolly Roger with intention, with memory, with love. His breath caught. The wheel vibrated beneath his hand, not with the ship’s strain, but with a pulse he knew as surely as his own heartbeat. Lightning-warm. Wild-soft. Fierce-gentle. A storm’s touch. Her touch. His eyes widened, his voice barely a whisper. “Des.” The name wasn’t a thought. It was recognition.

The wind surged again, driving the Jolly Roger forward with impossible force. Fog tore away from the bow in spiraling ribbons. The ship leapt across the water, cutting through the waves like a blade.

Dock

The pirates on the dock staggered backward, shouting in shock.

Jolly Roger

Henry stared at him, stunned. “What was that?”

Killian didn’t look away from the horizon. He didn’t answer. He didn’t need to. He felt her, the echo of her magic, the warmth of her spirit, the fierce protectiveness she had always carried like a second heartbeat.

Henry turned toward him. He felt a warmth beneath the wind, a strange tingling across his arms, a soft pressure against his back like someone steadying him. The fog around them shimmered faintly, as though lit from within. Henry’s voice trembled. “I think… I think she’s here.”

Killian swallowed hard, emotion tightening his throat.

Des… love…

The thoughts weren't words so much as sensations — memories rising like lightning behind his ribs. Her laughter in the rigging. Her hand on his shoulder. Her magic humming through the air when she stood beside him at the helm. "Aye, lad. That wind…" his voice trembling with awe and grief and something brighter. "It's her. It's Desylva." His voice broke. "She's helping us." His eyes widened, breath catching. "She's with us, lad."

The wind surged again, wrapping around the ship, almost tender, like a guiding hand — fierce, wild, protective — a hand on the back, a whisper in the rigging, a promise in the air, pushing them farther and faster than any natural gust could.

Henry pressed a hand to his chest, eyes shining. "It feels warm," he whispered. "Like she's… hugging the ship."

Killian's heart clenched. *Des… you brilliant, impossible storm…* He felt her presence like a pulse in the air — not a ghost, not a memory, but a force. A promise. A love that refused to die. "She always did love a dramatic exit," he murmured, voice thick with grief and wonder.

The wind eased, settling into a steady push behind them, as though escorting them to safety.

The Jolly Roger flew across the water, cutting through the waves with desperate speed. Behind them, the burning dock shrank into the fog, swallowed by flame and distance. The wind howled through the rigging like a living thing, carrying them farther from Shadow's Cove and deeper into open sea.

Henry collapsed beside him, chest heaving, "Are we clear?" he asked, voice trembling, eyes wide.

Killian looked at him, at the fear, the courage, the trust in the boy's eyes. He pulled Henry close, pressing a kiss to his hair. "Aye," he whispered, "We're clear."

Killian steadied the wheel, the last of the unnatural wind tapering behind them, and glanced toward the small brass bracket where the protection crystal still sat, its yellow glow faint now, flickering like a candle guttering after a long night's work.

The crystal pulsed once beneath his fingers, warm in a way that felt almost like a heartbeat. Not magic. Not enchantment. Gratitude.

He exhaled, emotion tightening his throat. "Thank you, love," he murmured under his breath — not to the crystal, but to the storm he knew had guided them. He lifted the crystal from its bracket. The glow dimmed fully now, settling into a soft amber hue, spent but safe. He held it for a moment — gentle, grateful — then returned it to the chest, where it would remain until needed again.

Henry leaned against him, still trembling. "You think she'll stay with us?" he said as he removed the dagger and holster from his waist and returned it to the chest. Killian looked out over the dark water, the wind brushing gently against his cheek like a familiar hand. "Aye," he whispered. "As long as we need her."

The Jolly Roger sailed on — carried not just by the wind, but by the spirit of a storm who still loved him fiercely and refused to let him fall.

A short while later

The night air was cool, brushing gently against the sails, carrying the faint scent of pine from distant shores. The adrenaline of the escape faded slowly, replaced by a heavy, exhausted quiet.

Henry sat on a coil of rope near the helm, knees pulled to his chest, breathing finally steady. Killian stood beside him, hand on the wheel, hook resting near the pocket where the bean lay tucked beside the vial. His coat fluttered in the breeze, lanternlight catching the tired lines around his eyes.

For a long time, neither spoke. The sea whispered against the hull in slow, steady breaths, as though the ocean itself had grown gentle for their sake. Lanterns swayed on their hooks, casting soft arcs of gold across the deck. The night wrapped around them like a sheltering cloak, quiet and patient, letting them have this moment untouched.

But beneath the quiet, Killian felt the tremor of everything he'd endured — the ritual, the near-loss, the impossible wind that had saved them. His heart still beat too fast, too hard, as though trying to catch up with the truth.

Des… my storm… still watching over me.

He swallowed, the ache sharp and sweet all at once.

Henry finally broke the silence. "Are you okay?" Killian didn't answer at once. He stared toward the horizon, where the stars shimmered like scattered memories drifting just out of reach. His voice, when it came, was low and roughened by everything he'd endured. "Aye, lad. I'm still breathin'."

Henry watched him, worry tightening his features. Killian saw it, the weight of a question pressing behind the boy's eyes. He angled his head, his voice gentle. "Is there somethin' else on your mind?"

Henry's voice came small, threaded with curiosity and lingering fear. "I was thinking about the ritual…" Killian turned slightly. "What about it?" Henry swallowed. "I was really worried. I thought… I thought she'd be gone from you forever."

Killian exhaled, slow and trembling, the sound almost swallowed by the sea. "I was worried too," his tone honest, his eyes softening, "More than I let on." Henry looked up at him, eyes glistening, "But you didn't stop," he said, his tone quiet.

Killian rested a steady hand on Henry's shoulder, grounding them both. "Part of me knew everything would be all right," his tone thoughtful, "Our bond… what Desylva and I shared… it's stronger than any magic. Stronger than any price." Henry's throat bobbed, his voice barely above a whisper. "True love."

Killian's lips curved into a small, soft, aching, smile. "Aye. True love," his tone warm.

Henry leaned closer, his tone curious and hopeful, "Did you… feel her? When it was happening?" Killian's eyes softened, the edges of his grief easing. "Aye. I did." He touched his chest, fingers curling over the place where memory lived, his voice thick with emotion. "I felt her presence — warm, fierce, steady. And I heard her voice … whisperin' that all would be well. That nothing could ever take her from me."

Henry shifted closer, small and warm against him. Killian wrapped an arm around him, letting the boy's presence soften the ache inside his ribs. The grief didn't vanish — but it gentled, settling into something he could carry.

Henry's voice came quiet. "You didn't lose her." Killian's throat tightened. He touched his chest again, over his heart, where Desylva's memory burned bright and unbroken. "No. I didn't." His voice dropped to a murmur. "She's still here. Storm and all."

Henry smiled, soft and relieved. Killian breathed out, the exhale trembling but steady. "You did well tonight. Brave. Quick. Smart." Henry's cheeks flushed. "I was scared." Killian's lips twitched. "So was I." Henry blinked up at him. "Really?" Killian nodded. "Fear doesn't make you weak, lad. It makes you human."

Henry leaned into him again, small and safe beneath Killian's arm. The sea rocked them in a slow, soothing rhythm, the ship creaking like an old friend settling in for the night.

After a while, Henry looked up. "Should we use the bean now?" he asked, his tone tentative. Killian glanced toward the horizon. The night was deep, the stars bright, the world hushed. "No," he said softly. "Not tonight." Henry frowned, his tone curious. "Why not?"

Killian brushed a hand through the boy's hair, smoothing it back from his forehead. "We're exhausted," his tone patient, "The ship's worn. And magic like this… deserves a clear head and a steady heart." Henry nodded slowly. "Morning, then?" he asked. His tone hopeful. Killian smiled, small, tired, warm. "Aye. Morning." Henry yawned, rubbing his eyes with the back of his hand.

Killian nudged him toward the companionway. "Get some rest, lad. Tomorrow, we return to Storybrooke." Henry paused at the door, looked back, smiled, and slipped below deck.

Killian remained on the deck long after, the night folding around him. He stared at the stars, the bean heavy in his pocket, the vial heavier still. The wind brushed past him, cool and salt-sweet. He whispered her name into the dark. “Desylva, my love.”

The breeze seemed to carry it gently across the sea. And Killian felt it — a soft, electric shiver along his skin, like the ghost of lightning. She was still with him.

Day 70

Dawn

Morning broke soft and golden, sunlight spilling across the deck like warm honey. The sea lay calm and glass-bright, its gentle ripples catching the first breath of day. The Jolly Roger rocked lazily, her sails stirring as though waking from their own long night.

Killian stood at the helm, hand resting on the wheel, coat fluttering lightly behind him. He looked tired, but steady — the kind of steadiness forged from resolve rather than rest. The pocket near his hook felt heavier than it should, the bean nestled beside the vial, both humming with quiet, insistent significance.

The companionway doors banged open. Henry burst onto the deck, his storybook clutched tight under his arm, hair tousled from sleep and excitement. “Mornin’, Cap!” he called, voice bright as his feet thudded across the deck. Killian turned, a small smile warming his features. “Mornin’, lad.”

Henry hurried to the helm, practically vibrating, his eyes shining, his voice eager, “Is it time?” Killian nodded. “Aye. It is.”

Henry hugged his storybook closer, as though it were a talisman warding off doubt. “I’m ready,” he stated, his tone determined.

Killian reached into his coat and withdrew the bean. In the morning light, it glowed brighter than it ever had — soft green pulses, warm and alive, as though it recognized the dawn and answered it. Henry’s breath caught, his voice full of awe. “It’s beautiful.” Killian held it gently, reverently. “Magic like this… it’s rare. Powerful. Dangerous.”

Henry nodded, his voice steady. “But we’re ready.” Killian looked at him and felt a swell of pride, fierce and tender. “Aye. We are.”

Henry gripped his storybook with one hand and Killian’s coat with the other, grounding himself in both myth and reality. Killian stepped away from the helm, guiding Henry toward the center of the deck. The breeze brushed against them, carrying salt, sunlight, and the faint promise of home. The sea stretched out before them, endless and waiting.

Killian closed his eyes for a moment, fingertips brushing the vial in his coat — a silent acknowledgment, a promise kept, a memory honored. When he opened his eyes, the morning seemed brighter. “All right, lad,” he murmured. “You know how this works.” Henry nodded eagerly, his tone confident. “We think of where we want to go.”

“Aye.” Killian’s voice softened. “Home.” Henry squeezed his storybook, voice full of longing. “Storybrooke.” Killian felt the word settle inside him like an anchor. “Storybrooke,” he echoed, his voice firm.

He held the bean aloft. Its glow intensified, responding to intention, to hope, to the bond between them. The deck vibrated beneath their feet. The air thickened, humming with power.

Henry grabbed Killian’s arm. Killian steadied him. Together, they focused — on the town they missed, the people waiting for them, the life they were fighting to return to. Killian drew a breath, then tossed the bean into the sea.

The moment it touched the water, the ocean erupted in a burst of brilliant green light. Waves spiraled outward, swirling into a vortex that churned with magic. The portal grew rapidly, spinning faster and faster, its center glowing

like molten emerald. The wind whipped across the deck. The Jolly Roger groaned as the magic pulled at her hull, timbers creaking like a beast waking from slumber.

Henry's eyes widened, voice breathless. "It's just like the stories…" Killian smiled, a spark of wonder threading through his exhaustion. "Aye, lad. And now we sail through it."

He nudged Henry, and together they headed back to the quarterdeck.

The portal roared, widening into a towering whirlpool of green light — a doorway between worlds, shimmering with impossible energy.

Killian gripped the wheel tightly. "Hold on." He steered the Jolly Roger toward the swirling vortex, the ship surging forward as the portal's magic reached for them. "Home," Killian whispered, his tone full of quiet conviction.

The Jolly Roger plunged into the vortex, her bow swallowed first, timbers shuddering as the portal wrapped around her like a living storm.

Inside Portal

For a heartbeat, there was nothing, no sea, no sky, no wind, only green brilliance swallowing the world whole. Then the world fractured. Sound warped first, stretching thin like taffy. The groan of the ship elongated into a low, trembling moan. Henry gasped, but even his breath seemed to echo strangely, as though the air couldn't decide where it belonged.

The sea vanished. The sky vanished. Everything vanished. The world became green light and roaring magic.

Killian's grip on the wheel tightened until his knuckles blanched. The wood vibrated beneath his palm, alive with magic older than any realm he'd sailed. His stomach dropped, not from fear, but from the uncanny sensation of gravity shifting sideways. He braced himself at the wheel, boots planted wide, jaw clenched as the ship lurched violently. The magic thrummed through him. Desylva's laugh. Her fury. Her hand in his. The way she'd looked at him the last time he saw her.

The portal wasn't water. It wasn't air. It wasn't anything a mortal world could name. It was pressure — thick, electric, humming with ancient power. It pressed against their skin, their bones, their hearts. The sails snapped taut, glowing faintly as magic threaded through the canvas. The masts groaned like they were being pulled through two centuries at once.

The light thickened around them, swirling in ribbons of emerald and gold. It wasn't just brightness, it had weight, texture, like drifting through liquid sunrise. The deck shuddered, then tilted, then righted itself, though Killian knew the ship wasn't truly moving forward or up or down. It was moving *between*.

Henry clutched his storybook tighter, the edges digging into his palms. Awe flickered across his face, but it was thin now, stretched over something trembling and raw. Each shift of the portal seemed to peel back another layer of him — wonder giving way to fear, fear giving way to the fierce determination only a child could muster. "Killian—" His voice wavered, bending strangely in the air, as though the portal were trying to pull the words apart. His knuckles whitened where he gripped Killian's coat.

Killian steadied him, his hook on his shoulder. "I've got you, lad." Even his own voice sounded different. He swallowed hard, forcing his breath steady. Henry needed him to be solid, unshakable. But the portal wasn't just moving them between worlds. It was moving him between versions of himself — the man he'd been, the man he'd lost, the man he was trying to be again.

The air grew colder, then warmer, then cold again. A rush of wind swept across the deck, but it wasn't wind from any world Henry knew. It smelled of pine forests, desert sand, old stone, fresh rain — scents flickering past like memories of realms they weren't visiting.

The deck vibrated beneath their feet, humming with the same magic that had once carried giants between realms. Killian felt the bean's magic pulse — warm, rhythmic, alive.

Henry's fingers tightened on Killian's coat. "It feels like… like everything's happening at once."

"Aye." Killian braced as another wave of magic rolled through them, bending the horizon into a curve of shimmering green. "Portals don't follow the rules of any world. They make their own. And no two are the same."

The sails snapped overhead, though there was no wind to fill them. The ropes creaked, stretching as though pulled by invisible hands. The hull groaned, timbers flexing under the strain of magic threading through every plank.

Henry stumbled as the deck rippled beneath his feet — not physically, but visually, like the wood had become water for a moment. Killian caught him, pulling him close. "Easy, lad." Henry swallowed hard, breath trembling. "It's… beautiful. And scary." Killian's gaze softened. "That's magic, lad. The real kind. The kind that doesn't care whether you're ready."

The vortex spiraled around them in towering walls of emerald light, swirling faster and faster until the world became a blur of color and sound. The deck vibrated beneath their feet, humming with the same magic that had once carried giants between realms. The light shifted again, deepening into a darker green, swirling with flecks of silver. Shapes flickered at the edges — silhouettes of trees, rooftops, waves, faces — echoes of places they'd been, places they'd lost, places they longed for.

Killian felt the bean's magic pulse — warm, rhythmic, alive. Henry felt something else. A soft pressure against his back. A warmth brushing his cheek. A whisper in the wind, familiar and fierce. He gasped, the sound sharp and bright. "She's here." It wasn't fear this time. It was recognition. Relief. Something like joy.

Killian didn't need to ask who he meant. He felt her too. A spark of lightning across his skin. A pulse, a presence woven into the air. Killian's heart lurched. The portal's magic surged through him, answering Henry's words with a crackle of silver that felt like a hand on his chest.

His breath caught, a sound too soft to be a sob and too broken to be anything else. "Des…" Her name wasn't a whisper. It was a wound reopening.

The vortex answered with a crackle of silver light. The magic constricted around them, not just a physical force but an emotional one, squeezing everything Killian had buried to the surface. Henry felt it too, his small frame trembling, not from the ship's pitch but from the weight of everything the portal demanded they face.

Henry reached out instinctively, fingers brushing the air as one of the shapes drifted close. It dissolved like smoke.

Killian felt something tighten in his chest — a pull, a memory, a whisper, Desylva. The portal seemed to hear it, responding with a faint shimmer of violet threading through the green. His breath caught, but he didn't look away. He let the moment pass through him, a reminder of everything they shared, and everything that was taken from them.

The ship lurched suddenly, as though hitting a wave made of light. Harder this time. Henry stumbled again, nearly falling. Killian braced his feet, steadying them both as the Jolly Roger surged forward — or backward — or sideways — the portal didn't care about direction.

The air grew thin, then thick, then thin again. Henry's ears popped. Killian's vision blurred at the edges, colors smearing like wet paint. The world around them pulsed, each beat echoing in his bones.

The portal roared, a soundless roar that vibrated through their ribs, then narrowed. The light intensified. The magic tightened around them like a fist.

Henry pressed close, voice small but steady. "We're going home." Killian looked down at him, pride swelling warm and fierce. "Aye, lad. We are."

The portal seemed to sense the thought. The emerald light around them shifted. The chaos became something else. Memory. Images flickered through the vortex. Veyra. Sunlit cliffs rising from silver seas. Coral reefs glowing beneath dark water. The jagged rock where Killian had first found her.

Henry gasped. "Killian..."

Killian saw them too. Not visions of the future. Echoes. Fragments of the voyage they were leaving behind. The images shifted again. Henry at the helm during the storm. Wooden practice swords clashing across the deck. The glowing reefs beneath the waves. Shadow's Cove emerging from the fog. The Collector's lantern burning silver.

Then another image appeared. The rail of the Jolly Roger. Henry holding the urn. Killian releasing the ashes into the wind. Gray fragments scattering across the sea, catching the sunset for a single brilliant heartbeat before vanishing into the waves.

Henry's breath caught. "Are portals supposed to do that?" The question lingered between them. Killian stared at the vision. His brow furrowed. "No." His voice was quiet. Certain. "Not usually."

Henry kept staring at the memories swirling through the green light. Veyra. The reefs. The storm. Shadow's Cove. All of it felt too specific. Too personal. His eyes widened. "Wait..."

Killian glanced down. "What is it, lad?" Henry pointed toward the drifting images. "The bean." Killian frowned. "What about it?"

Henry tightened his grip on the storybook. "You didn't buy that bean." The words seemed to hang in the strange air of the portal. "You traded for it."

Killian's expression shifted. Henry looked back at the memories surrounding them. "The Collector said memories have value."

Another image drifted past. The Jolly Roger cutting through Veyra's waters. Desylva laughing beneath a storm-dark sky.

Henry swallowed. "What if this is the memory?" Killian stared at the vision. For a long moment he said nothing.

The bean pulsed warmly in response, almost like a heartbeat.

Henry's eyes widened further. "What if the magic remembers?"

The images continued to drift around them. Too clear. Too personal. Not random magic. Memory. His memory. Their memories. The portal shimmered silver for an instant. Then she appeared. Not fully. Just a glimpse. The sight struck him so suddenly his breath caught. Storm-grey eyes bright with mischief. Wild hair dancing in an unseen wind. A familiar smile. Then the vision dissolved into silver sparks. There one heartbeat. Gone the next.

Henry stared. "Did you see that?" Killian swallowed hard. His chest tightened. "Aye, lad." His voice cracked softly. "I did."

The light around them tightened, spiraling inward, pulling the ship deeper into the heart of the vortex. The deck trembled. The sails snapped. The wheel jerked under Killian’s hand. The vortex roared. The world snapped. And then everything compressed into a single point of blinding green. A breath held by the universe. A moment between worlds.

Killian felt Henry’s hand tighten around his coat. He didn’t look down, he didn’t need to. He could feel the boy’s trust like a heartbeat against his ribs. And for the first time since Desylva was taken, Killian didn’t feel alone in the magic. Henry was with him. Desylva was with them. And the portal — wild, ancient, merciless, carried all three of their stories into that single suspended heartbeat.

Storybrooke Harbor

The tranquil waters of Storybrooke’s harbor shimmered under a pale morning sky, the air crisp with the scent of salt, pine, and the faint musk of wet timber from the docks. A soft mist curled around the pilings, catching the first rays of dawn in a delicate dance of light, the sea whispering secrets against the planks. The town lay quiet, its streets still

cloaked in the hush of early hours, shop shutters closed, streetlights flickering off one by one as the sun crept higher. For a moment, the harbor held its breath. A faint tremor rippled across the water, a vibration so subtle it might have been imagined. Then a low hum stirred the stillness, a pulse of magic that throbbed through the air like a heartbeat. The sea parted.

A swirling vortex of light and shadow tore open above the waves, its edges crackling with emerald and gold. The mist recoiled from it, curling back like frightened fingers. Ripples raced across the harbor's surface, widening in concentric rings as the vortex deepened, its center glowing with blinding green. With a surge of foam and spray, the Jolly Roger burst through the portal, her hull gleaming with sea-spray, her sails taut, her timbers humming with the last remnants of magic. She cut through the water like a blade through silk, the portal's glow reflecting off her masts in shimmering streaks. The vortex snapped shut behind her with a soundless flash, leaving only the gentle lap of waves and the faint scent of ozone drifting across the harbor — a lingering whisper of realms left behind. Morning calm returned, but the air remained charged, as though Storybrooke itself recognized the ship's return.

Dock/Town

Grumpy, perched on a crate at the dock's edge with his flask halfway to his lips, froze as the Roger appeared. His bushy brows shot up so high they nearly vanished into his hairline. "Well, I'll be damned!" he bellowed, leaping to his feet. The flask clattered to the cobblestones as his voice echoed across the harbor like a cannon shot. "He's back! The Jolly Roger's back! Hook's home!" He took off at a sprint, boots pounding the uneven stones, his gruff shouts ringing through the waking town. "Tell everyone! Hook's back! Ship's in the harbor!" His enthusiasm, rare for the surly dwarf, drew startled glances from early risers. Doc paused mid-bite at the bakery door, a jogger halted with earbuds dangling, shopkeepers cracked open shutters to peer out as Grumpy barreled toward the town square, his flannel shirt flapping like a flag behind him.

The harbor, moments ago quiet, now started to buzz with life.

Jolly Roger

Killian stood at the helm, his black coat dusted with sea salt, his blue eyes weary but softened by the boy at his side. His hook rested on the ship's wheel, its curve glinting in the dawn light, a silent testament to the storms they'd sailed through and the magic they'd just survived.

Henry gasped, blinking rapidly as sunlight washed over the deck. Real sunlight. Warm. Golden. Familiar. The sea was calm, the sky clear, the world quiet — a stark contrast to the chaos they'd left behind.

Killian steadied the wheel, chest rising and falling in heavy breaths. His coat fluttered in the gentle breeze — a normal breeze, not magic, not storm-born.

Henry turned slowly, eyes wide.

The Jolly Roger drifted toward the familiar harbor, her sails catching the gentle morning wind. The coastline stretched before them, green trees, rolling hills, rooftops clustered in neat rows. The clock tower rising above the town, its hands glinting in the morning light. Storybrooke. They'd made it. They were home.

Henry bounded to the port railing, his storybook tucked under his arm, sneakers scuffing the deck as he waved wildly at the distant docks. His grin split his face, bright as the sunrise. "We made it!" he called, turning to Killian, his voice brimming with triumph, his dark hair ruffled by the harbor breeze.

Killian's lips curved into a faint smile, his hook tapping the wheel with a soft clink. His voice carried the lilt of the sea, roughened by grief but warmed by Henry's infectious energy. "Aye, lad, that we did."

Henry's breath hitched. He pressed a hand to his chest, storybook trembling in his grip. "We're really back."

Killian looked at him, at the relief, the joy, the disbelief shining in the boy's eyes, and felt something inside him loosen, something that had been wound tight since the moment they'd left. "Aye," he murmured. "We are." He ruffled Henry's hair, his hand lingering a moment, gratitude and pride flickering in his eyes. The boy's presence had been a lifeline, keeping him from sinking into despair.

Henry puffed out his chest, mimicking Killian's swagger, though his sneakers and storybook undercut the pirate bravado. A pang of loss threaded through his excitement, his fingers tightening on the storybook as he glanced at the sea, as if Desylva's storm might still linger in the waves.

Killian's smile faltered, his blue eyes darkening as he followed Henry's gaze. The memory of scattering Desylva's ashes cut like a blade. His hand slipped to the vial in his coat pocket, its glass a faint weight against his heart, a fragment of her he couldn't leave behind. "She'd be proud of you, Henry. Keeping her story alive."

Henry nodded, throat tightening, but forced a grin, his voice steady despite the ache. "She's in the book now, forever." He tapped the storybook, his young face resolute, a boy determined to preserve her tempest in ink and memory.

The wind brushed past them, gentle and warm. But beneath it, Killian felt a faint spark, a soft, electric whisper. Henry felt it too. They exchanged a look. "She followed us," Henry whispered. Killian touched his chest, over his heart. "Aye, lad. She did."

Killian secured the wheel, guiding the ship smoothly toward the dock. The fixed metal gangplank clanged softly as the hull nudged against it. He dropped the anchor, the chain's rattle echoing across the water, then turned to Henry, his expression shifting to mock seriousness, his eyebrow arched.

"Best brace yourself, lad. Your mums'll have questions, and I wager Emma's got a lecture or two brewin'. Likely with my name on it." His lips twitched, a spark of roguish charm breaking through the grief, though his eyes held a flicker of apprehension at facing Emma's wrath.

Henry laughed, undaunted. "Worth it! I got to sail with Captain Hook, didn't I? That's gotta be, like, the coolest thing ever!" His grin was infectious, his eyes sparkling with the thrill of their adventure. "Mom'll get over it once I tell her about the glowing cave and the storm we rode. She's gotta admit that's awesome."

Killian chuckled, a low, warm sound that eased the weight in his chest," "Aye, you little scamp, you've got a pirate's tongue for tall tales."

Henry grinned. "And you know Emma, she won't stay mad at you. … She likes you." Killian raised an eyebrow. "Does she now?" Henry shrugged. "Well… she doesn't *not* like you." Killian laughed, a real laugh, warm and unguarded, the kind he hadn't felt in far too long.

His hook glinted as he gestured toward the gangplank. "Let's face the music, then. Together." He clapped Henry's shoulder and they moved toward the gangplank, boots thudding on the deck as they prepared to disembark.

The Jolly Roger stood proud, her return a beacon of hope in the harbor's misty embrace, her masts cutting stark lines against the morning sky.

Dock

Grumpy's shouts had drawn a small crowd to the harbor, their figures emerging from the morning mist like ghosts summoned by the dwarf's bellows. Ruby sprinted from the diner, her apron dusted with flour, her red-streaked hair flying as she skidded to a stop at the dock's edge, her eyes wide with relief and excitement. "Hook! Henry!" she called, her voice sharp with joy, her wolfish grin flashing as she waved, nearly tripping over a piling in her haste. "You're back! Thank the stars. I was startin' to think you'd gone full pirate and ditched us!"

Emma raced from the sheriff's station, her hair whipping in the breeze, her red leather jacket a splash of color against the gray docks. Her eyes shimmered with a mix of relief and frustration, her breath catching as she spotted Henry's waving figure, then Killian's weary silhouette beside him.

"Henry!" she shouted, her voice cracking with emotion as she closed the distance, her boots pounding the cobblestones. For one terrible heartbeat, she didn't seem able to move. She had imagined this moment a hundred different ways. Henry hurt. Henry lost. Henry never coming home at all. Then he waved. Just waved. Like he had only been gone an afternoon. Emma laughed and cried at the same time before sprinting the rest of the distance.

“You’re okay. Thank God!” She reached the gangplank just as they stepped onto the dock, pulling Henry into a fierce hug, her arms wrapping around him like a lifeline. “Don’t you ever sneak off like that again, kid,” she murmured, her voice thick, her eyes glistening as she held him tight, her sheriff’s resolve crumbling under the weight of her fear.

Henry hugged her back, his storybook pressed between them, his voice muffled but bright. His excitement spilling over, “I’m fine, Mom! We sailed to Veyra. It was amazing!” his hands gesturing as he pulled back, his grin undimmed by her stern look. “Killian taught me how to steer through a storm, we dueled on deck, we went underwater, we…”

Emma’s gaze snapped to Killian, her eyes narrowing, though the relief in them softened the edge. “You,” she said, her tone sharp but laced with concern, stepping toward him. “Taking my kid across realms without a word? What were you thinking?” Her hands went to her hips, her sheriff’s stance firm, but her voice trembled, betraying the fear that had gripped her since the Roger vanished.

Killian raised his arms, his hook glinting in a placating gesture, his lips curving into a wry smile that didn’t quite reach his eyes. “Easy, Swan. I didn’t know the lad stowed away ‘til we were at Veyra. He’s a sneaky one, your boy.” His voice was light, but the weight of his grief lingered, his blue eyes meeting hers with a quiet plea for understanding. “I had to take her home, Emma. … Des’s ashes belonged there, on Veyra’s shores. Henry helped me see it through.”

Emma’s expression softened, her anger melting under the raw pain in his voice, her hand reaching out to rest on his arm, her fingers warm against his salt-dusted coat. “I get it,” she said quietly, her eyes searching his. “I just… we were worried, Killian. You’re family. We can’t lose you, too.” Her voice cracked, her grip tightening, a silent promise to anchor him in Storybrooke’s harbor.

Killian nodded, his throat tight, his hook flexing at his side as he managed a faint, “I’m here now.” He glanced at Henry, who was recounting their adventures to Ruby with wild gestures, her laughter ringing out as she ruffled his hair. “The lad kept me grounded, Swan. Kept me from goin’ full pirate, as he put it.” His smirk returned, a flicker of his old charm, though his eyes still carried the shadow of Desylva’s loss.

Ruby, grin wide, slung an arm around Henry’s shoulders, her voice teasing. “So, kid, you’re a pirate now? Gonna start swashbuckling at the diner?” She winked at Killian, her eyes warm with gratitude, “You did good, Hook, bringing him back safe,” Ruby turned to Henry, “You owe me a story. Every detail of that cove you mentioned. Sounds like my kinda place.”

Henry laughed, his eyes bright as he turned to her, “It was awesome, Ruby! It had glowing algae, like Desylva’s mark!” His voice faltered slightly at her name, but he pushed on, his enthusiasm a shield against the ache. “And we fought off a storm, just like she would’ve!”

Killian’s gaze drifted to the sea, the Jolly Roger rocking gently behind them, sails glistening like a promise kept. “Aye, she would’ve,” he murmured, his voice barely audible, his hand slipping to the vial in his pocket, a fragment of her storm he’d carry forever.

He turned back to the group, his resolve hardening, the crowd growing as more townsfolk arrived. Snow and David jogging from the town square, their faces lit with relief. Archie, his umbrella tucked under his arm, offering a quiet nod. Even Doc, trailing behind with a half-eaten donut, muttering about Grumpy’s racket waking the town.

Snow reached them first, her white coat brushing the dock as she pulled Killian into a hug, her voice soft but fierce. “You scared us, Killian. But you’re home. That’s what matters.” David clapped his shoulder, his swordsman’s grip steady, his tone gruff but warm. “Good to have you back Hook. Don’t make a habit of portal-jumping without warning.” Killian managed a nod, his throat tight, the warmth of their welcome a balm against the cold ache of Desylva’s absence.

Grumpy, panting from his sprint, shoved through the crowd, beard flecked with crumbs as he jabbed a finger at Killian, his voice a tangled mix of relief and irritation. “You owe me a new flask, Hook! Dropped mine when you popped outta that portal like some damn ghost ship!”

Ruby—hands on her hips, apron dusted with flour— exasperation sharp enough to cut through the fog. “Saints above, Grumpy, there was no need to barrel through town screaming at this hour. A group text would’ve worked just fine.”

Grumpy shot her a look over his shoulder, scowl twitching into a begrudging grin. “I hate texting. And not everyone checks their phones anyway.”

His expression softened as his gaze landed on Henry. “Glad you’re back, kid. Town’s too quiet without your trouble.”

Henry grinned, holding up his storybook. “I got a ton of new pages to add, Grumpy! Veyra’s gonna fill half the book!” His voice was bright, but his eyes flicked to Killian, a silent acknowledgment of the grief they shared, the stories they’d woven to keep her alive.

The crowd lingered a moment longer, their voices a warm hum of welcomes and questions, but the morning chill and the promise of coffee at Granny’s began to draw them away. Ruby tugged Henry’s sleeve, her grin playful. “Come on, kid. Let’s get you some hot chocolate before Emma grounds you for life.” Emma shot her a mock glare but nodded, her arm around Henry as they turned toward the town, Snow and David following, their footsteps fading on the cobblestones. Doc shuffled off, muttering to himself, while Grumpy lingered, casting a last glance at Killian before heading for the diner, his grumbling softened by relief.

Killian stood alone on the dock, his boots rooted to the planks, his blue eyes tracing the Jolly Roger’s silhouette against the misty harbor. His heart remained heavy, Desylva’s absence a shadow no homecoming could erase, but with Henry at his side and the town’s warmth around him, he felt a spark of purpose, a reminder that some stories, even in loss, could still find a way forward. But he wasn’t quite ready to face them yet.

Henry paused and turned back, his young face creased with concern, “Aren’t you coming?” he asked, his voice small but piercing, the storybook clutched tight under his arm. Killian’s lips curved into a faint smile, his hook glinting as he gestured toward the ship, his voice soft but steady. “I’ll be along shortly, lad. Just need a moment with the old girl.” His gaze flicked to the Roger, a flicker of grief shadowing his eyes, the weight of Desylva’s absence pulling him back to the deck.

Henry’s brow furrowed, his sneakers scuffing the dock as he took a step closer, his voice tinged with worry. “You’re not gonna leave again, are you?” His eyes searched Killian’s, a boy’s fear of losing another piece of his family warring with the trust they’d built on Veyra’s seas.

Killian knelt slightly, meeting Henry’s gaze, his hand resting on the boy’s shoulder, his voice firm despite the ache in his chest. “Not a chance, lad. I’m home for good. Pirate’s honor.” He flashed a roguish wink, his hook tapping Henry’s arm gently, a promise sealed in the morning light. “Go on, now. Don’t keep your mum waiting. She’ll have my hide if you’re late for that hot chocolate.”

Henry nodded, his grin returning, though his eyes held a flicker of doubt. “Okay, but you better show up, Cap’n. I’m holding you to it.” He turned, his sneakers thudding as he jogged to catch up with Emma and the others, his storybook bouncing under his arm, his silhouette fading into the mist as the crowd dispersed.

Killian watched him go, lingering where he stood. The harbor carried on around him. Gulls wheeled overhead. Dock lines creaked. Somewhere farther up the street a shop bell rang. Storybrooke was awake. Alive. Ordinary. He had spent weeks chasing storms, sailing across realms, bargaining with ancient magic, and nearly losing everything. Yet somehow the simple sounds of home struck him harder than any of it. Home. The word settled quietly inside him. Not Veyra. Not the sea. Not even the Jolly Roger. Storybrooke. Family. People waiting for him to come back.

He turned, his boots heavy on the metal gangplank as he ascended, the clank of his steps echoing in the still air.

Jolly Roger

He stepped onto the Jolly Roger’s deck, the familiar creak of the timbers a bittersweet welcome, the ship’s gentle sway a reminder of the seas they’d sailed with her. He moved to the side of the companionway hood, his fingers brushing the carving etched into the wood. *KJ + DJ forever*. The letters burned into his vision, a vow unbroken by death.

Tears welled in his eyes, spilling over as he traced the carving, his voice a broken whisper. “My storm… you’re still here, aren’t you?” The words caught in his throat, the salt of his tears mingling with the sea’s breath, his chest heaving as he gripped the wheel, the ache of her absence a tide pulling at his heart.

He lingered a moment, the harbor’s mist curling around him, then turned, his boots heavy as he descended the companionway.

Cabin

The door creaked open, revealing the dim space lit by a single flickering lantern, its glow casting soft shadows across the desk cluttered with maps and a half-empty bottle of rum. Killian’s boots thudded softly on the cabin’s planks, the Jolly Roger’s gentle sway a reminder of the seas they’d sailed with her. His hand trembled as he drew the vial of ashes from his coat pocket, its glass glinting faintly, a fragment of her tempest he’d always carry close.

He sat at the desk, the chair creaking under his weight, and pulled a folded piece of paper out of the top drawer. A poem he’d been working on, its edges worn from nights spent clutching it. He unfolded the paper, his blue eyes tracing the verses, the words a quiet lament in his mind, each line a wave crashing against his grief.

I sailed to Veyra, her ashes in hand,
The Jolly Roger cut waves so wide.
Her storm’s sweet echo still haunts the land,
My heart adrift on a grieving tide.

The lad, young Henry, he stowed away fast,
His eyes alight with a storyteller’s flame.
Where cliffs met the sea, her ashes we cast
Their gray dust swirled, the Veyran breeze claimed.

We dove through reefs where her light was free,
Coral aglow with Desylva’s name.
The lad sketched her tale, in his book with glee,
Her storm in his lines, my heart’s only flame.

On deck we sparred, wood swords in the sun,
I taught him to dance with the ship’s old bones.
The little scamp landed one strike and won,
Then crowed his victory all through the groans.

"Use ropes, lad!" I roared, our laughter begun,
Her storm in his grin, like sea-polished stones.
The boy fought clever where others would run,
Learning the sea through the Roger’s bones.

Through squalls we steered, the boy at the wheel,
His hands held firm ‘gainst the tempest’s might.
Her spirit roared in the gale’s wild peal,
Guiding us safe through the howling night.

Killian’s throat tightened, tears welling as he read, the memory of Henry at the helm, the storm’s echo of Desylva’s magic, vivid in his mind. He picked up a quill from the desk, its inkpot glinting in the lanternlight, and dipped it, his hand steady despite the ache in his chest.

He added more verses, the words forming in his head as he wrote, each line a whisper to her storm, his voice silent but resonant in the cabin’s quiet.

In Shadow’s Cove we sought a bean’s spark,
Its cost near ruin, yet love held true.

The Collector waited within the dark,
Promising gain while demanding due.

The Collector reached for memory's flame,
To steal the storm that lived in me.
Yet love endured and spoke her name,
Stronger than any sorcery.

The lad stood fast when the magic lied,
His voice rang fierce through the silver light.
He would not let her be torn aside,
Nor let her vanish into the night.

When Shadow's Cove closed in behind,
And darkened hands would not release,
Her storm returned upon the wind,
And carried us at last to peace.

Back home in Storybrooke, the harbor did call,
Emma's fierce hug met the lad on the shore.
The town's warm cheer tried to break my fall,
But her absence cuts deeper than any before.

I climbed back 'board Roger, alone at the helm,
My carving, KJ + DJ, still etched in the wood.
My tears fell fast for my lost storm's realm,
Her love's the tide where my heart once stood.

Young Henry's tale keeps her ever near,
His book holds her lightning, her spark, her fight.
Her storm sails on, through grief and through fear,
Her gale in my heart, my eternal light.

Killian set the quill down, his fingers trembling as he read the final lines in his mind. His tears fell onto the desk, leaving the poem untouched. "My storm. My love," he murmured, his voice raw, "I'll always love you,' his voice starting to crack under the weight of loss, "Forever. And a day" he finished, the cabin's shadows swallowing the sound as his tears returned.

After a few moments, he wiped his tears, rose from the desk, and walked to the chest in the corner. He opened it, revealing her cloak, preserved by glowing runes, alongside her tattered scarf, from a carnival so long ago, some pieces of sea glass, and a pile of poems chronicling their story, Henry's now on the top. He placed the vial among them, its soft clink a final note in their saga, and folded his poem carefully, tucking it beside her rings and dagger.

His fingers hovered over the sapphire-crowned ring, and the dagger, its blade glinting with memories of her storm-born fury. "I brought you home, love," he whispered, his voice raw, breaking under the weight of loss. His tears falling onto the dagger's hilt, "Veyra's got you now, but this… this is ours." His hook brushed the rings as if her warmth might still linger. "I'll carry you always, love. Every tide, every star." He closed the chest, the lock clicking shut like a vow sealed, and stood, his resolve steady despite the grief. The Roger's silence a testament to the storm that would forever guide his course.

THE END!!!

Appendix 1
The Jolly Roger

Intro

The Jolly Roger was forged as the Jewel of the Realm from enchanted wood that thrummed with latent magic, she was the swiftest ship in all the realms, her sleek hull carving through storms and tides with a grace that whispered of sentience. Her hull, painted black with accents of deep gold, gleamed under the sun, the wood polished by years of salt and storm yet unmarred by rot, a testament to her enchanted origins.

From the fierce mermaid figurehead at her bow, its trident gleaming with secrets of the deep, to the gilded stern where waves sang of forgotten shores, she stretched 110 feet, her black hull, kissed with gold accents, shimmering like plundered gold. At 28 feet wide, she wed speed to stability, her two masts soaring 90 feet from keel to crow's nest, where lookouts pierced the horizon's veil.

Her sails, woven from some arcane thread, never frayed, or faded. They billowed like a defiance against the heavens, the red flag snapping atop the mainmast (the tallest and sovereign mast), unadorned yet bold, folds proclaiming the reign of Captain Hook.

The main deck, 25 feet above the keel and 12 feet above the waterline, pulsed with life, while the quarterdeck, rising 5 feet higher, granted Killian Jones a sovereign's view, his hook flashing as he gripped the helm, his blue eyes scouring the endless sea.

Once a naval vessel under Liam Jones, she was reborn as a pirate ship when Killian, shattered by his brother's death renounced a corrupt crown. Her enchanted timbers, untouched by rot or time, bore the weight of his saga. Liam's death in Neverland's poisoned grip, Milah's blood staining her deck, Baelfire's rejection after a fleeting bond, and the relentless pursuit of vengeance against Rumpelstiltskin.

She outran Poseidon's wrath, braved Neverland's ageless tides, and weathered countless perils, her spirit forever bound to Killian's heart. Her magic was no mere legend; the enchanted wood lent her unmatched speed and resilience, as if she answered her captain's will, making her a myth whispered in every port from the Enchanted Forest to realms unseen.

Over time, she became more than a ship, a living emblem of rebellion, love, and redemption, her planks etched with the echoes of Killian's journey from naval officer to Captain Hook. With four hatchways, forward, midship, aft, and the companionway's deck entrance, the ship breathed accessibility, her enchanted frame binding deck to depths. She was no mere ship but a legend, her companionway a lifeline to her captain's heart, her galley a hearth for her crew, her hold a vault for her magic, sailing eternal on the tides of fate.

Through storms and stars, the Jolly Roger sailed, her timbers singing of a pirate who'd risen from betrayal to become a hero, her every plank a testament to the man who'd made her immortal, her sails a beacon eternal on the tides of fate, carrying Captain Hook toward vengeance or redemption in the endless realms beyond!

Her Crew

The Jolly Roger was more than enchanted wood and sails; she was a home for a crew of rogues, each man bound to her timbers and to Captain Hook by loyalty forged in fire and sea. Her deck echoed with their voices, their scars and stories woven into the ship's legend, from her naval dawn as the Jewel of the Realm to her piratical reign under Killian Jones. Four souls stood foremost among her men, their lives entwined with the ship's journey through the Enchanted Forest and Neverland's ageless tides. One-Eyed Jack, Black Tom, Smee, and Billy, each a pillar of the Jolly Roger's defiant spirit.

One-Eyed Jack, a grizzled veteran of the sea, had served since the ship's first breath as the Jewel of the Realm. A gunner with a single, piercing eye, his other lost to a naval skirmish under Liam's command, he tended the Jolly Roger's cannons with a lover's care, polishing their iron barrels until they gleamed like obsidian. His face, lined by salt and sun, hid a quiet wisdom, and his gruff hum, rising as he worked, was a steady rhythm on the deck. He had stood by Liam's side, a loyal hand in the King's Navy, and when Killian turned the ship pirate, he followed without

hesitation, his faith in the Jones brothers unshaken by the crown's betrayal. His eye glinted with wary vigilance, catching threats others missed, and his words carried weight, a steady anchor for the crew through storms and battles. In the crew quarters, his hammock hung near the hatch, a sea chest beneath it holding a faded naval medal and a dagger honed to a razor's edge, relics of a life that shaped the Jolly Roger's earliest days.

Black Tom, a towering figure of shadow and silence, was another relic of the Jewel of the Realm's naval past. A boatswain since Liam's command, he wielded a harpoon with deadly precision, his scarred face unreadable beneath the dim lantern light of the deck. His ebony skin and broad frame made him a formidable presence, his strength hauling ropes or securing cargo in the hold with ease. He had joined the ship as a young man, his loyalty cemented when Liam saved him from a flogging unjustly ordered by a cruel officer. When Killian raised the crimson flag, his nod was his oath, his harpoon a vow to guard the Jolly Roger against all foes. Stationed often by the rail, he stood like a sentinel, his gaze fixed on the horizon, guarding the caged corner of the hold where powder kegs and magical relics lay. His sea chest, in the crew quarters, held a carved whalebone and a tattered book of sea shanties, silent tokens of a man whose voice spoke through action, his presence a cornerstone of the ship's enduring heart.

William Smee, the fidgety heart of the crew, joined after Milah's blood stained the deck, her death a wound that reshaped Killian's path. A criminal who thrived on the black market, selling stolen goods in the shadowed corners of port taverns, Smee's life took a fateful turn when he approached Rumpelstiltskin, the Dark One, in a smoky tavern. Striking a deal to trade a magic bean for eternal life, Smee set his sights on the Jolly Roger, where the bean was rumored to be held. While "procuring" the bean from Killian's ship, his nimble fingers betrayed by the creak of a deck plank, Smee was caught and imprisoned below deck in the hold, his wrists bound and his hopes of immortality dimming in the damp shadows. He was brought forth from the hold when Killian and Milah attempted to broker their own deal with Rumpelstiltskin, offering the bean to spare their lives. Smee, trembling at the rail, witnessed the Dark One's wrath, Rumpelstiltskin killing Milah by crushing her heart, her body crumpling to the deck, and the brutal amputation of Killian's hand, the Dark One believing the bean was clenched in the captain's fist. Smee's heart sank as Killian's cries echoed, the bean's promise slipping away. Yet Killian, cunning even in agony, had tricked Rumpelstiltskin, retaining the bean. Smee was eventually released from his bindings and, to his surprise, asked by Killian to become part of the crew. Indignant at first, Rumpelstiltskin had promised him eternal life, now impossible without the bean. Smee's protests faded when Killian revealed his plan. Using the magic bean, Killian transported the Jolly Roger and her crew to Neverland, a world where time stood still, granting Smee and the others a form of ageless existence. From that moment, Smee's loyalty to Killian was sealed, his nervous chatter and knack for survival a counterpoint to the ship's darker days. On deck, he scurried with ropes or relayed orders, while below, in the crew quarters, his dice games sparked laughter, his tales of mermaids and curses weaving the men tighter, a glue for the Jolly Roger's fractured souls post-Milah.

Billy, the youngest of the core crew, climbed aboard in Neverland's ageless waters, his sharp eyes and nimble frame perfect for the crow's nest. Recruited during Killian's long sojourn under Peter Pan's shadow, Billy was a runaway, perhaps fleeing the Lost Boys or a darker fate, his quick wit earning a place among the pirates. From the nest, his voice rang clear, "All clear, Cap'n!" his gaze spotting reefs or rivals through Neverland's mists. On deck, he darted through rigging, adjusting the sails with a monkey's ease, his youth a spark of hope amidst the crew's ranks. Billy's arrival marked a new chapter, his presence a reminder of the Jolly Roger's enduring pull, drawing souls to her cause even in the heart of Neverland. His courage grew under Killian's tutelage. He learned to navigate, his calls guiding the ship through Pan's treacherous tides. his sea chest holding a stolen spyglass and a letter he'd never sent. Billy's youth brought a spark to the crew, his trust in Killian a mirror of Baelfire's brief bond, lighting the Jolly Roger's deck with hope amidst its darker quests.

Together, these men formed the Jolly Roger's soul, their lives woven into her enchanted timbers. One-Eyed Jack and Black Tom, veterans of her naval birth, carried the weight of Liam's legacy, their steadfast hands shaping her from Jewel of the Realm to pirate legend. Smee, joining in the shadow of Milah's loss, brought a nervous heart that steadied the crew's rhythm. Billy, Neverland's son, added a flicker of youth to their ranks, his eyes fixed on horizons yet to come.

Numbering perhaps 20 to 30 at her peak, the crew filled the deck's bustle and the quarters' clamor, their hands steering the ship through Poseidon's storms, their blades clashing with foes, their voices rising in shanties under the red flag. From the Jewel of the Realm's disciplined ranks to the pirate brotherhood forged in Liam's loss and Milah's death, they carried the ship's legacy, their loyalty to Killian a thread binding the enchanted wood to the seas.

In the galley's warmth or the hold's shadows, on the deck or in the nest, they were the Jolly Roger's soul, sailing with Captain Hook toward vengeance or redemption, their lives etched into her timbers as surely as his hook. In the crew quarters, their laughter and curses mingled with the creak of hammocks, their sea chests guarding fragments of lives bound to the ship. On deck, they moved as one, One-Eyed Jack's cannons, Black Tom's harpoon, Smee's hustle, Billy's watch, each man a thread in the Jolly Roger's tapestry, loyal to Killian Jones, the captain whose hook and heart drove her through storms and stars.

Quarters

Captain's Cabin

The Jolly Roger's captain's cabin was Killian Jones's enchanted sanctum, a refuge of runed oak where the weight of command met the quiet of contemplation, its stern window casting a glow over the sea. Nestled aft at 100-110 feet, below the quarterdeck, it spanned 15x10 feet, the enchanted oak walls carved with faint mermaids, their silvery veins pulsing with magic to repel damp and intruders.

The cabin weighed 2,000 pounds, its fittings a pirate's indulgence. A 6x3 foot desk (200 pounds), crafted of enchanted oak with runes that healed scratches and gouges, anchored Killian's charts; a 4.5x6.5 foot double bed (150 pounds), crafted from enchanted oak with a hemp mattress stuffed with Neverland wool, its frame carved with subtle waves and runed to heal scratches and gouges, stood against the port wall, its crimson linens echoing the ship's sails; a mahogany bookshelf (100 pounds) held tomes and trinkets; and a 6x4 foot stern window (50 pounds), its enchanted glass etched with runes, glowed to pierce fog, able to crack under extreme force but healing itself through its magic. A 4x4 foot oak door (80 pounds), enchanted and runed to lock only to Killian's key, guarded the cabin's solitude. The tarred floor, runed and steady, cradled a crimson wool rug (20 pounds), mirroring the sails. Hooks held lanterns (enchanted glass, 10 pounds each, two total), their glow illuminating the bed, while shelves stored navigation tools (sextant 2 pounds, charts 10 pounds, logbook 5 pounds, hourglass 3 pounds, total 40 pounds) and minor magical items (a charmed quill, <1 pound). A sea chest (50 pounds), enchanted oak with runed locks, safeguarded Killian's relics and spoils from distant shores.

It was built for naval captains, the enchanted oak from a magical forest, runes forged by a mage to shield secrets. Liam studied charts and kept naval logs at the desk, his quill steady, the ship's bell ringing above, the single berth sufficient for his disciplined rest, its oak later reshaped into the double bed's grand frame.

Killian enhanced its enchantments, weaving runes into the glass, walls, desk, bed, their self-healing runes a ward against time and turmoil and shielding secrets from spies. The cabin was now a pirate's lair. Killian ruled from the desk, his hook tracing charts as he planned raids on merchant fleets or across Neverland's coves, the enchanted oak mended a gouge from a flung dagger, and a slash from a rival's blade, its runes glowing faintly to restore its polish. The stern window's glass healing after a Neverland squall. The enchanted desk and glass a testament to his unyielding will. The cabin's walls a fortress where dreams of glory burned beneath the Jolly Roger's sails.

The double bed, grand yet solitary, vast yet light at 150 pounds, cradled plans for spoils, its runes steadying his resolve, a place to strategize beneath the lantern's glow. Its frame restoring a gouge from a tossed tankard, and healing scratches and gouges from his hook, the crimson linens a stark contrast to his solitude, a silent witness to restless nights and rare reprieves. It mirrored Killian's duality—captain and dreamer, pirate and seeker, lover and fighter—its self-healing enchanted oak a vow to his resilience and a testament to his endurance. A pirate captain's indulgence, a luxury and haven after battles.

Maintenance was Killian's ritual. He oiled the door's hinges, swept the rug, and inspected the desk and bed's runes, their glow ensuring the oak's eternity, the window's glass mending cracks.

One-Eyed Jack, admitted only by command, checked the bookshelf for navigation tools, his gruff respect leaving the desk and bed untouched, their runes a captain's privilege. Black Tom, his bulk filling the door, delivered rum barrels, his eyes on the stern window's glowing glass, its runes repairing a crack from a squall's debris. Smee, superstitious and diligent, trembled at the charmed quill's magic, dusted the bed's frame, awed as they sealed gouges, his cloth tracing its wave carvings, his charms warding off ill omens, believing its runes sang to the sea and held the ship's luck. Billy, nimble and curious, polished the stern window, wiping salt to reveal its healing runes. His cloth also revealing the stars above the bed. His tales of the cabin's glow, the bed's expanse, and the desk's mending oak, fueling crew whispers of the captain's heart.

The cabin endured tempests, the window's runes glowing to pierce fog as the hull stood firm, the desk's stability grounding Killian's defiance. The cabin was Killian's soul, as he stood in the cabin, his hook grazing the bed's wave carvings, the Jolly Roger's heart pulsed around him, a refuge where grief met hope, its blackened walls and crimson linens a mirror of his quest for redemption beneath the ship's sails.

Crew Quarters

The Jolly Roger's crew quarters were her pulsing heart, two cramped havens where the crew's sweat, shanties, and secrets mingled, forging a brotherhood under Killian's command. Split into forward quarters (20-30 feet, near galley) and aft quarters (80-90 feet, near ship's stores), each was 10x10x7 feet, 5 feet below the main deck, with enchanted oak walls, their runes glowing to banish damp. Each housed 10-15 men.

Weighing 2,000 pounds (1,000 pounds enchanted oak walls, 400 pounds hammocks, 500 pounds sea chests, 20 pounds lanterns, 50 pounds oak door, 30 pounds fittings). Their enchanted oak planks, runed with knots, glowed to repel damp and discord. Hammocks (20 total, 20 pounds each, 10 per chamber) hung from oak beams and rocked with dice games; sea chests (10 total, 50 pounds each, 5 per chamber) made of oak and iron, stored clothes, gear, dice and trinkets, their lids carved with waves; and lanterns (two per chamber, enchanted glass, 5 pounds each, 4 total, 20 pounds) cast steady light. A single oak door (50 pounds, runed), aft, served shared access via the companionway, with ladders/hatchways for forward entry. Fittings (30 pounds, hooks, and other miscellaneous items) secured the chambers' runes. Ventilation slits, runed, kept air fresh, while tarred floors repelled leaks, their glow a crew comfort.

The quarters' warmth defied the bilge's damp below, the keel's 12 foot depth ensuring stability. One-Eyed Jack, the quartermaster, disciplined loiterers, his voice echoing, his sea chest holding naval relics from Liam's time his respect for Killian's visits unwavering. Black Tom, too broad for hammocks, slept on a reinforced bed, his harpoon resting by his sea chest, his strength steadying the hull's 145,500 pounds. Smee, superstitious, rolled dice, his charms warding off ill luck, believing the runes sang, his sea chest full of rum flasks. Billy, nimble, swept floors, his shanties lifting spirits, his tales of glowing walls a crew myth, he would sometimes polish a dagger from his sea chest.

Maintenance was routine. One-Eyed Jack patched hammocks and oiled doors, Black Tom reinforced doors and repaired chests, Smee swept floors and cleaned lanterns, Billy polished runes, the oak healing scratches.

The quarters were built for naval crews, their oak from a magical forest, runes by a mage. Killian enhanced their spells and runes to assist with rest. Historically, the quarters housed Liam's sailors, their hammocks steady as the ship's bell rang. Under Killian, they rang with Neverland jests, the cannons' roar above signaling raids, the bilge's pump below easing squalls. The aft quarters welcomed Killian via the companionway, his presence lifting spirits.

Structural and External Elements

Keel

The Jolly Roger's keel was her unyielding spine, a silent titan of enchanted oak that anchored her soul to the seas, bearing the weight of Killian's piratical legend. Running the full 110 foot length from bow to stern, the keel was a massive beam, 2 feet wide and 3 feet deep at its thickest point amidships, tapering to 1 foot at the ends, its lowest point 12 feet below the waterline, defining the ship's draft. Positioned at the hull's base, its top sat ~9 feet below the waterline, with the bilge's base ~10 feet below the waterline, just above the keel's upper edge. Weighing 10,000 pounds, the keel was hewn from a single enchanted oak, its silvery veins pulsing with runes of waves and stars, glowing softly to heal minor splits and repel rot, strengthening its grain to resist splintering and warping, even under the strain of Poseidon's tempests. Tar-blackened and smoothed by royal shipwrights, its surface bore faint carvings, visible in the bilge's shadows, a secret the crew revered.

The keel formed the ship's structural core, bolted to the hull's ribs and planking its runed surface etched with ancient wave motifs that glowed faintly, repelling barnacles and rot. The keel's stem (bow) and sternpost (aft), each 10 feet tall and 1,000 pounds, rose to connect the figurehead and rudder, their enchanted oak seamless with the main beam, ensuring stability. The keel steadied the Jolly Roger's dance over waves, the enchanted oak anchoring the masts (foremast, mainmast, stepped at 20, 55 feet) and balancing the hull's 145,500 pounds. One-Eyed Jack, the quartermaster, inspected its sockets in the bilge, his eye tracing runes for cracks, his hammer ensuring stability.

Black Tom, his strength unmatched, shifted ballast stones along its length, his footsteps echoing to balance the ship's load under Killian's orders. Smee, superstitious, swept the bilge near the keel, his charms whispered to its carvings, believing they warded off sea spirits. Billy, nimble, polished the keel's exposed ends, his cloth revealing starry etchings, his tales of their glow a crew legend.

The keel was carved from a magical forest's heartwood, chosen for its resilience, runes forged by a mage to defy storms. Its oak blessed by mages to withstand the realms' seas. As a pirate, he enhanced its magic, deepened its enchantments, ensuring they bore the ship's 114-ton dry weight, the enchantments subtly redistributing weight throughout her frame. He added runes, bartered from a Neverland alchemist, their glow enhancing buoyancy, making the Jolly Roger glide where mortal ships groaned.

Maintenance was rare but sacred, performed in dry docks or Neverland's enchanted coves. Billy, nimble and fearless, checked mast sockets, the oak's runes healing wear, Smee cleaned runes with salt, One-Eyed Jack inspected the stem's bolts and applied enchanted tar monthly, while Black Tom adjusted ballast. The keel's magic repelled most damage, its veins healing hairline fractures, but Killian revered it, knowing its weight grounded the ship's 114-ton dry mass.

It bore the Jolly Roger's legacy. Under Liam, it held steady on naval quests, its oak steady as the ship's bell rang, saluting fleets. Under Killian, it sliced Neverland reefs during raids, its 12 foot draft balanced by Black Tom's ballast shifts, the helm translating its stability. The keel's runes glowed during squalls, steadying the dive bell's plunge for enchanted coves' treasures, Killian's orders precise. Billy's crow's nest calls aligning with Killian's helm to keep her keel true. The keel's role was foundational. The masts (7000 pounds) stepped into its sockets, the anchor's chain (1,500 pounds) pulled against its strength, and the bilge's pump (100 pounds) cleared water to lighten its load. Killian handled its 18,500-pound mass with reverence, his helm adjustments—guided by the enchanted compass—ensuring the keel's alignment with currents, its slight flex absorbing the sails' pull (1,500 pounds) to outrun foes.

The keel was the Jolly Roger's resolve, a spine for Killian's fractured heart and his defiance of Rumpelstiltskin. For the crew, it was their root. Hidden below the bilge's shadows, the keel carried no ornament, yet its runes sang of endurance, a silent vow that the Jolly Roger would sail on, her 110 foot spine a line drawn against the sea's chaos. As Killian stood at the helm, his hook steady, he felt the keel's mass beneath, a partner in his quest, grounding the ship's flight through Neverland's eternal tides, the enchanted oak a promise of redemption etched in wood.

Hull

The Jolly Roger's hull was her enchanted fortress, a blackened bulwark of oak that cradled her crew and defied the seas' wrath, its silvery veins pulsing with magic as Killian steered her through tempests and wild tides. Stretching 110 feet long and 28 feet wide, with a 12 foot draft from waterline to the keel's lowest point, the hull formed the ship's outer shell, rising 15 feet from keel to main deck and 90 feet to the mainmast's peak, encompassing all decks and fittings.

Crafted from enchanted oak, from a forest, where trees whispered of ancient seas. Royal shipwrights carved runes to defy storms. Its 2-inch-thick planks, tarred black with golden trim, bore runes of waves and stars, glowing to repel rot, barnacles, and cannon fire. The hull weighed 145,500 pounds (140,000 pounds oak planks/ribs, 5,000 pounds copper sheathing below waterline, 500 pounds bilge keel fins), its magical wood lighter yet stronger than mortal timber, reducing mass while ensuring resilience. Iron bolts, runed to resist rust, secured planks to oak ribs, while enchanted copper sheathing shimmered, guarding against worms, the enchanted alloy shimmering in the deep. Bilge keel fins, small oak extensions, stabilized roll, their runes aiding balance. Killian enhanced it with Neverland alchemy, weaving protective spells into the planks.

The hull's exterior, sleek and menacing, bore the figurehead at the bow (0 feet, 500 pounds), cannons along the main deck (30-78 feet, 18,000 pounds), and the stern window of the captain's cabin (100-110 feet, enchanted glass), its black oak gleaming. Internally, it cradled the keel (centerline,110 feet, 12 feet below waterline), its ribs supporting masts, hold, and bilge (base ~10 feet below waterline, above keel). The copper sheathing glinted during dive bell plunges for cove treasures, the hull unbreached.

One-Eyed Jack inspected ribs in the bilge, his hammer tapping bolts, ensuring the hull's strength. Black Tom patched planks with enchanted tar, his hands sealing leaks below the waterline. Smee polished the copper sheathing during

careening, his charms warding off spirits, believing the runes sang. Billy painted gold trim, his brush highlighting stars, his tales of their glow a myth. The enchanted oak's runes healing scars.

The hull was the Jolly Roger's armor, its blackened oak a canvas of vengeance and hope, its immense weight a declaration of defiance against the sea itself, its runes a vow to endure. The enchanted oak carried Killian's dreams, a living legend slicing through the seas beneath sails.

Figurehead

The Jolly Roger's figurehead was a fierce and radiant mermaid, a sculpted guardian that crowned the ship's bow, her trident raised as if to command the seas themselves. Carved from enchanted oak, sourced from the same mystical forest as the ship's hull, the figurehead shimmered with a golden-brown luster, its grain alive with silvery veins that pulsed faintly, as if the wood breathed with the Jolly Roger's spirit. Measuring 5 feet tall, 2 feet wide, and 3 feet deep, the mermaid arched gracefully from the ship's stem, her form extending 4 feet forward of the bow, her tail curling back to merge with the hull's black and gold accents. Her face, fierce yet serene, bore emerald eyes crafted from sea glass, enchanted by a Neverland artisan to glow in fog or moonlight, guiding the ship through perilous waters. The trident, forged from polished iron and tipped with a crystal barb, stretched 3 feet long, its prongs etched with runes that shimmered when near magical currents, a beacon for treasures like squid ink or magic beans. Weighing 500 pounds, the figurehead was bolted to the bow with iron braces, the enchanted oak unyielding against centuries of waves, storms, and cannon fire.

The figurehead was positioned at the bow, just below the bowsprit, its base 8 feet above the waterline, where it caught the spray of the sea but remained clear of the waves' grasp. The hull's black paint framed it, gold accents tracing its contours, making the mermaid a focal point against the sails above. Construction began when Killian turned pirate, renaming the Jewel of the Realm the Jolly Roger, replacing its lion figurehead with the mermaid, carved by a Neverland sculptor who imbued the oak with protective runes. Killian added the trident, its iron forged in a pirate port, the crystal barb a merchant's gift, its runes enhancing the mermaid's magic.

Maintenance was a sacred task, led by Billy's careful hands. Every few weeks, he scaled the bowsprit with a cloth and whale oil, polishing the oak to preserve its glow, the sea glass eyes wiped clean to maintain their shine. One-Eyed Jack inspected the iron braces, tightening bolts with a wrench, while Smee, ever superstitious, whispered charms to the mermaid, believing her eyes warded off krakens. Black Tom cleaned the trident's crystal, his massive hands gentle, ensuring its runes stayed sharp.

The figurehead's enchanted properties were subtle but potent. The oak, tied to the ship's magic, resisted rot and wear, its silvery veins flaring when the Jolly Roger neared enchanted waters, like those hiding Ursula's wrecks. The sea glass eyes, glowing in darkness, seemed to guide Killian through fogbanks, while the trident's runes hummed near magical artifacts, aiding dives for relics.

The figurehead was a witness to the Jolly Roger's journey. The mermaid led Neverland raids, her trident glowing for merchant fleet chases, the dive bell's cove hunts guided by her light. She endured squalls, her runes flaring, the keel's 12 foot depth grounding her. She was the ship's soul, a mermaid of defiance and allure that embodied Killian's duality—his charm and his vengeance. It led the ship through peril, its trident a promise of conquest, its eyes a beacon of hope. For the crew, it was a talisman. The enchanted oak, unscarred by time, held the ship's memories. As the ship carved the seas, the figurehead gleamed, its sea glass eyes and crystal trident a herald of the ship's eternal quest, guiding Captain Hook through the tides of fate toward vengeance or redemption.

Bowsprit/Forecastle

The Jolly Roger's bowsprit and forecastle deck were her forward gaze, a spar and platform that thrust into the sea's embrace, guiding her through the mists of the Enchanted Forest and Neverland's eternal tides. The bowsprit, a 15 foot long spar of enchanted oak, extended from the bow at a 30-degree angle, its 2 foot diameter base bolted to the hull's stem, 10 feet above the waterline, and its tip reaching 12 feet beyond the figurehead. Weighing 1,000 pounds, it supported jib sails—two triangular canvas sheets, 500 square feet each rigged with enchanted hemp lines to enhance speed.

The bowsprit's silvery-veined wood, sourced from the ship's magical forest, bore faint carvings of waves, glowing softly in fog to aid navigation. The forecastle deck, a 15x10 foot platform elevated 12 feet above the waterline,

spanned the ship's bow forward of the foremast (20 feet from the bow), the enchanted oak planks polished by spray and crew boots. Framed by railings, 3 feet high and carved with mermaid motifs, the deck held the anchor's cathead and foremast base, its 200 pound weight distributed across reinforced timbers.

The bowsprit's rigging, 200 feet of tarred hemp and enchanted fibers, connected to the foremast and jibs, adjusted by turnbuckles—iron screws on the deck—manned by Billy's nimble hands. The forecastle housed a capstan for anchor duties and a lantern post, the enchanted glass glowing to mark the bow at night. Maintenance was rigorous. Billy climbed the bowsprit weekly, oiling its wood and checking rigging for fraying, while One-Eyed Jack polished the turnbuckles, his eye scanning for rust. Smee, wary of spirits, swept the forecastle, whispering to the mermaid railings, as Black Tom reinforced the capstan's bolts. The enchanted wood repelled wear, their veins healing cracks, a legacy of the Jewel of the Realm's dockyard, where the bowsprit was carved for naval missions, the forecastle built for naval lookouts. Killian added the jibs' crimson dye, their hue a pirate's taunt.

The bowsprit was the Jolly Roger's spear, thrusting toward Killian's desires—love, vengeance, redemption—while the forecastle was her eyes, a stage for hope. The bowsprit pointed forward, its crimson jibs and glowing wood a herald of Killian's quest.

Masts

The Jolly Roger's masts were the soaring spines of her ambition, two towering pillars that stretched toward the heavens, bearing the sails that made her a legend across the seas. Crafted from enchanted oak, (runed with spirals, glowing to repel rot and strain) sourced from the same ancient forests as the ship's hull, the masts gleamed with a pale, almost silvery hue, their grain pulsing with faint magical veins that lent them unnatural strength and resilience.

The Jolly Roger, at 110 feet, carried two masts—the foremast and the mainmast—each meticulously designed to harness the wind's power and propel the ship's enchanted speed. Together, they reached 90 feet from keel to the mainmast's crow's nest, the ship's highest point, their heights and rigging a symphony of form and function that defined her silhouette against the horizon. The masts were stepped to the keel's top (9 feet below the waterline), each mast passing through the bilge (10 feet below waterline) and hold (~5–7 feet above waterline), secured by oak steps (100 pounds each, runed), their bases piercing the hull's 12 foot draft to anchor the ship's balance. Iron fittings (500 pounds total) and hemp rigging (1,500 pounds, counted separately) braced their might, runes ensuring resilience.

Foremast: Positioned on the forecastle, 20 feet aft of the bow, the foremast stood 56 feet tall from deck to peak (80 feet from base of keel), its base 2 feet in diameter and bolted to the keel through the deck's enchanted timbers. It carried the brig's full square sail suite—course, topsail, and topgallant, its rigging crisscrossing to the bowsprit for stability. Weighing 3,000 pounds, it was the sturdiest, built to withstand headwinds.

Mainmast: Centered on the main deck, 55 feet from the bow, the mainmast was the tallest, soaring 66 feet from deck to peak (90 feet from base of keel), with a 2.5 foot diameter base. It bore the mainsail, main topsail, and main topgallant, all square rigged like a true brig's heart. It drove the ship's speed, and housed the crow's nest (175 pounds), a wooden platform 60 feet up, where Billy kept watch. Weighing 4,500 pounds, it was the ship's pulse, the enchanted wood humming in storms. A brig's characteristic spanker—its fore and aft sail—hung from the mainmast's aft side, aiding maneuverability and giving Killian the sharp turning radius that made the Jolly Roger feared in tight Neverland coves.

Each mast was stepped into the keel, secured with iron bands and enchanted wooden wedges to prevent shifting, their bases surrounded by futtock shrouds and ratlines—hemp ropes woven into ladders for crew access. The rigging, a web of tarred hemp and enchanted fibers, stretched over 1,000 feet across the masts, with stays anchoring them fore and aft and shrouds bracing them side to side. The sails, totaling 8,000 square feet, were dyed with Neverland pigments that resisted fading, their enchanted stitching—bartered from a sea witch—repelling tears. The masts' total weight, including rigging, reached 7,000 pounds, a burden the Jolly Roger's hull bore with ease, the enchanted frame unyielding.

The masts' sails, guided by Killian's helm, caught squalls, their oak steadying the hull's 145,500 pounds. One-Eyed Jack, the quartermaster, inspected the steps in the bilge, his hammer testing runes below the waterline, ensuring mast stability. Black Tom, his strength unmatched, climbed to adjust fittings, his hands tightening bolts against Neverland's gales. Smee, superstitious, polished the mast bases, his charms whispered to runes he believed sang

to the winds. Billy, nimble, scaled to the crow's nest, his eyes spotting merchant fleets, his tales of the masts' glow a crew legend. The masts hewn from enchanted forests, runes by a royal mage. Killian enhanced their spells, ensuring the masts bore the ship's 114-ton dry weight, their enchantments redistributing strain throughout the hull.

The masts were maintained with rigorous care, a task led by Billy's nimble hands and One-Eyed Jack's keen eye. Every month, Billy climbed the ratlines, a tar soaked rag slung over his shoulder, to polish the masts' wood, preserving their magical sheen. Smee, muttering of omens, inspected the rigging, re tarring ropes, while Black Tom tightened the iron bands with a mallet, his strength ensuring the masts' stability. Storms or battles left their marks—scars from cannon shot or lightning—but the enchanted oak healed slowly, its veins sealing cracks over time.

The crew revered the masts, whispering that their magic drew favorable winds. The masts bore witness to the Jolly Roger's saga. As the Jewel of the Realm, they carried Liam's sails to royal fleets, their oak untested but proud. When Killian turned pirate, the sails rose in defiance. They chased Neverland coves, the 12 foot draft and keel's depth stabilizing sharp turns, the rigging taut for raids. The mainmast's crow's nest spotted squalls, Killian's orders aligning the dive bell's plunder hauls.

The masts were the Jolly Roger's reach for freedom, their sails a defiant cry against Killian's losses. For the crew, they were aspiration. Two masts—lean, enchanted, and relentless—were her vow to soar. With Killian at the helm, the masts stood tall, their enchanted oak a beacon of the ship's eternal chase.

Rigging/Sails

The Jolly Roger's rigging and sails were her wings, a vast network of ropes and canvas that harnessed the wind to drive her through the Enchanted Forest's gales and Neverland's eternal currents. The rigging, totaling 1,000 feet of tarred hemp and enchanted fibers, formed a web across the ship's two masts with stays (fore-aft) and shrouds (side-to-side) anchoring the masts, and running rigging (halyards, sheets) adjusting the sails. The sails, 8,000 square feet of canvas, included square sails (course, topsail, and topgallant on both foremast and mainmast), a spanker on the mainmast's aft side, and jibs on the bowsprit. The sails were dyed with Neverland pigments that resisted fading and stitched with enchanted thread to repel tears. The sails' total weight was 1,200 pounds, the rigging 1,000 pounds, their enchanted elements reducing strain on the masts' 7,000-pound frame. The rigging was managed from the main deck and forecastle, with cleats and belaying pins (enchanted oak, 2 feet long) securing lines along the rails.

The sails were deployed by Billy, who scampered up the ratlines to unfurl them, guided by One-Eyed Jack's commands from the quarterdeck. Smee adjusted sheets, his nervous hands pulling enchanted lines, while Black Tom hauled halyards, his strength raising the heavy canvas. Maintenance was constant. Billy cleaned sails, Smee re-tarred ropes, One-Eyed Jack checked cleats, and Black Tom tightened turnbuckles. The enchanted canvas healed minor tears, its glow flaring in storms. The rigging was naval-grade, their magic added to outrun foes. The rigging and sails were the Jolly Roger's freedom, lifting Killian's vengeance or hope, their enchanted threads a song of Killian's quest.

<u>Operational Decks and Equipment</u>

Main Deck

The Jolly Roger's main deck was the beating heart of her piratical life, a sprawling stage where sails cast shadows over the crew's toil, battles, and fleeting moments of camaraderie. Stretching 90 feet long and 28 feet wide, from the base of the forecastle (20 feet aft of the bow) to the quarterdeck's rise (90 feet aft), it formed the ship's central platform, 12 feet above the waterline (24ft above the base of the keel).

Crafted from enchanted oak, its planks gleamed with a dark, polished sheen, their silvery veins pulsing faintly with the ship's magic, resisting rot and wear despite centuries of salt and blood. The deck supported key features. 12 cannons (six per side, 30-78 feet), the skiff (starboard, 50-60 feet), the gangplank (starboard, 70-80 feet), the foremast (20 feet), mainmast (55 feet), and midship hatchway (6x6 feet, 60 feet, leading to the hold). Cleats and belaying pins, enchanted oak pegs along the rails, secured rigging, while lanterns on posts cast flickering light for night watches. The deck's weight, including fixtures, was approximately 10,000 pounds, borne by the hull's enchanted frame.

The main deck was the crew's domain, where One-Eyed Jack drilled cannon teams, his gruff voice cutting through the sea's roar, and Billy darted across planks, adjusting sails with nimble grace. Smee led dice games by the hatchway, his nervous laughter echoing, while Black Tom stood sentinel, his harpoon ready for boarders.

Maintenance was a collective ritual. Billy scrubbed planks with saltwater, preserving their glow; Jack oiled cleats; Smee swept debris; Tom tightened cannon bolts. The enchanted oak healed minor scars, but crew revered it, tracing veins as if reading the ship's soul.

The deck was laid for naval precision, its oak sourced from magical forests. Killian blackened the rails, their gold accents a pirate's flourish. The main deck was the Jolly Roger's arena, where Killian's vengeance and hope clashed, a stage for the crew's loyalty. It pulsed with life, its planks a canvas for the ship's saga.

Quarterdeck/Helm

The helm and quarterdeck of the Jolly Roger were the ship's command heart, a raised platform where Killian, his steel hook gleaming, steered the vessel through the enchanted seas of the Enchanted Forest and Neverland's timeless waters.

The quarterdeck, elevated 5 feet above the main deck and located aft, spanned 30 feet long (from 80 to 110 feet from the bow) and 20 feet wide, occupying the stern third of the ship's 110 foot length. Crafted from enchanted oak, its planks gleamed with a dark, polished sheen, their grain laced with silvery veins that pulsed faintly, tying the deck to the Jolly Roger's magical essence.

The quarterdeck's surface, weathered yet unscarred, was sealed with tar to resist the sea's spray, its edges framed by a railing of carved mahogany, 3 feet high, etched with waves and stars that glowed softly in moonlight. Weighing 5,000 pounds (including planks, supports, and fixtures), the quarterdeck was supported by sturdy beams bolted to the ship's enchanted frame, its elevation offering Killian a sovereign's view over the sails and the horizon beyond.

At the quarterdeck's center stood the helm, a mahogany wheel 4 feet in diameter, its eight spokes polished to a warm, reddish glow, each bearing faint notches from Killian's hook—a captain's heartbeat etched in wood. The wheel, mounted on a pedestal of enchanted oak, 3 feet high and 2 feet wide, was connected to the ship's rudder via a tiller rope system, threaded through pulleys below deck, enchanted fibers woven into the hemp to ensure unyielding strength.

The helm's base was bolted to the deck, reinforced with iron brackets to withstand the strain of storms or sharp turns. A compass binnacle, a 2 foot tall wooden box with a brass dome, stood beside the helm, its enchanted needle—bartered from a Neverland sorcerer—always true, glowing faintly to guide the ship through fog or magical currents. The helm's total weight, including wheel, pedestal, and binnacle, was 300 pounds, a precise instrument that responded to Killian's lightest touch, as if the Jolly Roger herself obeyed his will.

The quarterdeck housed additional fixtures. A staircase to the main deck (on each side), a covered hatch to the companionway, and two lanterns (iron frames swinging on hooks, casting golden light over the helm at night.

The deck's maintenance was a task of pride, led by One-Eyed Jack's steady hand. Weekly, Billy scrubbed the planks with saltwater, preserving the tar's seal, while Smee, muttering of omens, polished the helm's spokes, his cloth lingering on Killian's notches. Black Tom oiled the railing's carvings, ensuring their glow, and checked the binnacle's brass for tarnish, his strength steadying the ladder during repairs. The enchanted oak repelled rot, but the crew treated it with reverence, believing its magic steadied the ship in Poseidon's wrath.

The quarterdeck was the Jolly Roger's stage. As the Jewel of the Realm, Liam stood at the helm, his orders crisp as the ship sailed for royal glory, the wheel unmarred by a hook. When Killian turned pirate, the quarterdeck became his throne, In Neverland, Baelfire stood warily by the helm, his young hands touching the wheel as Killian offered a fleeting home, the compass glowing to mark their course.

The quarterdeck was the Jolly Roger's mind, the helm its will. Killian's command over vengeance and loss. For the crew, it was authority. As Killian gripped the wheel, the quarterdeck stood firm, the enchanted oak a platform for the ship's eternal quest, steering Captain Hook toward vengeance or redemption.

Ship's Bell

The ship's bell was her resonant voice, a bronze beacon that sang of time, duty, and defiance across the seas. Hung on the main deck, starboard side, near the foremast (20 feet from the bow), the bell stood 2 feet tall and 1.5 feet wide, weighing 100 pounds. Cast from enchanted bronze, its surface shimmered with a verdigris patina, etched with runes that glowed faintly, amplifying its peal to cut through storms. Suspended from an enchanted oak yoke, carved with wave motifs, it was bolted to a deck post, 14 feet above the waterline, clear of spray but audible shipwide. A hemp lanyard, enchanted to resist fraying, dangled for ringing, its chime marking watches (every 30 minutes via the hourglass), signaling alerts, or heralding ceremonies. The bell's runes, tied to the ship's magic, resonated with a haunting clarity, rumored to ward off sea spirits.

Smee rang the bell, his nervous tug a ritual, while Billy polished its bronze, his cloth tracing runes with care. One-Eyed Jack tested the yoke's bolts, ensuring stability, and Black Tom stood nearby, his presence a guard against misuse.

Maintenance involved weekly polishing and lanyard checks, the enchanted bronze untarnished by salt. It was forged for the navy, its runes added by a mage to signal fleets. Killian kept it, its chime a reminder of lost honor. The bell was the Jolly Roger's pulse, its chime Killian's call to action, a voice for the crew. Hung beneath sails, it sang of the ship's eternal quest.

Cannons

The Jolly Roger's cannons were her iron roar, a dozen blackened barrels that thundered defiance across the seas of the Enchanted Forest and Neverland, their volleys a pirate's challenge to foes and gods alike. Forged from cast iron, each cannon measured 6 feet long, with a 4-inch bore capable of firing 12-pound round shot for long-range barrages or grapeshot for shredding enemy sails and crews in close combat. Weighing 1,500 pounds apiece, the cannons were mounted on oak carriages, reinforced with iron bands and fitted with four wooden wheels to manage recoil, their enchanted wood absorbing the shock of firing without splintering.

The ship carried 12 cannons, six on the starboard side and six on the port side, positioned along the main deck at intervals of approximately 8 feet, starting 30 feet from the bow and ending 78 feet aft, their muzzles protruding through gunports—rectangular hatches, 2 feet square, hinged with iron and sealed with tarred canvas when closed. Each cannon required up to four crew—loader, gunner, rammer, and firer—with One-Eyed Jack as the master gunner, his eye glinting as he aimed with lethal precision, barking orders to align the barrels. The total weight of the cannons and carriages was 18,000 pounds, a formidable load that the Jolly Roger's enchanted hull bore with ease, her timbers resonating with each blast.

The cannons were secured to the deck with breeching ropes, thick hemp lines threaded through iron rings on the carriages, limiting recoil to 3 feet to protect the deck and crew. Ammunition—200 round shot and 50 grapeshot canisters per cannon, totaling 2,400 shot and 600 canisters—was stored in racks along the deck's inner bulwarks, each rack holding 20 shots, with additional supplies in the powder magazine in the main hold. Swabs, rammers, and linstocks (for lighting fuses) hung on hooks beside each gunport, their handles carved from enchanted oak to resist splintering under the heat and force of battle.

Maintenance was a disciplined ritual under One-Eyed Jack's command. Monthly, he led the crew in scrubbing the barrels with oil-soaked rags to banish rust, the iron gleaming dully under his watchful eye. Billy, nimble and precise, polished the carriage wheels, checking axles for wear and re-tarring their joints. Smee, ever wary of misfires, cleaned the gunports' hinges, muttering charms against cursed powder, his hands trembling as he worked near the barrels. Black Tom hauled shot from the hold, his massive strength restocking the racks, each movement deliberate to avoid sparking the powder. The iron barrels, though not enchanted, were etched with faint wave motifs, a relic of their forging in the Jewel of the Realm's naval dockyard, their blackened surfaces repainted by Killian to mark the ship's pirate rebirth.

The cannons shaped the Jolly Roger's fearsome legend. As the Jewel of the Realm, they fired crisp salutes for royal fleets, their barrels polished to a naval sheen. When Killian turned pirate, they roared to life. They thundered against Poseidon's sea minions, the enchanted oak carriages holding firm as Killian defied the sea god's wrath, the barrels glowing faintly from enchanted powder that sparked with magical force. Construction began in a royal forge, their

iron tempered for naval precision, but Killian enhanced their power with enchanted powder, bartered from a Neverland alchemist, its faint glow extending range and impact, each blast a fleeting star in the night.

They were the Jolly Roger's wrath, their volleys an extension of Killian's unyielding cry against Rumpelstiltskin's shadow, their smoke a veil for tragic loss. For the crew, they embodied power and peril. Positioned along the main deck, their blackened muzzles faced the horizon, a silent promise of defiance beneath the sails. The cannons stood ready, their iron voices poised to echo Killian's relentless quest for vengeance or the faint hope of redemption in the realms beyond.

Anchor

The anchor was a mighty sentinel of iron, a steadfast guardian that tethered the ship to the ocean's floor, holding her steady against the capricious tides of the Enchanted Forest or the ageless currents of Neverland. Forged from blackened iron, its surface weathered by centuries of salt and storm, the anchor embodied the ship's unyielding resolve, its form both functional and fearsome. Shaped in the traditional admiralty pattern, it featured a long shank flanked by two curved flukes, each tipped with a pointed barb to dig into sand, rock, or coral. A sturdy stock, perpendicular to the shank, ensured the flukes bit deep, while a heavy ring at the shank's top secured the anchor chain. The anchor measured 6 feet in length from ring to fluke tips, 4 feet wide across the flukes, and 2 feet thick at its stock, its compact yet robust design suited for a 110 foot ship like the Jolly Roger, balancing strength with manageability. Weighing 2,000 pounds, it was a formidable mass, capable of anchoring the ship in depths up to 100 feet, its iron bulk a challenge that demanded the crew's collective might and the ship's enchanted rigging to raise or lower.

The anchor was stored on the starboard side of the forecastle, just forward of the foremast, where the deck's reinforced timbers could bear its weight. Suspended from a cathead—a stout wooden beam projecting from the ship's bow, carved with a mermaid's visage to echo the figurehead—it hung 10 feet above the waterline, its flukes clear of the waves but easily accessed for deployment. The cathead, reinforced with enchanted wood to withstand the anchor's strain, was bolted to the deck and braced with iron straps, its mermaid carving gleaming with a faint magical sheen, as if blessing the anchor's duty.

The anchor chain, forged from iron links each 6 inches long and 1 inch thick, stretched 150 feet in total length, sufficient to reach deep seabeds or hold the ship in shallow harbors with a 5:1 scope (chain length to water depth). The chain, weighing an additional 1,500 pounds, was coated with tar to resist corrosion, its links rattling with a deep, resonant clank that echoed the Jolly Roger's heartbeat. When not in use, the chain was stowed in the chain locker, a small compartment below the forecastle deck, accessed via a hatch near the foremast. The locker, lined with enchanted wood to prevent rot, held the chain in neat coils, its entrance sealed with a tarred canvas cover to keep out damp.

To lower the anchor, the crew rallied under One-Eyed Jack's gruff commands, his eye fixed on the task. Billy, nimble and quick, climbed onto the cathead to release the securing hawser—a thick hemp rope lashing the anchor to the beam—while Smee, muttering of sea spirits, manned the capstan, a sturdy drum on the main deck near the foremast. The capstan, carved from enchanted oak and fitted with iron bars, was turned by Black Tom's massive strength, assisted by other crewmen, their boots gripping the deck as they pushed in rhythm to a low shanty. The chain, threaded through a hawsehole—a reinforced iron pipe in the ship's bow—clattered as it fed from the locker, the anchor plunging into the sea with a thunderous splash, its flukes biting the seabed to hold the Jolly Roger fast. A crimson-dyed marker buoy, a small wooden float tied to the chain, bobbed on the surface to signal its position,

Raising the anchor was a labor of sweat and song, the crew circling the capstan as Black Tom's arms drove the bars, the chain coiling back into the locker with a metallic groan. One-Eyed Jack oversaw the chain's alignment, ensuring it fed smoothly through the hawsehole, while Billy, perched on the cathead, guided the anchor's ascent. As it broke the surface, dripping with seaweed and brine, Smee secured it with the hawser, his hands fumbling under Killian's watchful gaze. The anchor was hoisted to its perch, the cathead creaking but unyielding, its enchanted wood absorbing the strain.

Maintenance was a ritual of vigilance, led by One-Eyed Jack's meticulous eye. Every few weeks, the crew scrubbed the anchor's iron with oil-soaked rags to banish rust, the flukes polished to a dull gleam. Billy, with his sharp attention, inspected the chain links for cracks, reapplying tar to shield them from salt, while Black Tom tested the hawser and

capstan bars for wear, his hands re-knotting frayed ropes. The hawsehole's iron lining was oiled to prevent seizing, and the chain locker's enchanted wood was swept clean of debris, preserving its magic against the sea's decay.

Its construction traced back to the Jewel of the Realm's naval origins, forged in a royal dockyard its iron tempered to endure the king's far-flung voyages. When Killian turned pirate, it became a symbol of defiance, dropped in hidden coves to evade pursuit or anchor the ship during raids. The enchanted elements—the cathead's wood and the chain's tar, infused with Neverland's mystical resins—seemed to enhance its hold, the anchor gripping seabeds with uncanny tenacity, as if the Jolly Roger willed herself to stay.

It played its part in the ship's saga. It held the ship steady when Milah first boarded, her steps faltering as she crossed the gangplank to join Killian's life, the chain's clank a prelude to their doomed love. In Neverland, it grounded the Jolly Roger during Baelfire's brief stay, the anchor's hold a fleeting anchor for Killian's hope of family. It defied Poseidon's storms when Killian sought a relic, the enchanted cathead unyielding against waves that sought to drag the ship asunder. It was the Jolly Roger's tie to the earth, a counterpoint to her sails' boundless ambition. It embodied Killian's moments of pause, grounding his restless heart. For the crew, it was both burden and bond. One-Eyed Jack's pride in its strength, Black Tom's respect for its mass, Billy's fascination with its mechanics, Smee's nervous awe of its plunge. Its iron, scarred yet enduring, held the echoes of a thousand moorings, from royal harbors to pirate lairs. As the Jolly Roger swayed under Neverland's stars, the anchor hung silent on its cathead, the chain locker's coils a promise of stability, its weight a testament to the ship's eternal dance with the sea.

Capstan

The capstan was her muscle, a sturdy drum that harnessed the crew's strength to raise anchors, sails, and heavy loads. Positioned on the forecastle deck, 18 feet from the bow, it stood 4 feet tall and 3 feet in diameter, crafted from enchanted oak, its silvery veins pulsing with magic to ease turning. Weighing 800 pounds, it was bolted to the deck, its 12 iron bars (2 feet long) slotted for crew to push, each turn winding the anchor chain or rigging lines through a deck hawsehole. The capstan's gearing, enchanted iron cogs below deck, amplified force, allowing four men to lift the 2,000-pound anchor or 1,000-pound skiff. A locking pawl, an iron lever, secured it, runed to prevent slipping. The capstan's oak was carved with star motifs, glowing faintly in darkness, a beacon for night work.

Black Tom led capstan turns, his might driving the bars, joined by Billy, whose agility kept pace. One-Eyed Jack called rhythms, his shanty guiding effort, while Smee locked the pawl, trembling at the chain's clank. Maintenance involved oiling cogs and polishing oak, Billy's task, with Jack checking pawls. Construction was naval, built for anchor drills, runes added by Killian for strength. The capstan was the Jolly Roger's effort, turning Killian's will into action. On the forecastle, it stood firm, its oak a testament to the ship's labor.

Gangplank

The gangplank was a vital tether to the world beyond, a sturdy bridge that bore the weight of her crew's restless ambitions in the torchlit ports of the Enchanted Forest or the shadowed coves of Neverland. Crafted from the same enchanted wood as the ship's hull, it gleamed with a dark, polished sheen, its grain swirling with faint, silvery veins that hinted at the magic woven into its core. Measuring 12 feet long, 3 feet wide, and 4 inches thick, the gangplank was precisely proportioned to span the gap from the main deck—12 feet above the waterline—to a dock or jetty, even when the ship rode high on a swelling tide.

Forged in the Jewel of the Realm's naval days by master shipwrights, its edges were smoothed by hand, reinforced with iron bands at each end to prevent splitting under the strain of heavy loads like Black Tom's massive frame or crates of plundered gold. The surface, etched with delicate carvings of waves and stars, was coated with a thin layer of tar, roughened to ensure grip against the slick of rain or sea spray, a practical touch for pirates darting to shore with rum-soaked swagger or treasures from Neverland's markets.

The gangplank bore no mechanism for retracting into the ship's hull, the enchanted density too robust for such intricate engineering. Instead, it was stowed on the main deck, lashed securely to the starboard rail aft of the midship hatchway, near the quarterdeck, approximately 70-80 feet from the bow. This position, deliberately placed aft of the skiff's davits at the ship's midpoint (50-60 feet from the bow), ensured no interference with the smaller boat's launch, maintaining clear operational zones along the Jolly Roger's 110 foot length. Two iron brackets, bolted deep into the deck's enchanted oak, cradled its length, their surfaces pitted from centuries of salt and storm. Thick hemp ropes,

knotted with sailor's precision by One-Eyed Jack's hands, bound the gangplank tight, preventing it from shifting in the ship's roll through Neverland's turbulent seas.

Though the crew almost exclusively deployed the gangplank from the starboard side, the Jolly Roger was structurally symmetrical, allowing the plank to be launched from the port side just as readily. The ship's bulwarks featured removable gangway boards—simple wooden cutouts that could be slid free on either side of the vessel.

When circumstances demanded a port-side deployment, One-Eyed Jack would pull the port cutout from its housing, opening a clean passage through the railing. This symmetry granted Killian tactical versatility; a captain could not always choose which side faced an unfamiliar dock or an enemy vessel. If a ship to be boarded lay to the Jolly's left, the gangplank would be run out over the port rail without hesitation.

When a port loomed, be it a bustling harbor in the Enchanted Forest or a hidden inlet where mermaids sang, Killian's sharp command set the crew in motion. One-Eyed Jack, his eye glinting with focus, led the task, untying the ropes with Billy's nimble assistance, while Smee muttered nervously about cursed tides. The gangplank was slid over the starboard rail, its notched end hooking onto a reinforced cleat near the rail's aft section, a sturdy iron fitting forged to bear its weight. Two guide ropes, tied to the gangplank's forward end, were tossed to the dock and pulled taut by waiting crew, adjusting the incline to ensure a stable path, whether for Black Tom's heavy tread or Killian's purposeful stride.

When deployed from the port side, the process mirrored the starboard operation precisely—an intentional design choice from the Jewel of the Realm's naval architects. Matching reinforced cleats, identical spacing along the bulwarks, and mirrored deck rings ensured the gangplank could be secured, angled, and guided with equal stability regardless of which side faced the shore.

The enchanted wood, imbued with a subtle magic, seemed to hum faintly when deployed, its carvings catching the light as if guiding the crew to shore, a whisper of the Jolly Roger's will to connect sea and land. This magic, perhaps a gift of the wood's ancient origins, steadied the gangplank against tempests, never buckling under the weight of crew or storm, its silvery veins glowing faintly in the dark to mark the path.

When the crew returned, laden with spoils, rum, or secrets, the gangplank was raised with deliberate care. Billy, quick and sure, scrambled to the dock to untie the guide ropes, while One-Eyed Jack and Black Tom hauled the plank back aboard, the enchanted wood sliding smoothly over the rail. Smee, eager to please, coiled the ropes, his hands fumbling under Killian's watchful gaze. The gangplank was then restowed in its brackets, lashed tight, its surface gleaming under the sails' shadow, ready for the next port.

When not in use, the plank could be stored along either side of the main deck, laid flat against the inside of the bulwarks. The Jolly's deck plan was perfectly symmetrical, offering identical storage space along both rails. Thick ropes were tied to iron rings set deep into the deck, securing the plank so it could not shift during storms or sudden maneuvers. Depending on the crew's needs, it might be tucked beneath the pin-rails to keep the rigging lanes clear or lashed near the central cargo hatch to free space for cannon operation. Killian often chose the storage side based on practical concerns—keeping the working side of the ship unobstructed or balancing the vessel's trim when heavy cargo made one side ride lower in the water.

Maintenance was a ritual, led by One-Eyed Jack's meticulous eye. Every few weeks, the crew scrubbed the tarred surface to remove salt and grime, reapplying pitch to preserve its grip, the scent of tar mingling with the sea's brine. Billy, with youthful precision, polished the iron bands with a cloth dipped in whale oil, banishing rust, while Black Tom tested the ropes for fraying, his massive hands re-knotting weak strands. The enchanted wood required no sanding or repair, its magic repelling rot or wear, but the crew treated it with reverence, as if the gangplank held the Jolly Roger's spirit in its grain.

It had seen moments that shaped Killian's fate. As the Jewel of the Realm, it bore Liam's steady steps to royal councils, its then-unmarred surface a symbol of naval pride. When Killian turned pirate, it carried his defiant march to shore. In Neverland, Baelfire hesitated on its edge, his young eyes wary before stepping to shore, a fleeting guest on the ship's path. It bore Ursula's weight as she struck her deal with Killian, her voice a melody soon silenced by betrayal, and trembled under Poseidon's wrath when seas rose against the ship, its magic holding firm.

The gangplank was the Jolly Roger's handshake with the world, a bridge between the ship's enchanted isolation and the realms' chaos. It carried Killian to taverns where he drowned grief in rum, to markets where he bartered for squid ink or magic beans, to shores where his hook sought Rumpelstiltskin's shadow. For the crew, it was freedom's gate. Smee's path to dice games, Billy's to new horizons, One-Eyed Jack and Black Tom's to battles won or lost. the enchanted wood, unscarred by time, held the echoes of these crossings, each step a thread in the Jolly Roger's tapestry, linking the crimson-flagged ship to the ports that shaped her captain's heart. As the crew lashed it tight under Neverland's stars, the gangplank lay quiet, a silent promise of the next shore, its magic as enduring as the Jolly Roger's legend.

Skiff

Nestled against the Jolly Roger's starboard side, the skiff was a nimble shadow of its mother ship, a small boat poised to ferry the crew through shallow waters or to swift raids where the ship's bulk could not venture. Carved from sturdy oak and sealed with pitch, it measured 16 feet long and 5 feet wide, its shallow draft perfect for gliding through hidden lagoons or coral-strewn bays. Reinforced with the same enchanted wood as the Jolly Roger, it bore a faint magical resilience, resisting cracks or leaks even in the churning seas of Poseidon's wrath.

The skiff could hold up to six men comfortably. Killian at the tiller, his hook steady on the rudder; Smee rowing with nervous vigor; Billy scanning the horizon with sharp eyes; and three others, like One-Eyed Jack or Black Tom, their weight balanced by a small cargo well beneath the thwarts for plunder or provisions, which always held a leather satchel that could be used to carry small items from the skiff to the Jolly Roger. Its interior was austere, with two rowing benches, a pair of oars, a coiled mooring rope, and a canvas tarp for shielding goods from spray. Painted black to mirror the ship's hull, a crimson stripe along its gunwale echoed the Jolly Roger's sails, marking it as an extension of her defiant spirit.

Secured 8 feet above the waterline, just below the main deck's starboard rail, the skiff hung midway between the foremast and midship hatchway, 50-60 feet from the bow, forward of the gangplank's stowage near the quarterdeck at 70-80 feet. This positioning ensured no interference with the gangplank's aft operations, maintaining clear zones along the ship's 110 foot length. Two sturdy davits—curved iron arms bolted to the deck—held the skiff aloft, its weight suspended by thick hemp ropes threaded through pulleys, each rope knotted to iron cleats on the skiff's gunwales. When not in use, additional lashings secured it to the davits, preventing sway in rough seas, its hull shielded from waves by the ship's overhang.

To lower the skiff, Killian's sharp orders rallied the crew—often Billy and One-Eyed Jack, their hands deft on the ropes. The lashings were untied, and the pulleys creaked as the skiff descended to the water's surface, its hull kissing the sea with a gentle splash. As it settled, a rope ladder, 10 feet long and woven from coarse hemp, was tossed over the starboard rail, its wooden rungs clattering against the hull, the crew leaping or stepping into the skiff at water level.

Once aboard, someone unhooked the pulley ropes from the gunwale cleats, freeing the skiff from the Jolly Roger's embrace, the ropes left dangling from the davits for later retrieval. With oars dipping into the sea, the skiff glided free, carrying Killian to secret deals in Neverland's markets or desperate chases, its crimson stripe a flicker beneath the ship's towering sails.

Upon return, the skiff nudged against the Jolly Roger's starboard hull, the mission—be it plunder or parley—complete. Someone on deck lowered the pulley ropes, their ends weighted with iron rings to reach the skiff below. Someone standing in the skiff's re-secured the ropes to the gunwale cleats. With the skiff tethered, the occupants climbed the rope ladder, its rungs swaying each man hauling himself over the rail to the main deck. Sometimes Killian would ascend last, his hook catching the ladder's edge with a metallic clink, his gaze lingering on the sea.

Once all were aboard, the crew—One-eyed Jack and Billy at the fore, Smee steadying the lines—manned the pulleys, hoisting the skiff back to its perch 8 feet above the waterline. The davits groaned under the load, but the enchanted wood of the ship held firm, the skiff settling into its cradle with a thud. Lashings were retied, securing it against the next storm, the rope ladder coiled and stowed near the rail, ready for the Jolly Roger's next venture.

This skiff, a fleeting shadow of the ship's might, bore the crew's hopes and hazards, its every launch and return a testament to their bond with the crimson-flagged legend above.

Crow's Nest

The crow's nest of the Jolly Roger was a lofty sentinel, a wooden perch high atop the mainmast, where the crew's sharpest eyes scanned the horizons of the Enchanted Forest and Neverland's misty seas. Positioned 60 feet above the main deck on the mainmast, the tallest of the ship's masts, the crow's nest was the Jolly Roger's highest vantage, 84 feet from the keel, offering an unobstructed view of reefs, rivals, or magical mists. Crafted from enchanted oak, matching the mainmast's pale, silvery-grained wood, the nest was a circular platform 4 feet in diameter and 1 foot thick, surrounded by a railing of woven hemp ropes, 3 feet high, lashed to four sturdy posts. The platform, weighing 175 pounds, was bolted to the mast with iron brackets, the enchanted wood unyielding against storms or the ship's roll. A canvas canopy, dyed crimson, stretched overhead, secured by ropes to shield the lookout from sun or rain, its edges frayed but enchanted to resist tearing.

Access was via the ratlines, hemp ladders woven into the mainmast's shrouds, climbed by Billy, the crew's nimble lookout, whose sharp eyes made the nest his domain. A hatch in the platform's center, 2 feet square, allowed entry from below, its hinged lid sealed with tar to keep out water. The nest's interior held a spyglass, 2 feet long and brass-bound, hung on a hook, the enchanted lens—traded in a Neverland market—piercing fog to spot distant sails or mermaids. A signal flag, crimson with a white hook emblem, was coiled beneath the platform, ready to be hoisted to alert the deck below. A small wooden box, bolted to the railing, stored flint, tinder, and a lantern for night watches, its faint glow a beacon in the dark. The nest's total weight, including fixtures, reached 250 pounds, a light burden for the mainmast's enchanted strength.

Maintenance was Billy's ritual, his lithe frame scaling the ratlines monthly to scrub the platform with oil, preserving the oak's magical sheen. Smee, when tasked, climbed nervously to re-tar the hatch, muttering of falling, while One-Eyed Jack inspected the brackets below, ensuring their hold. Black Tom rarely ascended, but his strength hauled up replacement ropes when the canopy's lashings frayed, the enchanted fibers woven to endure. The nest's wood, like the mast, healed minor scars—splinters from stray shot or storm-tossed debris—its silvery veins sealing over time. The crew believed the nest's magic sharpened their sight, a charm from the Jewel of the Realm's forging, when it guided naval fleets.

The crow's nest was the Jolly Roger's vision, a perch for hope and vigilance. It stood watch, the enchanted oak and crimson canopy a lighthouse for the ship's quest, guiding Captain Hook through the seas of fate.

Navigation Tools

The Jolly Roger's navigation tools were her guiding stars, a collection of enchanted instruments that charted her course through the realms' unpredictable seas. Housed primarily in Killian's cabin (aft, below the quarterdeck) and the quarterdeck's binnacle, they included a sextant, charts, logbook, hourglass, and lanterns (starboard/port), each imbued with magic to navigate Neverland's warped currents or the Enchanted Forest's enchanted waters.

The sextant, a brass arc 12 inches long, weighed 2 pounds and hung on a cabin hook, its lenses enchanted to align with stars even in daylight, ensuring precise latitude readings.

The charts, 20 parchment rolls (3x2 feet each), were stored in a mahogany case in the cabin, their ink infused with Neverland magic to shift and reveal hidden routes, weighing 10 pounds total.

The logbook, a leather-bound tome (12x8 inches, 5 pounds), rested on Killian's desk, its pages enchanted to record the ship's course without fading.

The hourglass, 18 inches tall and 3 pounds, stood beside the binnacle, its sand glowing to mark 30-minute intervals with unerring accuracy.

Two lanterns, iron-framed with enchanted glass, hung on starboard (green) and port (red) rails, 2 feet tall and 10 pounds each, their light piercing fog.

The tools were maintained by Killian and Billy, with Smee assisting nervously. Billy polished the sextant's brass, checking its lenses, while Killian updated the charts, their ink shifting under his quill. Smee cleaned the logbook's cover, fearing its magic, as One-Eyed Jack refilled the lanterns' whale oil, their runes glowing under his touch. Black Tom secured the hourglass's stand, his strength steadying its base.

The tools, the sextant and charts were crafted by royal mages, the lanterns forged for naval signals. Killian enchanted the logbook and hourglass in Neverland, for precision. They were Killian's compass for destiny, charting vengeance or redemption. Tucked in the cabin or glowing on deck, the navigation tools lit the Jolly Roger's path, guiding Killian through the seas' mysteries.

Access and Support Systems

Ladders/Hatchways

The ladders and hatchways were her arteries, a network of passages that linked decks and compartments, pulsing with the crew's movement. The ship featured three main hatchways and multiple ladders (internal and external), all crafted from enchanted oak, their silvery veins ensuring durability. The midship hatchway (6x6 feet, main deck, 60 feet from bow) led to the main hold, its hinged lid runed to repel water. The foremast hatchway (4x4 feet, forecastle, 20 feet) accessed the forward hold and chain locker, its cover tarred for sealing. The companionway (2x4 feet, quarterdeck, 95 feet) descended to Killian's cabin and aft quarters, its lid carved with a compass rose. Internal ladders, 10 feet long and 2 feet wide, connected decks to holds, each with 12 runed rungs, weighing 50 pounds. Ratlines, hemp ladders on mast shrouds, reached the crow's nest (60 feet up), their enchanted fibers unyielding. The total weight of hatchways and ladders was 500 pounds, integrated into the ship's frame.

Billy maintained ladders, oiling rungs to prevent creaks, while Smee swept hatchway lids, muttering of curses. One-Eyed Jack checked hinges, his eye on security, and Black Tom tested rung strength, his weight a gauge. Maintenance ensured runes glowed, repelling wear. The hatchways were built for naval efficiency, ladders enchanted for durability. Killian added runed lids, their magic a pirate's safeguard. They were the Jolly Roger's flow, linking surface to depths, Killian's command to his crew's labor. Crisscrossing the ship, they wove her story, guiding the crew through peril.

The Companionway

The Jolly Roger's companionway was her vital artery, a shadowed lifeline of dark, enchanted oak that pulsed with the ship's living legend, carrying Killian from the quarterdeck's command to the beating heart of his cabin and the crew's hidden domains. Located on the quarterdeck at 95 feet from the bow, near the helm, it began with a 2x4 foot hatchway, the enchanted oak lid, 3 inches thick and weighing 100 pounds, carved with a delicate compass rose, its runes glowing faintly to guide footsteps through the night's gloom. The doors opened to a steep, 10 foot long, 2 foot wide ladder of enchanted oak, its 8 rungs (each 1 inch thick, 5 pounds), smoothed by Killian's boots, dropping 6 feet to a landing 12 feet above the waterline. The ladder, weighing 50 pounds, led to a dimly lit corridor, 3 feet wide and 15 feet long, snaking through the ship's underbelly, the enchanted oak walls whispering of Neverland's markets and lost loves, their silvery veins seeming to pulse with the Jolly Roger's will. The corridor's low ceiling, 5 feet high, forced even Killian to bow, a humble passage to power, its air cool and thick with the tang of tar and the faint glow of magical relics—charms and trinkets hung on hooks, their light a secret only the captain knew.

The corridor branched to three destinations. Aft, a 4x4 foot heavy oak door (80 pounds), carved with a compass rose and runed to lock only to Killian's key, guarded the captain's cabin (100-110 feet); port, a 3x5 foot low doorway (50 pounds) opened to the aft crew quarters (80-90 feet), where hammocks rocked and dice clattered in the gloom; and forward, a 2x3 foot door (40 pounds) revealed a second ladder (8 feet, 40 pounds, 6 rungs), descending to the main hold (30-80 feet), its cavernous depths brimming with plunder and power. A single lantern, enchanted glass (10 pounds), swayed on a hook, its golden glow piercing the passage's shadows, steady despite the ship's roll. The total weight was 370 pounds, its compact design a testament to the ship's enchanted efficiency, a shadow-route through her veins that let Killian glide unseen, his hook grazing the timbers as he moved, a captain commanding from the shadows, ever vigilant over his ship's pulse.

The companionway was Killian's secret path, its oak a confidant to his triumphs and torments. His boots thudded on the ladder, smoothed by centuries of descent, his hook brushing the compass rose as he slipped from the helm's weight to the cabin's solitude, the passage's cool air easing his mind. One-Eyed Jack, the grizzled quartermaster, oiled the hatch's iron hinges, his eye ensuring silence to shield Killian's privacy, his gruff voice warning loiterers away.

Black Tom stood guard at the hatch, his harpoon barring intruders, his strength bolting the ladder's base. Smee, trembling with superstition, polished the corridor's runes, his cloth wiping tar to reveal their glow, muttering charms against spirits, believing the walls held Neverland's secrets. Billy, nimble and bold, cleaned the lantern, his cloth catching salt from its glass, his tales of the passage's relics—a mermaid's scale, a witch's bead—sparking crew whispers. Maintenance was a sacred ritual. One-Eyed Jack checked hinges weekly, Black Tom reinforced bolts, Smee swept the corridor's tarred floor, and Billy oiled rungs, the enchanted oak repelling wear, its runes healing scratches.

It bore the Jolly Roger's saga. Under Liam, it was a naval officer's path, his crisp steps descending to quarters as the ship's bell rang, his logs penned in the cabin below. Baelfire, wary and young, climbed the ladder to the deck, Smee guiding him through the passage, the runes' glow easing his fear as dice clattered in the quarters beyond. The corridor withstood Poseidon's storms, its tarred walls dry as Killian plotted defiance in the cabin, the hold's plunder reached via the second ladder. Crafted for naval efficiency, its oak from magical forests, runes forged by a royal mage. Killian deepened its enchantments, bartering to weave relics into the walls, their glow a ward against spies, the corridor a secret vein through the ship's heart.

It was the Jolly Roger's pulse, a humble passage where Killian's command bowed to his humanity, its low ceiling a reminder of vulnerability, its runes a map of his soul. For the crew, it was a legend. One-Eyed Jack's loyalty guarded its hatch, Black Tom's vigilance secured its doors, Smee's faith revered its relics, Billy's wonder lit its shadows. The passage's air, thick with tar and magic, carried whispers of Neverland's markets, its walls seeming to answer Killian's will, a heartbeat that bore him through centuries. As he moved through the corridor, his hook grazing the oak, the companionway was his shadow-route, a lifeline from the quarterdeck's glare to the cabin's secrets, the quarters' camaraderie, or the hold's power, the enchanted wood pulsing with the Jolly Roger's eternal quest for redemption beneath her sails.

Dive Bell

The Jolly Roger's dive bell was a marvel of piratical ingenuity, a bronze sentinel crafted to plumb the ocean's depths for sunken treasures and magical artifacts hidden in the coral graves of the Enchanted Forest or the abyssal trenches of Neverland. Forged from heavy bronze, its surface pitted with verdigris yet polished to a dull gleam, the bell stood 4 feet in diameter and 5 feet high, resembling a squat, domed cauldron that seemed to hum with secrets of the deep. Its walls, nearly an inch thick, were reinforced with enchanted wood fittings—oak planks from the Jolly Roger's own timbers, carved with faint runes that glowed softly in the dark, binding the bronze to the ship's mystical essence.

The interior, cramped but functional, was designed for three occupants. One seated at the controls on a narrow wooden bench bolted to the floor, managing levers for stability, while two stood braced against the curved walls, their movements careful in the tight space. A thick glass porthole, 8 inches wide and set in the bell's side, offered a murky glimpse of the underwater world, its leaded frame etched with a compass rose, while a heavy iron ring at the dome's apex served as the primary lifting point for launch and recovery operations.

Pressure-regulating runes, crafted by Aelthari enchanters and etched along the bell's rim, glowed with a faint azure light, pulsing to ward off the crushing force of the deep and maintain a breathable atmosphere, as if the bell were still on the surface, shielding the trio from the bone-crushing pressure of the abyss. Weighing 1,500 pounds, the dive bell was a formidable burden, its mass a challenge even for the Jolly Roger's enchanted rigging, yet its heft ensured stability against the sea's restless currents, the bronze resonating with a low, almost otherworldly hum.

The dive bell's origins were steeped in the Jolly Roger's naval past as the Jewel of the Realm. Commissioned by Liam for a royal expedition to retrieve a sunken relic from a king's lost fleet, it was crafted by a reclusive smith in a port known for its alchemical forges, the bronze infused with rare ores to withstand the ocean's embrace. When Killian turned pirate, the bell became a tool of plunder, its purpose shifting to seek mermaid hoards or cursed artifacts fueling his vendetta against Rumpelstiltskin.

The enchanted wood fittings and Aelthari runes, added during Killian's Neverland years, were carved by a shipwright who traded his skill for passage, the runes warding off krakens and guiding the bell to magical troves. These runes, pulsing azure when near objects of power, stabilized the bell's interior, ensuring the three occupants—one at the controls, two standing—could breathe and move without the deep's crushing weight shattering their lungs or bones.

When not in use, the dive bell was stored in the forward hold, nestled beneath the foremast hatchway, where spare sails and tools surrounded it. A wooden cradle, built from enchanted oak, held it upright, lashed with thick hemp ropes to prevent shifting during the ship’s roll. A tarred canvas tarp, heavy with the scent of pitch, shielded it from the hold’s damp, the crew stepping warily around its looming bulk, as if it carried the weight of the sea itself. Its storage near the hatchway ensured quick access, the forward hold’s open space accommodating its 1,500-pound mass.

To lower the dive bell, the crew transformed the foremast into a crane, a ritual led by One-Eyed Jack’s steady commands. The tarp was peeled back, ropes untied, and a block-and-tackle system, rigged to the foremast’s yardarm, was threaded with a cable—hemp braided with enchanted fibers for strength. One-Eyed Jack guided the hoist, his eye fixed on the bell’s ascent, while Smee’s nervous chatter filled the air, his hands steadying the cradle. Billy, nimble and precise, climbed the rigging to adjust the pulley, ensuring a smooth lift.

The bell was raised through the forward hatch, swung carefully over the port side, opposite the skiff's starboard davits, and lowered into the sea by the foremast crane. The bronze hull settled into the water with surprising grace, bobbing gently against the swells as a rope ladder was lowered alongside it.

The dive team descended from the deck into the waiting vessel. The first aboard unsealed the hatch and secured the interior, while the final diver detached the hoisting lines before climbing inside and bolting the hatch shut behind them.

Once sealed, the pressure-regulating runes flared brighter, their azure glow spreading through the bronze interior. The vessel's enchantments maintained breathable air, stabilized internal pressure, and shielded its occupants from the crushing force of the abyss. With the launch rigging detached and the hatch secured, the crew hauled the ropes and ladder back aboard. Free of the crane's rigging, the dive bell became an independent craft, descending beneath the waves under the control of its crew, its azure runes glowing against the dark.

Small rune-driven maneuvering fins, concealed along the bell's lower rim, allowed the vessel to navigate independently once submerged, responding to the helm controls within the cramped bronze cabin. The bronze hull gleamed within the ocean's embrace as it carried Hook and his companions toward mermaid tears, cursed relics, squid ink, or forgotten treasures buried beneath the sea.

Upon returning to the surface, the dive bell signaled the Jolly Roger with a flare of its azure runes. Guided by the vessel's helm, the bell maneuvered alongside the ship beneath the foremast crane.

A rope ladder was lowered over the port side. Billy descended swiftly, carrying fresh hoisting lines. Working from the ladder and the bell's exterior rings, he secured the recovery rigging while the occupants waited inside.

At One-Eyed Jack's command, the block-and-tackle strained taut and the bell rose dripping from the sea, water cascading from its bronze hull as it climbed toward the deck.

Once safely aboard, the bell was lowered onto the planks and secured. The hatch was unsealed from within and the expedition crew emerged, blinking in the daylight and carrying whatever treasure, relic, or strange prize they had retrieved from the depths.

Only then was the bell lowered through the forward hatchway and returned to its enchanted oak cradle in the forward hold. Billy checked the lashings, Smee redraped the tarred canvas cover while muttering of sea spirits, and Black Tom inspected the lifting rings and crane tackle for strain before the vessel settled once more into silent storage.

Maintenance was a sacred task, overseen by One-Eyed Jack’s meticulous eye. Every few months, the crew polished the bronze with oil-soaked rags, scrubbing verdigris to reveal its shine. Billy cleaned the porthole’s glass, ensuring clarity. Black Tom inspected the lifting rings, crane tackle, and enchanted cable, checking the integrity of the runes and bindings that reinforced them. The wooden fittings and runes, untouched by rot, were oiled to preserve their luster, the crew tracing the azure runes with reverence to renew their power. The crew whispered of the bell’s dives, tales of Killian emerging with a glowing gem or a vial of ink, his hook dripping with brine, his eyes haunted by the deep.

The dive bell shaped the Jolly Roger's legend. Under Liam, it sought a royal artifact, its bronze untested but proud. As a pirate ship, it dove for treasure, the runes guiding to its glint in the sand. In Neverland, it carried Killian to a sunken cave, the porthole framing a coral hoard. It descended to retrieve squid ink from a wreck. Against Poseidon's will, it braved crushing depths for a forbidden relic, its runes defying the sea god's currents. Each dive etched the bell's legacy, its bronze a canvas for the Jolly Roger's daring, its azure runes a map of Killian's heart.

The dive bell was the Jolly Roger's plunge into the unknown, a vessel within a vessel that dared the sea's darkest secrets. It embodied Killian's willingness to risk all, its cramped interior—three souls, one seated, two standing—a mirror to his burdened soul. Stored in the hold, it waited like a sleeping giant, its verdigris and runes a promise of treasures unclaimed. The dive bell's weight anchored her quests, its bronze hum a song of the deep, carrying Captain Hook to the ocean's heart, where vengeance or redemption lay buried in the silt.

Powder Magazine

The powder magazine was a fortress within her heart, a heavily guarded chamber that housed the gunpowder fueling her cannons' thunder. Located in the main hold, 50 feet from the bow and 5 feet below the waterline, the magazine was a 6x6x6 foot compartment carved into the ship's starboard side, its walls, floor, and ceiling lined with enchanted oak planks, their silvery veins pulsing with protective magic to dampen sparks and repel water. A copper-plated door, 3 feet high and 2 feet wide, sealed the chamber, its surface etched with runes to ward off fire, secured by a heavy iron lock that only Killian and Black Tom held keys to.

The magazine's capacity was 50 barrels of gunpowder, each 2 feet tall and 100 pounds, totaling 5,000 pounds of powder, enough for sustained battles or raids. The barrels, made of oak and sealed with tar, were stacked in enchanted wooden racks, their magic preventing shifts during the ship's roll. The compartment's total weight, including structure and contents, reached 6,000 pounds, a load balanced by the hold's reinforced timbers.

It was accessed via a narrow passage in the main hold, its floor covered with felt mats to muffle footsteps and reduce sparks, lit by a single lantern with an enchanted glass that emitted light without flame, hung from a copper hook. Ventilation slits, lined with copper mesh, allowed air circulation while blocking embers, their runes glowing faintly to purify the air of damp. Safety measures were paramount. No iron tools were permitted inside, and crew entered in felt slippers, stored in a locker by the door, to prevent static. Black Tom guarded the magazine, his massive frame stationed nearby, his harpoon a silent warning to intruders.

Maintenance was a ritual of caution, led by Black Tom and One-Eyed Jack. Weekly, they inspected the barrels for leaks, re-tarring seams, while Smee, trembling, swept the felt mats, whispering charms against explosions. Billy polished the copper door, his sharp eyes checking runes for wear, the enchanted oak walls requiring no repair, their magic repelling rot or fire. The magazine's construction, begun under naval command, used enchanted oak, the copper plating added by Killian to shield against pirate raids' chaos.

The magazine powered the Jolly Roger's defiance. The enchanted powder, infused with Neverland alchemy, burned hotter and farther, a secret Killian guarded fiercely. It was the Jolly Roger's latent fury, a spark waiting to ignite Killian's vengeance or his hunt for Rumpelstiltskin. Tucked in the hold's shadows, the magazine pulsed with power, its copper door a gate to the ship's might, fueling her crimson-flagged charge through the seas.

<u>Below-Deck Compartments</u>

Galley

The Jolly Roger's galley was her fiery heart, a compact oaken hearth where Smee's stews fueled the crew's fire through endless seas. Located forward at 20-30 feet, it was a 10x8x7 foot chamber, its base rested ~7 feet above the waterline (5 feet below the main deck), near the crew quarters and above the bilge (10 feet below waterline). Weighing 1,500 pounds (350 pounds enchanted oak walls, 800 pounds brick hearth, 50 pounds oak table, 40 pounds oak door, 10 pounds lantern, 180 pounds gear, 30 pounds shelves, 40 pounds door), the enchanted oak planks, runed with flames, glowed to repel fire, damp, and smoke.

The 4x3 foot brick hearth, runed, with its iron gate burned enchanted charcoal that never smoked, while a 6x2 foot oak table held pots, knives, and barrels of flour, salt, and rum. Shelves, oak and runed, stored pewter plates and tankards (30 pounds total). A lantern (enchanted glass, 10 pounds) hung above, its light steady. A 2x2 foot ventilation

hatch, runed, cleared steam. A 4x4 foot runed oak door (40 pounds) opened to the hold, its runes locking provisions, accessed via ladders/hatchways.

The galley's warmth countered the bilge's chill below, the keel's 12 foot depth grounding its fires. One-Eyed Jack rationed provisions, his eye ensuring order, his respect for Killian's visits firm. Black Tom, his bulk crowding the table and door, hauled barrels and wood, his strength steadying the hull's 145,500 pounds. Smee, the cook, stirred stews, his charms warding off spoilage, believing the runes held the ship's vigor. Billy, nimble, cleaned the hearth, his songs of glowing planks a crew myth and chopped herbs, his knife flashing, his songs seasoning meals.

Maintenance was Smee's duty. He scrubbed the hearth, oiled shelves, and cleaned runes. One-Eyed Jack checked barrels, Tom bolted the table, Billy polished tankards, the oak healing cracks.

It fueled raids, the hold's provisions sustaining squalls, the bilge's pump below lightening the load. Killian shared rum here, his laughter lifting spirits. It was Killian's fire, a spark of defiance, its runes a vow of sustenance, the ship's warmth, a hearth where Killian's crew forged bonds.

Hold

The Jolly Roger's hold was her cavernous vault, a shadowed heart of enchanted oak where provisions, treasures, and secrets fueled her voyages. its runed walls whispering of raids and resilience. Spanning 70x22x7 feet from 30-80 feet, its base rested 5-7 feet above the waterline (5-7 feet below the main deck), above the bilge (10 feet below waterline) and below the crew quarters. It comprised three compartments—forward (30-40 feet), main (40-60 feet), aft (60-80 feet)

Weighing 10,000 pounds (5,000 pounds oak structure, 5,000 pounds provisions), the enchanted oak planks, 2 inches thick, bore runes of knots, glowing to repel water, damp and theft. Its floors were tarred. Oak beams (1,000 pounds) braced the ceiling, while hatches (200 pounds, runed for security) at 60 feet connected to the main deck and companionway (second ladder).

Accessed via the midship hatchway (6x6 feet, main deck, 60 feet) and foremast hatchway (4x4 feet, forecastle, 20 feet), it stored barrels (flour, rum, water, other provisions, 100 pounds each, ~50 total), crates of canvas, and magical items (squid ink, magic bean, <1 pound). The powder magazine (50 feet, 6,000 pounds) and dive bell (forward, 1,500 pounds) resided here, with ropes and spare sails stacked aft. Lanterns (enchanted glass, 10 pounds each, 4 total) hung from beams, their light piercing shadows.

Its gloom hid plunder, its air heavy with tar, the keel's 12 foot depth below ensuring stability. One-Eyed Jack oiled hatches and inventoried barrels, his eye scanning runes, guarding the ship's wealth. Black Tom, his might unmatched, hauled crates, his strength centering the hull's 145,500 pounds for the 12 foot draft. Smee, superstitious, inventoried crates and swept the floor, his charms warding off curses, believing the runes held the ship's fate. Billy, nimble, oiled hatches, his tales of glowing planks a crew myth, and cleaned runes, the oak healing scars.

The hold was crafted for naval stores, its beams steady, and when Killian turned the ship pirate he added runes. Under Killian it brimmed with spoils, the capstan hauling merchant fleet treasures, the bilge's pump below lightening squalls. The dive bell's cove hauls filled its crates, Killian's key locking hatches. It was the ship's memory a vault where Killian's past and future rested. a hoard of dreams, its runes a vow to endure.

Ship's Stores

The ship's stores were her lifeblood, a trove of ropes, flags, weapons, and tools sustaining her voyages. Housed in the aft hold (80-100 feet, below quarterdeck), a 20x10x7 foot compartment, the stores held 500 pounds of enchanted hemp ropes (for rigging, skiff), 20 signal flags (2x3 feet, canvas, stored in oak chests), 30 cutlasses and 20 boarding axes (iron, 3 pounds each, racked), and carpentry tools (saws, hammers, 50 pounds total). The compartment, lined with enchanted oak, weighed 1,000 pounds empty, with stores adding 800 pounds. A 4x4 foot hatch in the hold's ceiling, accessed via the main hold, sealed with runes, guarded by Black Tom. Shelves and racks, oak and runed, organized goods, lit by a runed lantern.

Billy inventoried stores, his sharp eyes checking ropes, while Smee folded flags, fearing their magic. One-Eyed Jack sharpened cutlasses, his whetstone steady, and Black Tom hauled tools, his strength restocking. Maintenance involved rope tarring, blade oiling, and shelf cleaning, the runes repelled rot. Construction was navy design, runes added by Killian for security. The stores were the Jolly Roger's readiness, fueling Killian's quests. In the hold's shadows, they waited, their runes a promise of the ship's endurance.

Bilge

The bilge was her shadowed underbelly, a dank hollow of enchanted oak where the sea's intrusion met the crew's vigilance, its runed walls pulsing with the ship's unyielding heart. Spanning 70x22x7 feet from 30-80 feet, its base rested ~10 feet below the waterline, 1-2 feet above the keel's top (9 feet below waterline), just below the main hold (5-7 feet above waterline), with its ceiling 3 feet below the waterline, a low cavern beneath the main deck's 12 foot height.

Weighing 2,000 pounds (1,900 pounds oak structure, 100 pounds bilge pump), the enchanted oak planks, 2 inches thick and tarred black, bore runes of spirals, glowing to repel rot and seal leaks. The bilge pump, an enchanted oak and iron contraption, stood midship (55 feet), its runes ensuring tireless operation, draining ~600 gallons (5,000 pounds) of bilge water to lighten the ship's 12 foot draft. Iron grates (50 pounds) covered drainage channels, guiding water to the pump, their runes resisting rust.

The bilge's sloshing depths tested the crew's grit, its air thick with salt and tar, the keel's starry carvings faintly visible below. One-Eyed Jack, the quartermaster, inspected the keel's sockets here, his boots splashing as he checked runes for cracks, ensuring the hull's stability. Black Tom, his strength vital, hauled debris from the pump, his grunts echoing as he cleared clogs to maintain the 145,500-pound hull's balance. Smee, trembling at the bilge's gloom, manned the pump, his charms warding off sea spirits, believing the runes held the ship's fate. Billy, nimble, cleaned the grates, his cloth wiping salt, his tales of the keel's glow a crew myth.

Maintenance was relentless. One-Eyed Jack sealed planks with enchanted tar, Black Tom cleared channels, Smee oiled the pump, Billy polished runes, the oak healing minor scars. Construction began under naval command, the bilge crafted to protect the keel, its oak from a magical forest, runes by a royal mage. Killian enhanced its magic, strengthened the pump's runes, ensuring the bilge's defiance of leaks.

It bore naval discipline, its pump churning as the ship's bell rang, keeping the ship trim for royal quests. Under Killian, it sloshed during Neverland raids, Smee's pumping lightening the hold's plunder, the keel's 12 foot depth steadying merchant fleet chases. The bilge endured squalls, its runes glowing as the dive bell plunged for cove treasures, Killian's orders keeping her buoyant. It was the Jolly Roger's resilience, its weight a testament to endurance, its runes a vow to rise above the sea's grasp. The bilge's pump echoed his will, a shadowed heart pulsing beneath sails, absorbing the sea's weight as Killian bore grief. Hidden below, it anchored the ship's survival, its runes a quiet defiance.

Weight

The Jolly Roger was a marvel of enchanted craftsmanship, her dry weight—228,015 pounds or approximately 114 tons (the enchantments subtly redistributing weight throughout her frame)—a living testament to her resilience and Captain Killian Jones's mastery over her formidable mass. This weight, the sum of her enchanted oak hull, sails, iron cannons, and myriad fittings, was no mere burden but a dynamic force, one Killian wielded with a pirate's cunning and a navy man's precision, honed under Liam's command on the Jewel of the Realm.

The hull, a blackened fortress weighing 145,500 pounds (including 5,000 pounds of copper sheathing and 500 pounds of bilge keel), formed her outer shell, its runed oak planks glowing with silvery veins that lightened her 110 foot frame, making her swifter than mortal brigs. The keel, a 10,000-pound spine of enchanted oak, ran her length, its runes anchoring the masts—7,000 pounds of oak across foremast and mainmast—whose 8,000 square feet of sails (1,200 pounds) caught Neverland's winds. Killian's hook on the helm (200 pounds, mahogany wheel), positioned on the quarterdeck, felt the hull's stability, aligning the masts' pull to dance over waves.

The main deck (10,000 pounds, enchanted oak) stretched 90 feet, bearing the 18,000-pound thunder of twelve cannons, their 1,500-pound iron barrels steadied by runed carriages, each shot a defiance Killian ordered with Jack's gruff precision. The forecastle deck (200 pounds) hosted the capstan (800 pounds), turned by Black Tom's

might to raise the 3,500-pound anchor and chain, its weight timed by Killian to outrun tides. The quarterdeck (2,000 pounds) elevated the helm, where Killian stood, his eyes on the crow's nest (175 pounds, mainmast), Billy's lookout guiding his course. The bowsprit (1,000 pounds) and figurehead (500 pounds, oak mermaid) adorned the bow, their runes glowing, the hull's 145,500 pounds slicing reefs. The gangplank (300 pounds) and skiff (500 pounds) added nimble weight, lowered by Billy under Killian's nod, balancing raids.

Below, the companionway (370 pounds), a shadowed artery with a runed compass rose hatch, led to the captain's cabin (2,000 pounds), where Killian's desk held navigation tools (40 pounds, sextant, charts) and squid ink, its oak walls a sanctuary for his plans against Rumpelstiltskin. The crew quarters (2,000 pounds, forward and aft) rocked with Smee's dice games, their hammocks swaying as Killian passed, his presence steadying the crew. The galley (1,500 pounds), Smee's hearth, fueled the crew with stews, its brick fire defying Poseidon's storms under Killian's watch. The hold (10,000 pounds, including 5,000 pounds of provisions), a cavern of plunder, stored the dive bell (1,500 pounds) and powder magazine (6,000 pounds, 5,000 pounds powder), Killian's key guarding its danger, Tom's strength securing barrels. The ship's stores (1,800 pounds, aft) held ropes and cutlasses, inventoried by Billy, while the bilge (2,000 pounds) sloshed below, Smee's pump clearing water to lighten Killian's load. The ship's bell (100 pounds, bronze) rang Smee's nervous chime, its runes echoing Killian's orders, and ladders/hatchways (500 pounds) connected decks, Billy's agility maintaining their runes.

Killian handled this 114-ton mass with artistry, his helm adjustments balancing the hull's 145,500 pounds and sails 2,000 pounds, the rigging (1,000 pounds) taut as he outmaneuvered foes. In Neverland, he trimmed sails to shift weight aft, speeding past reefs, the crow's nest guiding his path. Against Poseidon, he leaned into the helm, the keel's 10,000 pounds and hull's runes defying gales, the bilge pump easing the load. For Milah, he sailed her light, her laughter lifting the deck's weight; for Baelfire, he centered provisions in the hold, the capstan raising the anchor swiftly. The companionway's corridor let him slip to the cabin, his hook grazing relics, plotting Ursula's squid ink deal. Symbolically, the dry weight was Killian's burden—yet his mastery made it a weapon, the Jolly Roger a swift shadow, her 114 tons a lover's embrace he steered toward redemption, her oak heart pulsing under sails.

Displacement

Fully laden, the Jolly Roger's displacement surged to an estimated 262-312 tons (524,000-624,000 pounds), a measure of her total mass pressing against the seas, a dynamic force Captain Killian Jones balanced with nautical genius. This encompassed the dry weight of 228,015 pounds (114 tons), plus the crew (20-30 men, 175 pounds each, 3,500-5,250 pounds, 2-3 tons), whose boots thudded across the main deck as Jack drilled cannon crews, Tom hauled ropes, Smee rang the ship's bell, and Billy scaled the crow's nest. Ballast, enchanted stones or iron ingots in the bilge, added 60,000-100,000 pounds (30-50 tons), stabilizing the 7,000-pound masts and 1,200-pound sails' upward pull, its weight adjusted by Black Tom to counter Neverland's squalls. Provisions—food, water, rum, and spares in the hold and galley—contributed 10,000 pounds (5 tons, beyond the hold's 5,000-pound stores), fueling months at sea. Bilge water, variable but estimated at 5,000 pounds (2.5 tons, ~600 gallons), sloshed below, pumped by Smee to keep her trim. These additions pushed displacement to 262-312 tons, a mass Killian wielded to outmaneuver foes and gods, the hull's enchanted oak carving a buoyant path.

Killian's command transformed this weight into agility, his orders aligning the Jolly Roger's bulk with the sea's rhythm.

The ballast, stacked along the keel in the bilge, was his anchor, its 30-50 tons lowered by Black Tom's strength to steady the 145,500-pound hull, runes glowing to defy Poseidon's waves. Killian kept ballast minimal, trusting the hull's magical buoyancy, its copper sheathing glinting as he sped through reefs.

The crew's weight, scattered across the quarterdeck, main deck, and crew quarters, shifted with Killian's calls—Jack at cannons, Billy in the crow's nest, Smee in the galley—balancing port and starboard to prevent roll during sharp turns. During a chase, Killian ordered the hold's 10,000 pounds of provisions centered midship, the skiff secured to avoid sway, speeding her flight.

The bilge water, a fickle load, was Smee's bane; Killian urged faster pumping, the 100-pound pump clearing 5,000 pounds of slosh, keeping the bow light for Ursula's cove.

In battle, the displacement shaped Killian's strategy. For a squid ink hunt, he loaded extra powder in the powder magazine (5,000 pounds), adding ~3 tons, yet sailed true, the helm's tiller ropes taut as he dodged foes, the 18,000-

pound cannons balanced by ballast. Against Poseidon, Killian leaned into gales, the hull's runes and 60,000-pound ballast defying capsizing, the capstan raising the anchor to flee. The navigation tools (40 pounds) in the captain's cabin were his mind, their sextant guiding the 312-ton mass through Neverland's mists, Billy's calls adjusting course.

Historically, Liam's naval ballast weighed heavier, but Killian streamlined her, the companionway leading to the hold where he planned raids. The displacement was Killian's heart, a tide he rode with grace, his hook on the helm a lover's caress, the Jolly Roger's 262-312 tons a dream defying the realms' storms under her sails.

Appendix 2
Tiger Lily & Eldrin Backstory

The Grove of Forgotten Wings

The Neverland jungle loomed dense and untamed, its canopy a tapestry of emerald leaves woven with shadows, where moonlight pierced the foliage in silver lances, casting dappled patterns on the mossy earth. Tiger Lily moved through it with silent precision, her boots gliding over roots slick with dew, her dark braid adorned with raven feathers that shimmered faintly, catching the lunar glow like polished obsidian. Once a fairy, a guardian of light and destiny tasked with shielding the realm from encroaching darkness, she had failed to halt the Black Fairy's rise. Guilt, sharp as a blade, had driven her to shed her radiant wings, trading enchantment for the weight of a warrior's blade and the exile of Neverland's wilds, seeking penance in its unforgiving embrace.

The jungle seemed to breathe with her, vines curling gently toward her as if drawn by an old, unspoken bond, their leaves whispering secrets in the humid air thick with the scent of damp earth and blooming orchids. A restless wind stirred, carrying the faint, mournful cry of distant ravens, prickling her skin like a warning. One night, a strange shimmer, flickering like starlight trapped in mist, drew her deeper into the jungle's heart. She emerged into a moonlit grove, its air pulsing with ancient magic, the ground carpeted with luminescent moss that glowed faintly under her steps. Twisted branches arched overhead, their bark etched with runes that pulsed in time with her heartbeat, as if the grove itself recognized her fractured fairy soul.

"You carry the scent of starlight," a voice called from above, rich with age and tinged with sorrow, "but your wings are gone, Flameheart." Perched on a gnarled branch, an African Grey parrot gazed down, his feathers tinged with silver and violet, shimmering like a twilight sky. His eyes glowed faintly, twin embers of amethyst, wise and weary. Tiger Lily's hand brushed the hilt of her blade, her stance wary but curious. "Who are you, bird, to know what I've lost?" she asked, her voice steady, edged with a warrior's defiance. The parrot tilted his head, his beak clicking softly. "I am Eldrin, once familiar to a sorcerer who vanished in the eclipse's shadow. I've waited a century for one who remembers magic's pulse. You, warrior, still hum with it."

She stepped closer, the grove's magic thrumming through her, stirring memories of fairy dust and forgotten flights. "A talking parrot in Neverland's wilds," she mused, her lips twitching with a faint smirk. "Reckon you're more than you seem." Eldrin's feathers ruffled, a sardonic glint in his eyes. "And you're more than a blade-wielding exile, Flameheart. The jungle knows you, as do I. Shall we uncover why it called you here?" His voice carried a challenge, daring her to embrace the magic she'd buried. Tiger Lily's gaze hardened, but a spark of curiosity flickered within. "Speak plain, bird. What's this grove want with me?" Eldrin's wings fluttered, a soft glow tracing their edges. "Redemption, perhaps. Or a fight worth winning. Stay, and we'll find out together." The grove seemed to hum in agreement, its runes flaring brighter, binding their fates under Neverland's restless sky.

A Shared Past of Magic and Loss

Tiger Lily stood in the grove, the luminescent moss casting a soft glow on her weathered boots, the air heavy with the scent of ancient magic and the faint tang of jungle rain. Her past as a fairy, a guardian under the Blue Fairy's tutelage, tasked with steering destiny against the tide of darkness, hung like a shadow over her. She had been woven into a prophecy tied to Rumpelstiltskin, a beacon meant to thwart Fiona's descent into the Black Fairy's malice. Her failure had shattered her, leaving a fractured heart and a lingering aura of enchantment that clung to her like dew to a leaf. Eldrin, perched on a low branch, his violet-tinged feathers shimmering, watched her with knowing eyes, his curse of silence broken by her presence, a soul who had once danced with starlight.

"You were meant to guide destiny," Eldrin said, his voice a blend of sorrow and steel, his beak clicking as he shifted. "As was I, bound to a sorcerer who sought to seal Neverland's rifts. We both failed, Flameheart, but your spark woke me from silence. Perhaps we can mend what's broken." Tiger Lily's jaw tightened, her fingers brushing the scars on her knuckles, remnants of battles fought to atone. "I left destiny behind when I shed my wings," she said, her tone low, edged with pain. "I'm no guardian now, just a warrior who fights to survive." Eldrin's eyes gleamed, undeterred. "Surviving's a start, but you still hum with magic. Neverland's heart feels it, and so do I."

She paced the grove, her braid swaying, raven feathers catching the moonlight. “Your sorcerer, what happened to him?” she asked, her voice softer, curiosity piercing her guard. Eldrin’s wings drooped, his glow dimming. “The eclipse swallowed him, trying to seal a rift that bled nightmares. His magic bound me to this grove, silent until one with true magic came. You, Flameheart, broke that curse.” He paused, his gaze piercing. “But my power fades beyond Neverland’s borders. The longer I’m away, the weaker I grow, realm-jumping tires me, saps my spark. Here, I’m alive. Out there, I’m a shadow of myself.” Tiger Lily stopped, her gray eyes meeting his. “Then why stay with me, bird? I’m no fairy now, just a wanderer.” Eldrin chuckled, a dry, witty sound. “Because wanderers find paths others miss. We’re both exiles, you and I. Let’s carve a new destiny, or at least a good fight.” Her lips twitched, a reluctant smile breaking through. “You’re a bold one, Eldrin. Alright, let’s see what this jungle’s hiding.” The grove’s runes pulsed, sealing their pact under the silvered canopy.

Eldrin’s Powers and Personality

Eldrin, the silver-and-violet African Grey, was no mere bird. Once the familiar of a sorcerer who wove spells to bind Neverland’s chaos, his magic had waned over a century of solitude, tethered to the grove’s ancient power. Tiger Lily’s arrival, her fairy-born aura crackling like a storm’s edge, rekindled his spark, though he warned her, “My strength is tied to Neverland’s heart. Beyond its shores, my magic fades, and realm-jumping leaves me weary, like a candle burned low.” His powers, though diminished, were formidable when wielded with her.

> *Echo-Sight*: His eyes glowed violet, replaying whispers of the past—war cries, secrets, or footsteps of hidden foes—guiding Tiger Lily through ambushes or forgotten trails.
>
> *Featherveil*: His wings cast a shimmering veil, cloaking her in invisibility for fleeting escapes, though the effort drained him outside Neverland’s magic.
>
> *Spell-Speak*: His ancient tongue wove incantations, unlocking hidden doors or mending minor wounds with a soft glow, but only in realms rich with magic.
>
> *Dreambinding*: At night, he slipped into dreams, delivering cryptic warnings or wisdom, his voice a beacon in the mind’s fog, though realm-jumping dulled this gift.

Eldrin’s personality was a blend of wit and wisdom, his sardonic quips, “Flameheart, you swing that blade like you’re angry at the world” masking a fierce loyalty forged through shared loss. He teased Tiger Lily relentlessly, calling her “Flameheart” for her fiery spirit, yet his respect shone through in quiet moments, urging her to face her past not with shame but with purpose. “You’re no fallen fairy,” he’d say, his beak clicking in mock exasperation. “You’re a storm with a sword, and I’m here for the lightning.” Tiger Lily would smirk, retorting, “Keep talking, bird, and I’ll clip your wings myself.” Their banter was a dance, sharp but warm, binding them as allies against Neverland’s shadows.

Partnership

The jungle trembled, its leaves quivering as if sensing the darkness stirring within. Tiger Lily crouched beneath the gnarled roots of an ancient tree, its bark etched with scars older than memory, the air thick with the scent of damp earth and the acrid tang of shadow magic. Her blade gleamed in her hand, its edge honed to a whisper, her breath steady despite the low growls echoing through the undergrowth. Shadow Beasts, born of Neverland’s forgotten nightmares, stalked closer, their forms twisting like smoke, their eyes glowing with a hunger for light. Eldrin landed silently on her shoulder, his silver-violet feathers shimmering faintly, his voice a low whisper. “Three of ‘em, Flameheart. One to your left, two skulking behind. They’re starved for your spark.”

“Then they’ll choke on it,” she muttered, her gray eyes narrowing, her muscles coiling like a panther’s. Eldrin’s eyes flared violet, his wings spreading wide. “Let’s give ‘em a show,” he said, his tone laced with sardonic glee. A ripple of silver light burst from his feathers, Featherveil, cloaking them in invisibility, the air shimmering like a heatwave. The beasts lunged, snarling at empty air, their claws raking the earth where she’d stood moments before. Tiger Lily moved like a wraith, her blade slicing through shadow-flesh with lethal grace, blood like ink spattering the roots. Eldrin soared above, his ancient tongue chanting a Spell-Speak incantation, sharp and melodic. Vines surged from the earth, their thorns gleaming like daggers, binding the beasts in a writhing cage.

One beast broke free, lunging for Tiger Lily. Eldrin's Echo-Sight hummed, replaying its growl to pinpoint its path. "Duck left, now!" he squawked. She spun, her blade severing its claw mid-strike. The last beast fell, its form dissolving into mist. Tiger Lily straightened, wiping blood from her blade, her breath heavy but steady. "You're not just a bird," she said, a faint smirk tugging at her lips. Eldrin preened, his feathers glowing faintly. "And you're not just a warrior, Flameheart. That fairy spark's still in you. It's why we found each other." She sheathed her blade, her eyes glinting with resolve. "Keep that up, and I'll make you walk home." He chuckled, a dry, knowing sound. "I'd fly, but Neverland's where my magic sings. Take me beyond, and I'm a tired old parrot." The jungle stilled, its whispers fading, their victory a quiet flame in the darkness.

Weeks later, they reached a cliffside where the wind sang through jagged stones, their surfaces carved with runes that glowed faintly under a sky bruised with twilight. The air hummed with a melody both mournful and alive, the scent of salt and moss mingling with the faint crackle of ancient magic. Tiger Lily knelt beside a stone, her fingers tracing its weathered runes, their warmth pulsing against her skin like a heartbeat. Eldrin perched on a nearby ledge, his usual wit replaced by a somber stillness, his violet eyes dimmed as if lost in memory. "This place," he said, his voice low, "was the heart of Neverland's magic. My master brought me here when I was a fledgling, my feathers still soft." Tiger Lily's gaze softened, her braid swaying as the wind tugged at her raven feathers. "What happened to him, Eldrin?"

He shifted, his glow fading slightly. "The eclipse. When the stars vanished, so did he, trying to seal a rift that bled nightmares into this world. His magic tethered me to Neverland, but it weakens when I leave its shores." His beak clicked, a rare note of vulnerability. "I've waited a century, hoping for one who could finish what he began." Tiger Lily stood, the wind whipping her cloak, her gray eyes fierce with purpose. "You think I'm that one?" Eldrin's eyes gleamed, a spark of hope. "You were a fairy, Flameheart. You hear the land's pain, feel its pulse. You're no exile, you're its voice." She gripped her blade's hilt, her voice steady. "Then let's finish it together, bird." Eldrin hopped onto her shoulder, his feathers glowing faintly, a wry chuckle escaping him. "Flameheart, you were born for this. But don't expect me to shine bright if we hop realms. I'll be a grumpy shadow by then." She smirked, the stones' song rising around them, a call to heal Neverland's wounds as their pact deepened under the twilight sky.

The Emberclaw Pact

Smoke rose like a beacon through the northern cliffs of Neverland, curling into a sky heavy with the threat of rain, the air thick with the scent of scorched earth and blood. Tiger Lily and Eldrin had been tracking a strange energy, a pulse of fire and shadow, when they crested a ridge and found a battlefield below. The Emberclaw, a fierce warrior tribe descended from fire spirits, fought with relentless fury, their obsidian armor glinting like molten glass, their faces painted with crimson ash that glowed faintly in the dusk. Twisted creatures of shadow and bone, spawn of Neverland's darkest rifts, swarmed them, their claws tearing through the air, feeding on fear. "They're outnumbered," Eldrin said, circling above, his violet eyes scanning the fray. "The shadows thrive on despair, and I'm not at my best after that last realm-jump, my magic's thin." Tiger Lily's grip tightened on her blade, her voice like steel. "Then we'll make do, bird. Let's burn 'em out."

She leapt into the fray, her blade singing through the air, a blur of silver and fire as she struck with a warrior's grace, her raven feathers dancing in the wind. Eldrin soared overhead, his weakened magic straining but fierce, casting bursts of silver flame that seared shadow-flesh, his Echo-Sight replaying enemy snarls to guide her strikes. "Left, Flameheart, two coming fast!" he squawked, his wings flaring with Featherveil to cloak her briefly, though the effort made his glow flicker. The Emberclaw rallied, their chants rising like thunder, their spears flashing as they followed her lead. Tiger Lily fought like a storm, relentless and precise, her fairy-born spark amplifying Eldrin's magic. His Spell-Speak wove vines to trip the beasts, though he panted, "Neverland's my strength, this would be easier here than anywhere else." Together, they turned the tide, the last shadow dissolving into ash as silence fell over the valley, the ground littered with bones and embers.

That night, around a roaring fire that crackled with the scent of pine and resin, the Emberclaw chieftain, Kaelra, approached, her towering frame clad in obsidian armor, her eyes like burning coals. "You fight with the fury of flame and the wisdom of wind," she said, her voice deep and resonant, her palm marked with the tribe's phoenix sigil. "You're not just allies. You're kin." Tiger Lily glanced at Eldrin, perched on a nearby branch, his feathers dim from the battle's toll. "We've wandered long enough," he said, his wit softened by weariness. "Time we stopped running, Flameheart. Neverland's my home, outside it, I fade fast." Kaelra extended her hand, her sigil glowing faintly. "Stay. Teach us. Learn from us. Be Emberclaw." Tiger Lily placed her hand over Kaelra's, her gray eyes fierce with resolve. "We will, chieftain. This is our fight now." Eldrin's eyes gleamed, a spark of pride. "Good choice, Flameheart. Let's

hope they've got room for a bird who's useless off this island." Kaelra laughed, a rare sound. "Plenty of room, spirit-guide." The fire roared higher, sealing their bond under Neverland's starless sky.

In the moons that followed, Tiger Lily wove her fairy-born magic into the Emberclaw's fiery tactics, becoming a revered warrior-teacher, her blade and storm-spark guiding their young fighters through Neverland's perils. Eldrin, once a lonely relic bound to a forgotten grove, found purpose as a spirit-guide to the tribe's mystics, his Echo-Sight and Spell-Speak lighting their paths, though he often grumbled, "Take me beyond Neverland, and I'm just a tired parrot, realm-jumping's no friend to my magic." His wit remained sharp, teasing Tiger Lily as "Flameheart" before dawn drills, though his loyalty shone in quiet moments, perched above her tent, his violet eyes watching the stars.

One night, under a canopy of fireflies that danced like fairy dust, Eldrin settled on a branch above her tent, his feathers glowing faintly in Neverland's embrace. "You were always meant to lead, Flameheart," he said, his voice soft but certain. "Not from some lofty throne, but from the fire of battle and heart." Tiger Lily leaned back, her braid swaying, a rare smile softening her scarred features. "And you were meant to nag me, bird," she retorted, her tone warm with camaraderie. "But you're right. … This tribe, this fight… it's home." She paused, her gray eyes reflecting the fireflies' glow. "Even if you're weaker than a hatchling outside this jungle." Eldrin squawked, mock-offended, "Cheeky warrior! Keep me in Neverland, and I'll outshine your spark yet." Their laughter mingled with the fireflies' dance, the Emberclaw's chants echoing in the distance, their bond a beacon in Neverland's wild heart, a home forged in fire and magic.

Appendix 3
The Eclipse Syndicate

They were an entity shrouded in secrecy, moving like a ghost through the fabric of existence. The whisper in the void, the storm that leaves only ruin in its wake. A soulless dominion lurking in the abyss, they rose, they fell, and yet they always returned, stronger, more formidable, unstoppable at full strength. They were the unseen force that manipulated realms without an identity, a harbinger of catastrophe feared but rarely witnessed. Once worshipped as gods, now long forgotten, their presence endured, buried in lost prophecy older than time itself. Erased from all records, they remained a terror whispered in hushed voices. They noticed everything.

When Killian claimed the mantle of Captain Hook, the Syndicate stirred. “The Sea has risen, Steel is here,” one among them murmured. When Desylva entered the world, they took heed. “The Storm has broken, she has come.”

The Syndicate's gaze lingered often upon Veyra. They listened when the elders gathered children beside firelight and old stones. They heard every retelling of the *Ballad of Captain Hook*. Most children listened, imagined adventure, then forgot. But one did not. The storm-child returned again and again. Night after night. She asked questions the others never asked. She memorized every verse, even ones others ignored. She lingered on the prophecies while the rest chased simpler tales. She searched for truths hidden between the words.

The Syndicate observed.
"She listens."

Years passed. Her fascination only deepened.
"She remembers."

More years passed. The obsession remained.
"She is the one who hears the call."

And so they waited, watching as fascination became obsession, and obsession became destiny. For years they had watched Storm and Steel move separately across the world. Steel trapped within Neverland’s borders. Storm surviving alone upon distant shores. Separate. Unaware. Unconnected. The distance between them spanned realms. The Syndicate waited. The time had come for the paths foretold by prophecy to finally converge.

"The hour approaches."
"The pieces are in motion."
"Bring them together."

In Veyra a storm rose where no storm should have existed. When Desylva clung to the rock beneath a dying storm, it was the Syndicate that reached into the currents between realms. Hidden hands twisted ancient pathways. Forgotten currents shifted.

In Neverland a storm was kindled. A portal was torn open where none should have existed. The Jolly Roger was drawn toward it while Storm was guided toward Steel.

Neither knew the hand that moved them. Killian believed he was chasing freedom. Desylva believed she was fighting for survival. Both believed they had chosen their course. The Syndicate allowed them that belief.

The portal deposited the Jolly Roger precisely where it needed to. At exactly the right moment. Not earlier. Not later.

"Steel has found Storm."
"The first thread is tied."
"Let destiny proceed."

When Killian brought Desylva aboard the Jolly Roger, the Syndicate’s time loomed closer. “Storm and Steel have connected, our time is approaching.”

When they kissed for the first time, the tides began to shift. “Their union has set our grand return in motion,” one declared. When they made love for the first time, another whispered, “Each time they join, they fuel our fire.”

---.---

Far beyond mortal sight, the Syndicate turned its gaze once more toward Storm and Steel. They watched as the Obsidian Vault fell. They watched as black towers shattered. They watched as ancient walls that had endured for ages collapsed into fire and ash. For the first time in many years, silence settled among them.

"The prison is gone."
"It has been empty for a very long time."
"Their hands have disturbed old graves."

Ash and shadow drifted through forgotten memories. A fortress of black glass. A thing bound beneath stone. Ancient wardens. Ancient wars. All lost to time.

"The keepers would not be pleased."
"They are dust."
"But the memory remains."

Far below, Storm and Steel fled the dying fortress, unaware that eyes older than kingdoms had witnessed every step.

"The Shadow Cloak has changed hands."
"The chain endures."
"The prophecy advances."

The Syndicate fell silent once more. Watching. Waiting. Remembering.

---.---

The Vanishing Wood was chosen as a proving ground for evaluating emotional bonds resistant to magical interference. A place where false paths flourished and certainty dissolved. A place where illusion fed upon memory and separation.

Storm and Steel entered. The Wood divided them. It offered confusion. It offered distance. It offered solitude. Yet both continued the search. They followed no map. They followed no trail. They followed each other. What followed mirrored manifestations recorded only rarely throughout history. The signs were familiar. The pattern endured.

The Syndicate watched.

"The bond endures."
"The thread remains unbroken."
"The prophecy holds."

The result was deemed favorable. Previous projections remained unchanged. Confidence increased. No deviation from prophetic expectations was observed.

---.---

Far from the seas where Storm and Steel sailed, another thread of the prophecy was tested. Upon a forgotten island near Neverland, dark enchantments spread among the Emberclaw. Voices vanished. Ravens gathered. Despair rooted itself where hope had once flourished. Another design woven quietly into the greater tapestry. The Syndicate watched.

"The voices fade."
"The tribe weakens."
"Let us see if they answer the call."

And answer they did. A weary familiar crossed realms to seek them. Storm and Steel came willingly. Through cliffs and shadow, through curses and fear, they climbed toward the source. The darkness was broken. The stolen voices returned. The Syndicate watched.

"The call was heard."
"The bond responds."
"The prophecy remains unchanged."

Another thread held firm.

---.---

Far beyond the sight of sailors and kings, the Syndicate made its first overt move.

The treasures gathered by Storm and Steel across countless trials vanished in a single flash. Relics won through blood, sacrifice, and impossible quests disappeared without struggle, without warning, without a trace. The hold of the Jolly Roger stood empty. The Syndicate watched.

"The hoard is secured."
"The first collection is complete."
"Let them follow."

Storm sensed the disturbance immediately. Steel vowed pursuit. Together they resolved to reclaim what had been taken. Yet even among the ancient powers of the realms, whispers of concern spread.

The Blue Fairy appeared in secret, risking much simply to deliver a warning. She spoke of eyes in the darkness. Of forces moving beyond mortal understanding. Of plans already set in motion. For a fleeting moment, fear touched even her. The Syndicate watched.

"Light has seen us."
"Light is afraid."
"As it should be."

Still Storm and Steel refused to turn away. The warning was heard. It was not heeded. The Syndicate approved.

"They continue."
"The path remains unchanged."
"The prophecy advances."

---.---

The prophecy had endured every trial. The bond had survived every projection. Observation continued. Yet certainty demanded proof. Not through relics. Not through ancient trials. Through loss. Storm would be removed. Steel would be denied. The reaction would be observed.

A quiet port was selected. Mortal hands were selected for the task. Disposable agents. Unaware of the greater design they served. Coin was offered. Instructions were delivered. Take the storm-touched one. Hold her until moonrise. Wait. The agents obeyed. The kidnappers never knew the true purpose of their task. They believed coin guided the operation. They believed they were delivering a valuable captive to an unknown patron.

The Syndicate watched.
"Remove Storm."
"Observe Steel."
"Measure the response."

Storm resisted. Steel noticed. Steel pursued. The hours between proved enlightening. No hesitation was observed. No alternative path was considered. No distance slowed the pursuit. Steel searched. Steel hunted. The result was

immediate. The search began without hesitation. The pursuit never slowed. No bargain was considered. No alternative was entertained. No obstacle altered the outcome. Steel found. The bond endured.

The Syndicate watched.

"The storm remained defiant."
"The steel remained unwavering."
"The response exceeded projections."
"The attachment deepens."
"The bond strengthens."

Questions lingered among the hidden observers.
Was the bond merely affection?
Was it loyalty?
Was it something older?
Something foretold?
Was it love?
Was it destiny?
Were the two now inseparable components of the same design?

No consensus was reached. None was required. The outcome remained favorable. The prophecy held. Confidence increased. The path remained unchanged.

---.---

Storm and Steel had endured separation. They had endured temptation. They had endured fear. Yet another variable remained untested.

Expression.

What truths emerged when thought could no longer be hidden? What remained concealed when every word was forced into the open? The spell was woven. A melody carried upon cursed mist. A voice hidden behind laughter.

The Jolly Roger became the stage. The crew became the chorus. Storm and Steel became unwilling performers.

The Syndicate watched.
"The mask is removed."
"The hidden becomes spoken."
"The bond is exposed."

Throughout the ordeal, observations accumulated. Steel's first instinct was Storm. Storm's first instinct was Steel. Neither sought freedom alone. Neither considered escape without the other. Even when reason failed. Even when dignity vanished. Even when the ship itself joined the song. The pattern remained unchanged.

The Syndicate watched.
"The harmony persists."
"The thread remains stable."
"The prophecy holds."

Yet another result proved unexpected. Light intervened. The Blue Fairy answered the call. She recognized the disturbance. She sensed the hand behind the song. For a fleeting moment, ancient fear touched ancient light.

The Syndicate noticed.
"Light has heard the music."
"Light suspects."
"Light remembers."

The spell was broken. The observations remained. Storm and Steel departed with questions. The Syndicate departed with answers. Another trial concluded. Another prophecy fulfilled. Another thread secured.

---.---

The bond had endured separation. The bond had endured temptation. The bond had endured illusion. Yet one question persisted. What happened when Storm lost herself completely? Would Steel still find her? Would Steel still reach her? Or would the storm consume the woman at its center?

A quiet port was selected. A suitable agent was chosen. A harmless face. A forgettable voice. A cup placed in an unsuspecting hand.

The Syndicate watched.
"Awaken the storm."
"Remove restraint."
"Measure the response."

The powder entered the tea. The tea reached Storm. Moments later, lightning answered. The market descended into chaos. Wind howled through crowded streets.

Steel felt the disturbance. Steel ran toward it.

The Syndicate observed carefully. No hesitation. No fear. No concern for personal safety. Steel entered the storm willingly. The pattern repeated. Storm raged. Steel endured.

The Syndicate watched.
"The steel advances."
"The storm does not strike."
"The bond persists."

At the center of the tempest, Steel extended his hand. Words were spoken. A kiss followed. The storm ended. The result was immediate. The storm yielded. The attachment overpowered the catalyst. The bond overpowered the disturbance.

The Syndicate watched.
"Confirmed."
"The connection is genuine."
"The response is repeatable."

The observing agent departed unseen. The trial had provided its answer. The bond was no longer theoretical. It was measurable. It was predictable. It was real. The Syndicate watched as Storm recovered and Steel remained at her side.

Questions that had lingered through previous trials finally faded. Was it affection? Was it loyalty? Was it destiny?

No further distinction mattered. The outcome remained unchanged.

"Storm chooses Steel."
"Steel chooses Storm."
"The prophecy holds."

---.---

Storm and Steel stood upon the threshold of union. The pattern remained intact. The bond endured. The projections remained favorable. A proposal had been accepted. A future had been chosen. The thread strengthened.

The Syndicate watched.
"The union approaches."

"The bond deepens."
"The prophecy advances."

Observation continued. No intervention was required. No correction was necessary. For a time, all remained as foreseen. Then something changed. A shadow moved beyond the design. An ancient player stepped upon the board unbidden. The Dark One interfered. For the first time in many cycles, uncertainty spread among the observers.

"The pattern has shifted."
"This variable was not introduced by us."
"The thread has been severed."

Far below, a wedding remained unspoken. A future remained unfinished. Steel reached. Storm resisted. Neither prevailed. The Dark One carried Storm beyond sight. The Syndicate watched. Silence followed. Long silence. Ancient silence. The kind reserved for events without precedent. At last, the silence broke.

"The prophecy has deviated."
"No."
"The thread remains."
"The path has changed."

The distinction mattered. Storm lived. Steel endured. The bond remained intact though distance stood between them. The observers turned their gaze once more toward the scattered pieces. For the first time since Storm and Steel had met, the future could no longer be mapped with certainty.

The Syndicate watched.
"The Dark One interferes."
"Observation continues."

The Syndicate waited. And once Storm and Steel were torn apart, the Syndicate fell silent once more, retreating into the depths, waiting... watching... until the time came to rise again. They fully believed the path remained inevitable. Storm and Steel would reunite. The child foretold by prophecy would come. The gate would open. Their return would begin. They waited. They waited for almost 50 years. Then finally it happened. Storm and Steel reunited. The prophecy awakened. The path reopened. Then the Dark One intervened again. The thread was cut. Storm was gone. Steel was broken. The future was changed. The child never came. The gate never opened. They finally realized and understood. The prophecy failed. It would never be fulfilled.

Appendix 4
Rumpelstiltskin's Motives

Rumpelstiltskin, the Dark One, was never a man of simple greed. Though gold and power were his currency, his motives ran deeper, tangled in a web of fear, control, and an insatiable hunger for what he'd lost. When he first heard whispers of Desylva and Killian's quest for the Tears of the Moon, his interest wasn't merely in the gem's fabled ability to break curses. No, it was Desylva herself who caught his eye. A woman marked by a sorceress's curse, her spirit unbroken, despite the magic binding her. To Rumpelstiltskin, she was a mirror to his own fractured soul, a puzzle to unravel, and a prize to wield.

His initial motive was practical. Power. The Tears of the Moon could undo any curse, including the Dark One's own. A tantalizing prospect for a man who both reveled in and resented his immortality. But Desylva's curse intrigued him more. It wasn't just a shackle; it was a wellspring of raw, untapped magic, a relic of an older, wilder sorcery than his own. He saw in her a battery, a living conduit he could drain to amplify his own strength, perhaps even to defy the dagger that tethered him to his dark fate.

Years passed. Yet events beyond even Rumpelstiltskin's manipulations began to concern him. What started as fascination became unease. What became unease became alarm. For the first time in many years, Rumpelstiltskin found himself watching forces he did not fully control.

Rumpelstiltskin had sensed the emergence of The Eclipse Syndicate. He traced their resurgence back to Killian and Desylva. He realized that their passion, their bond, was the Syndicate's source of power. He knew what had to be done. He enlisted Regina in his quest to break them. Every attempt failed. Each scheme only strengthened them. Each setback brought them closer. Each victory deepened the bond he sought to shatter. Desperation forced his hand. He had to sever the bond at its core. Kidnapping Desylva, wrenching her from Killian's arms, he succeeded. The severance fractured the Syndicate's strength.

But even that victory was not enough. The Syndicate's weakening solved one problem. Killian Jones remained another. Rumpelstiltskin had never been content merely to win. He needed his enemies broken. Power alone didn't explain the cruelty of faking her death. His intention to possess her power was never impulsive. It was a heist planned with precision, her screams a symphony to his triumph. That twist was personal. Rumpelstiltskin knew Killian Jones, Captain Hook, was a man driven by vengeance and love, two forces that had once shaped Rumpelstiltskin's own path. By convincing Killian that Desylva was dead, he didn't just eliminate a threat; he broke a rival. He'd seen Killian's devotion, the way he fought for her, the way he softened under her gaze. It echoed too closely the love Rumpelstiltskin had once felt for Bae, his son, before cowardice and darkness tore them apart. To see Killian suffer, to watch him drown in despair as Rumpelstiltskin once had, was a perverse satisfaction. A way to rewrite his own pain onto someone else's story.

But there was more. Keeping Desylva alive, bound in enchanted chains in his tower, revealed a deeper, almost compulsive need. Control. She wasn't just a tool; she was a defiance of his own isolation. Rumpelstiltskin, for all his deals and manipulations, was alone, shunned by those he'd betrayed, feared by those he ruled. Desylva, with her sharp tongue and unyielding will, was a captive companion, someone to taunt and test. He'd sit by her prison, spinning gold, and prod her with questions about Killian, about freedom, about love. Each answer a thread he'd twist into his own narrative. She fought back, spitting venom, and he relished it. In her resistance, he found a perverse reflection of his own struggle against the darkness within him.

Years later, when the curse swept them all to Storybrooke, his motives shifted subtly. The Tears of the Moon were lost to him. Killian still carried it. But Desylva remained a key. In this new world, her curse weakened, leaking magic he could still siphon, though less efficiently. He let her escape, perhaps deliberately, knowing she'd run to Killian.

Why? Because Rumpelstiltskin thrives on the long game. Their reunion wasn't an end, but a new beginning. A chance to watch them hope, to let them build something he could later destroy. He'd lost Bae, lost Belle's trust too many times, and now he'd orchestrate a tragedy to prove love always crumbles. Desylva and Killian together were a ticking clock, and he'd wait, patient as a spider, for the moment to pull the strings.

In his tower, later in his pawnshop, Rumpelstiltskin spun his plans. He wanted power to secure his immortality, revenge to salve old wounds, and control to fill the void of his loneliness. Desylva was the linchpin. Her magic, her spirit, her connection to Killian. All pieces in his endless chess match against fate. Kidnapping her wasn't just theft; it was a declaration that no one, not even a pirate and his tempest, could outrun the Dark One's shadow.

Yet the Dark One's plans did not end with her escape. From the shadows of his pawnshop, Rumpelstiltskin watched. He watched the reunion in Granny's Diner. He watched the true love's kiss ripple through Storybrooke. He watched the storm magic return to Desylva's veins. And for the first time in many years, he felt something unfamiliar. Fear. Not fear of Desylva alone. Fear of what Killian and Desylva became together.

He followed every step. The friendships she forged. Her growing influence over Storybrooke. Her reconciliation with former enemies. The way even Regina found herself extending an olive branch. Every new connection strengthened the thing Rumpelstiltskin feared most. She was no longer isolated. She was becoming part of the town itself.

While Storybrooke celebrated birthdays, danced aboard the Jolly Roger, and debated true love over coffee at Granny's Diner, the Dark One was never far away. He was figure glimpsing from across the street. A shadow lingering beyond the docks. A silhouette watching from a rooftop. Always observing. Always calculating. Always waiting. The town believed the danger was gone. He knew better. He was counting the days until he would be forced to act.

The moment Killian placed the second ring on her finger and declared his love before the town, He understood the danger had returned. The bond he had spent decades breaking had not merely survived. It had evolved. It was stronger now than it had ever been before.

Appendix 5
Captain's Folly
Fourth Revised Storybrooke Edition

"There are only one hundred and seventeen rules. It's perfectly straightforward."— Captain Killian Jones

CHAPTER 1
GAME PLAY

Objective

Captain's Folly is a card and coin game of strategy, luck, negotiation, and risk.

The primary objective is to become the first player to play your final card while still possessing Coins, thereby achieving ***Victory at Sea.***

Players accomplish this through:
- Strategic card play
- Tides and/or Mutinies
- Luck of the Sea cards
- Duels
- Coin management
- Negotiation
- Occasional nonsense
- Surviving the Captain's interpretation of the rules

If no player achieves ***Victory at Sea***, the Voyage may ***Return to Harbor*** and be decided by ***Final Draw***.

Versions of Play

FUN Version

The standard Storybrooke version of game.
No wagering is required. Players compete only for the honor of achieving ***Victory at Sea.***

GAMBLE Version

The traditional pirate version of game
A ***Locked Chest*** is introduced and a *Buy-In* is required before play begins. The winner of the Voyage claims the contents of the Locked Chest.

MULTIPLE DECK Option

Game may be played with more than one standard deck. May be used with either the FUN or GAMBLE Version.

Recommended Usage:

2-4 Players: One Deck
5-6 Players: Two Decks Recommended
Large Gatherings: Additional decks may be added as required.

When using multiple decks:

Duplicate cards are considered valid.
Duplicate Kings may create additional Tides.
Duplicate Queens may Counter additional Tides.
Additional Mutinies remain possible.
Consequences are the responsibility of the players.

Duplicate Card Rule

A player holding two or more completely identical cards (same suit and rank) may play them together as a single play.

May not be used with:
- Kings
- Queens
- Fives
- Tens
- Three of Hearts
- Any card currently affected by a Tide, Mutiny, Rule, or Event

Cards played together resolve as one play.

Captain Jones maintains this speeds up larger Voyages.
David Nolan maintains it encourages unnecessary chaos.
Captain Jones considers this a recommendation.

Matching Duplicate Rule

If a player possesses a card that exactly matches the previously played card in both rank and suit, they must play it.
This requirement overrides normal Tide restrictions.
Special Cards are exempt from this rule.
Playing an exact duplicate does not change the active Tide.

Example:
Player One plays Six of Spades.
Player Two possesses another Six of Spades. Player Two must immediately play the matching card.

Play then proceeds normally.

Players

2-6 Players (Recommended 4 Players)

Components

1 Standard Deck of 52 (To make things interesting you can use 2 or more decks)
1 Twelve-Sided Die (D12) – Originally two normal die. Replaced with a D12 in Storybrooke.
Luck Deck (25 Cards)
Curse Deck (25 Cards)
Neutral Deck (25 Cards)
3 Red Event Cards (blank)
Coin Pot
Treasure Chest containing 500 Coins Each player receives 20 Coins at the beginning of a Voyage.
Locked Chest (Gamble version only)
Key for Locked Chest (Gamble version only)

Select a Captain

Choose one player to act as Captain. All Players roll the die. Highest roll is Captain.
Captain takes the first turn.
If playing on a ship and the ship's Captain is playing, they are automatically Captain
If playing on land and a Captain is playing, they are automatically Captain.
If two or more Captain's are playing, they roll to see who gets to be Captain. Highest roll wins.

Ante

Each player contributes 5 Coins to the Pot at the start of every Voyage.

Dealing Cards

All cards are dealt.
The cards in your hand are all you'll receive unless a Rule, Luck Card, Curse Card, or Neutral Card says otherwise.

When using multiple decks, Shuffle all decks together into a single draw pile before dealing.

Dead Man's Hand (Optional)

When playing with fewer than four players, an additional hand may be dealt face down.
This hand is known as the Dead Man's Hand.

Only one may exist during a Voyage unless another Rule, Event Card, or Extraordinary Circumstance says otherwise.

The Dead Man's Hand does not take turns.
- Counts as an eliminated player for card effects.
- May be affected by Event Cards that reference eliminated players.

Before the first turn, the Captain may exchange their hand for the Dead Man's Hand and must accept whatever is found there.

Prepare Event Decks

Place them face down.
Place the D12 nearby.

Red Event Cards

Place one Red Event Card at the bottom of every pile regardless of the number of standard playing decks being used.

When a Red Event Card reaches the top of a deck: Shuffle that deck and return Red Card to the bottom.
Continue play.

All Red Cards are removed upon Return to Harbor.
They are returned to the bottom of their respective Event Decks before the next Voyage begins.

Treasure Chest

Contains all Coins not currently owned by a player or contained in the Pot.
It supplies Coins that are required by: Event Cards, Certain Rules, Certain Amendments, Extraordinary Circumstances.

In the unlikely event the chest becomes empty, any action requiring Coins to be taken from the Treasure Chest is ignored.
If a ***Luck Card*** would award Coins from the Treasure Chest, the player may draw another Luck Card instead.
Curse Cards requiring payment to the Treasure Chest still apply.

Captain Jones maintains the Treasure Chest has never been emptied.
Leroy maintains this is mathematically impossible. Captain Jones maintains Leroy is counting wrong.

At the end of every Voyage, all Coins are returned to the Treasure Chest before beginning a new Voyage or ending play.
If playing the ***GAMBLE*** Version, a new Buy-In must be established before the next Voyage begins.

Locked Chest

Used only during the Gamble Version.

The Locked Chest begins each Voyage unlocked with the key inside.

Before play begins Players agree upon a Buy-In. Each player contributes items of equal value.

Acceptable Buy-Ins may include: Gold, Silver, Gems, or any other valuables approved by the Captain
Storybrooke Note: Cash is generally considered acceptable.

Once all Buy-Ins have been contributed:
The Chest is locked.
The key is placed in the Pot.

The contents of the Locked Chest may not be inspected, altered, removed, borrowed against, or redistributed during the Voyage.

The winner opens the Locked Chest and claims its contents.
The key remains inside the Locked Chest until the next Voyage.

Turn Order

Turns proceed clockwise.
The Captain goes first.

Card Play

Players play one card during their turn. (unless an Event card or Rule says otherwise)
Resolve any effects.
End your turn
Cards remain in play unless another Rule affects them.

Standard Play

The Captain begins each round by playing a non-special card.
The suit of that card becomes the active Tide.
Play proceeds clockwise.

A player must follow the active Tide using the following order of priority:
Play a higher non-special card of the active Tide suit.
If unable, play a lower non-special card of the active Tide suit.
If no card of the active Tide suit is available, play a card matching the rank of the previously played card.

If a player changes the suit by matching the rank of the previously played card, the newly played suit becomes the active Tide.

Example

Captain plays Four of Spades.
Active Tide = Spades.

Player Two plays Eight of Spades.
Player Three has no Spade higher than Eight but possesses Six of Spades. Player Three plays Six of Spades.
Player Four has no Spades but possesses Six of Diamonds. Player Four may play the Six of Diamonds.

Player Four's play changes the active Tide to Diamonds because the card matches the rank of the previously played card.

Unable to Follow Tide

If a player cannot make any legal play:

The player contributes 1 Coin to the Pot.
The player's turn immediately ends.

The active Tide remains unchanged.

Captain's Privilege

The Captain may ignore Tide restrictions.
Instead of following the active Tide, the Captain may play any legal non-special card.
The newly played card immediately establishes the active Tide.
This action may not be challenged.
If the Captain is eliminated, he is still the Captain. He is still the boss.

Special Card Play

(see below for list of Special Cards)

May be played at any time regardless of the active Tide unless another Rule, Event Card, Tide, or Mutiny says otherwise.
Playing a Special Card does not change the active Tide.
Fives and Tens are not considered Special Cards for the purposes of Tide restrictions and must still be played normally.

Special Card Challenge

Any player may immediately challenge the play of a Special Card by any other player except the Captain. (The Captain can not be challenged)
The challenged player hands his cards over to the Captain (even if the captain is eliminated). The Captain will determine in said player possesses a legal non-special card that could have been played instead. If the player does:

- The Special Card is returned to that player's hand.
- The player must immediately play a legal card.
- The player gives 1 Coin to every player.
- The player contributes 1 Coin to the Pot.

If the Captain determines that there wasn't another card, the challenge is denied (unsuccessful) and:

- The Special Card remains in play.
- No penalties are assessed.

Card Transfer Protection

No effect may cause a player to possess fewer than two unplayed cards unless those cards are being played normally.

If an effect would reduce a player below two unplayed cards, that effect is modified according to the Rule, Event Card, or game effect creating it.

If no modification exists, the affected cards remain where they are.

Exception:

The Captain may voluntarily surrender their final card. If doing so leaves the Captain with no unplayed cards, the Captain immediately achieves ***Victory at Sea***.

Special Cards

Any King -- May claim a Tide. Unless another Rule says otherwise.
Any Queen -- May Counter a Tide. Unless another Rule says otherwise. (Special conditions may apply.)
Three of Hearts – immediately starts a Mutiny. This effect remains active until resolved.
Any Five or Ten -- Triggers Luck of the Sea cards. (see below)

Tides

Certain cards create or alter Tides. Multiple Tides may exist during a Voyage.
The exact interaction between Tides is governed by the active game state.
A Tide remains active until replaced or canceled.

Note: No one is entirely sure how many Tides exist. Captain Jones insists he knows.

Calm Waters

May affect

- Queens
- Certain Tides
- Certain Counters

Details remain disputed.

Mutiny

Triggered by Three of Hearts
- Certain Hearts may become affected while Mutiny remains active.
- Mutiny effects may persist across multiple turns. May affect cards play several turns later.
- May cross currents.
- May not make sense.

Cross Current Mutiny Clause

See Rule 68: Mutiny effects may continue to influence Hearts played later if said Hearts cross an active Current.
Note: Archie still does not understand this Rule.

Leeward Reversal

Mentioned frequently. Nobody remembers learning it.

Event Cards: Luck of the Sea

Triggered when a Five or Ten is played. Players must roll the D12
Draw a card from an Event Card (Your role will determine which deck)

Dice Results

If player rolls 2,4,6,8,10 -- Draw from LUCK DECK
If player rolls 3,5,7,9,11 -- Draw from CURSE DECK
If player rolls a 12 -- Draw from NEUTRAL DECK
If player rolls a 1 – Captain's Favor – The Captain decides which deck player must choose from. The Captain is not required to explain the decision. (This was added when dice were replaced with a D12)

Luck Deck

YOU STRUCK GOLD
Collect the entire Pot.

PAY DAY
Collect 3 Coins from every player.

STORM FAVOR
Player on your right gives you 2 Coins.

TIDAL WAVE
Player on your left gives you 2 Coins.

WISH
Collect 3 Coins from the player who had the best/strongest play last round.
If that is you, then choose the player who had the next best play.

SHIPWRECK TREASURE
Gain 5 Coins from the Treasure Chest.

TAILWIND
Take another turn immediately.

MERMAID'S GIFT
Steal one unplayed card from another player. (Then give that player one of yours)

LOST SOUL'S LEGACY
If an eliminated player exists: place 2 of your cards into their unplayed pile.
If multiple eliminated players exist: place 1 card into each pile.
If no eliminated player exist: Take 3 coins from Treasure Chest

DOUBLE DOWNSWELL
If you played a Five and have another Five, play it immediately.
If you played a Ten and have another Ten, play it immediately.

DUEL OF HONOR
Choose another player.
Both roll. Winner gains half the loser's coins.
Note: Used to be an actual sword duel. Modified at later date.

FAIR WINDS
Roll again.
Even = every player gives you 2 Coins.
Odd = every player gives you 3 Coins.

FAVORABLE CURRENT
Move one active Tide to a player of your choice.
If no active Tide take 1 coin from Treasure Chest

HIDDEN CACHE
Take 3 Coins from the Treasure Chest
and 1 Coin from every player.

SALVAGE RIGHTS
Choose a card previously played this Voyage.
Place it back into your hand.
Then immediately throw another card.

CAPTAIN'S PRAISE
Gain 4 Coins from the Treasure Chest.
If you're the Captain, gain 7.

FAIR TRADE
Take one card from another player.
Give them one of yours.

SMUGGLER'S PROFIT
Gain Coins from the Treasure Chest equal to the number of cards remaining in your hand.
If you're the Captain double it.

STARBOARD BLESSING
Your next card cannot be affected by a Curse Card.

GOOD TIDES
Cancel one active negative effect affecting you.

FOUND TREASURE MAP
Gain 3 coins from the Treasure Chest.
Draw another Luck card.

OLD DEBT REPAID
Choose a player.
They give you 4 Coins.

HARBOR FAVOR
Take 2 Coins from every player who has more Coins than you.

GHOST CREW
Gain 4 coins from Treasure Chest and immediately play another card.

LUCKY STAR
Keep this card face up.
Ignore the next Curse Card drawn against you.

Curse Deck

YOU HIT A REEF
Give 5 Coins to the Pot.

YOU SINK
Give 3 Coins to every player.

SIREN'S CALL
Give the player on your right 2 Coins.

KRAKEN'S HUNGER
Give the player on your left 2 Coins.

CURSED
Give 2 Coins to the player with the strongest play so far.
If that is you, then choose the player with the next best play.
Unless you are the captain.

SCURVY
Miss your next turn.

FOG BANK
Your next card is treated as one rank lower.

CUTPURSE
Give the richest player 3 Coins.

DEAD MAN'S BURDEN
If an eliminated player exists, take half of their unplayed cards. If the number of cards is odd, round down if you're the Captain, round up if your crew. If more than one eliminated player exists, add together all unplayed cards belonging to eliminated players. Take half of the combined total. You may take the cards from one pile or split them among multiple piles. If no eliminated players exist, contribute 7 Coins to the Pot.

DOOMSWELL
If you played a Five and have another Five, you MUST play it immediately.
If you played a Ten and have another Ten, you MUST play it immediately.

DUEL OF SHAME
Choose another player.
Both roll.
If you lose, surrender half your coins.
Note: Used to be an actual sword duel. Modified at later date

BLACK TIDE
Roll again.
Even = give every player 2 Coins.
Odd = give every player 3 Coins.

ROTTEN CARGO
Place one unplayed card face up before you.
This card becomes your next mandatory play.

BAD WINDS
Miss your next opportunity to claim a Tide.

MUTINOUS CREW
Give 2 Coins to every other player.

LEAK BELOW DECK
Give 4 Coins to the Pot.

BROKEN COMPASS
Your next card must be played blindly.

CURSED MAP
Draw another Curse Card immediately.

BOARDING PARTY
Reveal your highest unplayed card.
Player with lowest coin total takes it and gives you one of theirs.

UNPAID DOCK FEES
Pay 5 Coins to the Pot.

SHIP'S DAMAGE
Lose your next turn unless you can convince another player to pay the Pot 2 Coins for repairs.

POOR NAVIGATION
Reveal your lowest card.
This card becomes your next mandatory play.

FOG OF CONFUSION
You may not challenge any Rule until your next turn.

STOLEN SUPPLIES
Player to your left takes 3 Coins from you.

MISFIRED CANNON
Roll again.
Odd = lose 3 Coins.
Even = lose 5 Coins.

Neutral Deck

WHIRLPOOL
Collect all UNPLAYED cards.
Shuffle and Redeal.
Every player contributes 5 Coins to the Pot.

TEMPEST
Swap hands with player of your choice.
All other players contribute 3 Coins to the Pot.

ROGUE PORTAL
Collect ALL cards. (Played and Unplayed)
Shuffle and redeal.
Every player contributes 5 Coins to the Pot.

SHORE LEAVE
Player may ignore one Rule this round.
Unless doing so would break another Rule.

STRANGE TIDES
Reverse turn order.

STOWAWAY
Every player passes one card to the left.

HARBOR INSPECTION
All players reveal one card.

SHIFTING CURRENT
Players rotate hands clockwise.

FAVOR EXCHANGE
Each player gives 2 Coins to the player on their left.

SHIPWIDE CONFUSION
Current active Tide immediately changes owner.
All players roll the D12.
Highest roll claims the Tide.
If no Tide is active, every player gains 1 Coin from the Treasure Chest.

WAYWARD SEAGULL
The richest player and poorest player swap 3 Coins.

OPEN SEA
No special effects may be played until the next Five or Ten.

UNCHARTED WATERS
Everyone rolls.
Highest gains 5 Coins from Treasure Chest.
Lowest gives 5 coins to the Treasure Chest.

EMERGENCY REPAIRS
Every player contributes 2 Coins to the Pot.

SMUGGLER'S ROUTE
Swap places in turn order with any player.

ROGUE WAVE
All active Tide effects immediately end.

PORT AUTHORITY REVIEW
Captain must explain one Rule.
Explanation not required to help.

BARREL OF RUM
Every player gains 2 Coins from the Treasure Chest

LOST LOGBOOK
One active Rule is ignored until the next round.

FALSE HARBOR
All players contribute 5 Coins to Pot. The current Voyage may not end this round.
All players recover one previously played card of their choice if possible.

CROSSWINDS
All players pass one card to the player in their right
Then one card to the player on their left.

STRANGE FOG
Everyone reveals their highest card.

CREW DISPUTE
All players vote on something.
Result must be implemented.
Exact subject remains negotiable.

FOUND RULE
Captain may immediately invent a temporary Rule.
Expires at end of round.

RULE AUDIT
Choose any game effect currently in play.
The Captain must explain why it is happening.
Accuracy is optional.

Run Out of Coins

If a player reaches 0 Coins, they must choose one option.

FORFEIT

Player leaves the Voyage.
Remaining cards are placed face down before them.
These cards may still be affected by certain Event Cards.

LOAN FROM THE TREASURE CHEST

Borrow coins from the Treasure Chest.
Repayment: Double the borrowed amount.

TAKE A CHANCE

Only available if the player has an unplayed Five OR Ten

Play the card
Roll the die.
Hope for the best.

FRIENDSHIP

Ask another player for a loan.

The player asked may Accept or Reject request.
If they reject, the player may ask another player or Forfeit.
If they accept, terms are negotiated.

If the Terms are accepted.
Coins exchanged.
Borrower receives one card from every player.

If the eliminated player rejects the terms they immediately forfeit.
If no agreement is reached, the player immediately Forfeits.

RESTOCK

Available only during the Gamble Version.

The player pays an amount equal to the original Buy-In into the Locked Chest.

The Captain:

Unlocks the Locked Chest.
Confirms payment.
Relocks the Chest.
Returns the key to the Pot.

The player receives:

20 Coins from the Treasure Chest.
One card from every active player.

Protection Clause:

A player with fewer than 3 unplayed cards can not surrender a card through RESTOCK.
Instead, the RESTOCKING player must give that player 2 Coins from their newly acquired supply.

End of Voyage

A Voyage may end in one of two ways.

VICTORY AT SEA

A player successfully plays their final card while still possessing Coins.
That player immediately claims the Pot and wins the Voyage.

RETURN TO HARBOR

If all remaining players reach their final card during the same round, no player achieves Victory at Sea.
Players then have to decide which option they want to pursue.

Option 1: Begin a New Voyage
Collect all Cards. Shuffle and Redeal. Play continues.

Option 2: Return to Harbor
Proceed to Final Draw.

Final Draw

Eliminated players forfeit all claims to the Pot and may not draw.

Collect all cards from every player (active or not)
Shuffle.
Each player still participating in the Voyage cuts the deck.
Only active players draw a card.
Highest card wins the entire Pot.

Ties are resolved by suit: Spades > Hearts > Diamonds > Clubs
If a tie still remains, tied players draw again.

Captain is Boss

If at any point two Rules conflict: The Captain decides.
If the Captain has been eliminated: The Captain still decides.
If anyone complains: Refer to Rule 117. "The Captain is always right." (Even if another rule says otherwise)

Notes

David disputes this rule.
Archie is looking for documentation.
Grumpy considers it evidence.
Killian insists it has always been there

CHAPTER 2
Official Rule Index

CERTIFICATION OF AUTHENTICITY

This Rule Index has been reviewed and approved by the Office of Maritime Recreational Gaming, the Storybrooke Harbor Authority, and Captain Killian Jones. Subsequent review discovered that only one of those approvals could be independently verified. The parties responsible refuse to identify which one.

Some rules have been retired, modified, or replaced following the enactment of Storybrooke municipal regulations. The Publishers bear no responsibility for disagreements arising from missing, contradictory, forgotten, disputed, or newly discovered rules. In the event of uncertainty, consult the Captain. If the Captain is responsible for the uncertainty, consult Rule 117.

NOTICE TO ALL PLAYERS

By opening this Rulebook, participating in a Voyage, handling the cards, touching the Pot, drawing from the Luck of the Sea Decks, rolling the die, accepting Coin, offering Coin, borrowing Coin, lending Coin, disputing Coin, challenging a Tide, surviving a Mutiny, invoking a Current, crossing a Current, contesting a Current, or otherwise participating in a game of Captain's Folly, you acknowledge and accept the following:

Not all Rules are contained within this Rulebook.

Certain Rules may apply only under specific conditions, seasons, realms, magical jurisdictions, weather patterns, or nautical circumstances.

Some Rules are known to become active only:

During Winter Voyages
During Summer Storm Seasons
During Blood Moons
During Mermaid Migrations
Within Enchanted Forest territorial waters
Within Neverland territorial waters
While traversing active Realm Portals
During Kraken Alerts
During Whale Migrations
During active Mutinies
During simultaneous Mutinies
During Counter-Mutinies
During Leeward or Windward conditions
During Tidal or Harbor Events
During Captaincy Favor or Disputes
During Extraordinary Circumstances
On Tuesdays

Certain Rules were revised following relocation to Storybrooke, Maine, due to:

Municipal ordinances
Parking regulations
Insurance requirements
Harbor authority complaints
Repeated misunderstandings involving motor vehicles

Certain historical Rules remain preserved for traditional purposes despite being impossible to enforce within the Land Without Magic.

The validity of any Rule may be affected by:

Current Tide conditions
Previous Tide conditions
Future Tide conditions
Cross Currents or Counter Currents
Reverse Currents
Clarified Reverse Currents
Leeward Reversals
Clarified Leeward Reversals

Some Rules have been lost, damaged, forgotten, stolen, revised, disputed, misplaced, removed, replaced, suppressed, mistranslated, eaten by sea creatures, or otherwise rendered unavailable.

Newly discovered Rules may be considered legally valid provided:

The Captain remembers them,
The Captain claims to remember them,
The Captain can explain them confidently,
Or the Captain insists they have always existed.

Players acknowledging this Rulebook waive all claims arising from:

- Unexpected Rule Changes
- Previously Undocumented Rules
- Sudden Mutinies
- Coin Shortages
- Deck Reversals
- Portal Incidents
- Rogue Tides
- Kraken Interference
- Captaincy Disputes

HISTORICAL NOTE

Scholars remain divided on the exact number of active Rules governing Captain's Folly.
Most surviving editions list 117 Rules.
Older editions reference anywhere between 84 and 213 Rules.
One heavily damaged copy recovered from Neverland contains only the phrase: "You know the rules." Written 312 times.

RULE INDEX

Voyage & Setup

Rule 1 - Beginning a Voyage
Rule 2 - Establishing the Pot
Rule 3 - Selection of the Captain
Rule 4 - Determining Turn Order
Rule 5 - First Watch Procedures
Rule 6 - Fair Distribution of Cards
Rule 7 - Favorable Winds
Rule 8 - Unfavorable Winds
Rule 9 - Open Sea Conditions
Rule 10 - Harbor Departure Requirements

Tides & Currents

Rule 11 - Standard Tide Declaration
Rule 12 - Rising Tide
Rule 13 - Falling Tide
Rule 14 - Storm Tide
Rule 15 - Dead Tide
Rule 16 - Rogue Tide
Rule 17 - Counter Tide
Rule 18 - Counter-Counter Tide
Rule 19 - Cross Tide
Rule 20 - Reverse Cross Tide
Rule 21 - Coastal Current
Rule 22 - Deepwater Current
Rule 23 - Rogue Current
Rule 24 - Cross Current
Rule 25 - Double Cross Current

Navigation & Sea Conditions

Rule 26 - Windward Advantage
Rule 27 - Red Tide Exception
Rule 28 - Blue Tide Exception
Rule 29 - Harbor Fog Conditions
Rule 30 - Open Ocean Visibility
Rule 31 - Moonlit Crossing

Rule 32 - Starboard Passage
Rule 33 - Port Passage
Rule 34 - Safe Anchorage
Rule 35 - Offshore Drift

Strategic Play

Rule 36 - Tactical Withdrawal
Rule 37 - Emergency Realignment
Rule 38 - Salvage Rights
Rule 39 - Port Authority Exemption
Rule 40 - High Sea Priority
Rule 41 - Crew Consensus Clause
Rule 42 - Valid Captain's Folly Strategy
Rule 43 - Invalid Captain's Folly Strategy
Rule 44 - Conditional Strategy Exception
Rule 45 - Strategic Reversal

Coin & Pot Management

Rule 46 - Coin Collection Procedure
Rule 47 - Pot Redistribution Standards
Rule 48 - Emergency Borrowing Rights
Rule 49 - Interest on Maritime Loans
Rule 50 - Mutual Aid Provision
Rule 51 - Debt Settlement Requirements
Rule 52 - Mermaid Interference
Rule 53 - Unauthorized Treasure Acquisition
Rule 54 - Salvaged Wealth Distribution
Rule 55 - Bankruptcy at Sea

Mutiny Regulations

Rule 56 - Declaration of Mutiny
Rule 57 - Secondary Mutiny Conditions
Rule 58 - Harbor Mutiny Dispute Procedure
Rule 59 - Mutiny Resolution Standards
Rule 60 - Delayed Mutiny Effects
Rule 61 - Mutiny Chain Reactions
Rule 62 - Hearts Suit Escalation
Rule 63 - Hearts Suit Containment
Rule 64 - Temporary Mutiny Suspension
Rule 65 - Full Mutiny Restoration
Rule 66 - Active Mutiny Assessment
Rule 67 - Cross-Realm Mutiny Recognition
Rule 68 - Cross Current Mutiny Clause
Rule 69 - Emergency Mutiny Dispensation
Rule 70 - Mutiny Adjudication Protocol

Reversals & Clarifications

Rule 71 - Leeward Reversal
Rule 72 - Reverse Leeward Reversal
Rule 73 - Reversal Clarification
Rule 74 - Clarification Amendment
Rule 75 - Amendment Reversal
Rule 76 - Reversed Amendment Exception
Rule 77 - Clarified Reversal Exception
Rule 78 - Clarification of Clarification
Rule 79 - Revised Clarification of Clarification
Rule 80 - Clarification Sunset Clause

Extraordinary Circumstances

Rule 81 - Storm Response Procedures
Rule 82 - Siren Interference
Rule 83 - Sea Witch Interference
Rule 84 - Mermaid Intervention
Rule 85 - Ghost Ship Encounter
Rule 86 - Leviathan Alert Status
Rule 87 - Kraken Alert Status
Rule 88 - Emergency Counter-Mutiny
Rule 89 - Catastrophic Tide Event
Rule 90 - End-of-World Exemption

Harbor & Voyage End

Rule 91 - Return to Harbor
Rule 92 - Harbor Authority Review
Rule 93 - Harbor Conditions
Rule 94 - Voyage Completion Standards
Rule 95 - Final Pot Verification
Rule 96 - Kraken Exception
Rule 97 - Final Draw Procedure
Rule 98 - Tiebreak Priority
Rule 99 - Victory Recognition
Rule 100 - Captain's Toast

Storybrooke Amendments

Rule 101 - Automobile Interference
Rule 102 - Municipal Parking Exception
Rule 103 - Kraken Exception Clarification
Rule 104 - Clarification Clarification
Rule 105 - Harbor Master's Review
Rule 106 - Cell Phone Distraction Clause
Rule 107 - Cellular Tower Interference
Rule 108 - Electrical Storm Amendment
Rule 109 - Realm Boundary Exception
Rule 110 - Storybrooke Residency Provision

Reserved Rules

Rule 111 - Reserved
Rule 112 - Reserved
Rule 113 - Reserved
Rule 114 - Reserved
Rule 115 - Reserved
Rule 116 - Reserved

Final Authority

Rule 117 - The Captain Is Always Right

Addendum

The existence, interpretation, and historical validity of Rules 43, 58, 68, 71, 74, 88, 96, 103, 104, and 117 remain the subject of ongoing dispute among experienced players. The publishers accept no responsibility for arguments resulting from interpretation of Rules

The following statements have been entered into the official record:
Captain Killian Jones: "Every one of the one hundred and seventeen rules is perfectly reasonable."
David Nolan: "Half of them were invented last Thursday."
Archie Hopper: "I'm still trying to understand Rule 68."
Leroy (Grumpy): "This document is evidence."

CHAPTER 3
Missing, Lost, Disputed, or Otherwise Unavailable Rules

Notice to the Reader

The First Storybrooke Printing of Captain's Folly was assembled from several surviving copies of earlier editions recovered from various locations, including:

The Enchanted Forest
Neverland
The Jolly Roger
Three separate taverns
One customs warehouse
An active shipwreck

As a result, portions of the official Rules Index remain incomplete.

The publishers acknowledge that several rules listed in the Official Index can no longer be located. The publishers further acknowledge that certain rules appear to have been deliberately removed. The publishers decline to speculate as to who may have removed them.

Missing Rules Registry

Rule 18: Counter-Counter Tide
Status: Missing
Last Verified: Neverland Edition
Archivist's Note: The surviving page contains only the words: "Trust me, you'll know it when you see it." No one knows what that means.
Additional Commentary: Every surviving reference assumes the reader already understands Rule 18. This assumption has proven unhelpful.

Rule 29: Harbor Fog Conditions
Status: Water Damaged
Archivist's Note: The page was discovered completely blank. Captain Jones insists this is entirely normal during fog conditions.

Rule 37: Emergency Realignment
Status: Removed
Reason Given: "No longer relevant after the curse." No further explanation was provided.

Rule 43: Invalid Captain's Folly Strategy
Status: Disputed
Archivist's Note: Every known copy contains the title. No surviving copy contains the actual rule. Captain Jones maintains this omission is intentional.
Historian's Note: Several scholars argue that publishing Rule 43 would immediately invalidate half of all known strategies.

Rule 52: Mermaid Interference
Status: Classified
Access Level: Restricted
Reason: Following multiple complaints from mermaids.

Rule 58: Harbor Mutiny Dispute Procedure
Status: Partially Missing
Surviving Text: "...under no circumstances should..." The remainder of the page is gone.

Rule 67: Cross-Realm Mutiny Recognition
Status: Realm Restricted
Applies Only In: Neverland, The Enchanted Forest, Wonderland
Does Not Apply In: Storybrooke, Boston, New Jersey (Nobody remembers why.)

Rule 69: Emergency Mutiny Dispensation
Status: Lost
Historian's Note: Evidence suggests Rule 69 once canceled Rule 68. Rule 68 currently claims Rule 69 never existed.
The matter remains unresolved.
Counterclaim: One surviving margin note reads: "We used it twice." No one remembers when.

Rule 71: Leeward Reversal
Status: Missing
Archivist's Note: Referenced by seventeen separate rules. Located in none.
The number of references increases every time the rulebook is reprinted.

Rule 72: Reverse Leeward Reversal
Status: Missing
Archivist's Note: Believed dependent upon Rule 71.
This discovery was not helpful.

Rule 74: Clarification Amendment
Status: Removed
Reason Given: "Made things worse."

Rule 75: Amendment Reversal
Status: Missing
Archivist's Note: Presumed consequence of Rule 74.

Rule 82: Siren Interference
Status: Sealed
Reason: Legal settlement.

Rule 88: Emergency Counter-Mutiny
Status: Heavily Edited.
Archivist's Note: The surviving copy contains forty-seven separate revisions. Most were written in different handwriting. Several appear to be arguments.

Rule 91: Return to Harbor
Status: Disputed
Archivist's Note: Six surviving editions contain six different procedures. Each claims the other five are incorrect.

Rule 96: Kraken Exception
Status: Active
Details: Unavailable
Reason: Nobody wishes to test it.
Publisher's Note: This position was reached after extensive consideration and one brief experiment.

Rule 100: Captain's Toast
Status: Incomplete
Surviving Text: "...and therefore the Pot rightfully belongs to..." The rest is missing.

Rule 103: Kraken Exception Clarification
Status: Missing
Archivist's Note: This should have made Rule 96 easier to understand. It did not.

Rule 104: Clarification Clarification
Status: Missing
Reason: The clarification required additional clarification.

Rule 111: Reserved
Status: Unknown
Archivist's Note: A handwritten margin note reads: "We'll need this later." No record exists indicating whether "later" has occurred.

Rule 112: Reserved
Status: Unknown.
Archivist's Note: The page appears to have been intentionally removed.

Rule 113: Reserved
Status: Unknown
Archivist's Note: Possibly seasonal. One surviving notation references Winter Solstice Tide Conditions.
No additional information survives.

Rule 114: Reserved
Status: Unknown
Archivist's Note: May apply only during active Realm Transitions.

Rule 115: Reserved
Status: Unknown
Archivist's Note: One copy references "Never play this during a Blood Moon."
No explanation follows.

Rule 116: Reserved
Status: Unknown
Archivist's Note: The final surviving note reads "If Rule 116 is required, something has gone very wrong."

Final Commentary

The Board of Maritime Recreational Gaming maintains that all listed rules once existed in complete form. Captain Jones maintains they still do. David Nolan maintains that at least half were invented after moving to Storybrooke. Archie Hopper maintains that a properly indexed rulebook would solve most of the confusion. Leroy ("Grumpy") maintains that this appendix constitutes evidence in an ongoing fraud investigation. No official determination has been made.

The undersigned hereby certify that this Rulebook contains all known official rules of Captain's Folly currently available for publication. The existence of additional rules remains possible. The existence of additional rules remains likely. The existence of additional rules is strongly suspected. The existence of additional rules has neither been confirmed nor denied by Captain Killian Jones.

A handwritten note appears beneath the certification:
"They're in here somewhere." — K. Jones, Captain of the Jolly Roger

And directly beneath it, in heavier handwriting:
"They are not." — Leroy, Investigator of Fraud, Self-Appointed and Unpaid

CHAPTER 4
Chain of Custody & Marginal Annotations
Pertaining to the Official Rulebook of Captain's Folly
Fifth Known Printing, Storybrooke Edition

CHAIN OF CUSTODY

The following record has been reconstructed from surviving ownership marks, signatures, tavern ledgers, customs inventories, maritime records, and handwritten notes discovered throughout the Rulebook.
The Publishers make no warranty as to the accuracy, legality, or chronological order of the following entries.

Original Compilation

Author: Captain Killian Jones
Location: Unknown
Approximate Date: Unknown
Condition: Complete

Notes:
The original manuscript is believed to have consisted of 117 rules plus numerous amendments.
The existence of earlier editions has never been confirmed.
The existence of later editions is constantly being argued.

First Known Record

Custodian: Captain Killian Jones
Location: Enchanted Forest Coastal Waters
Condition: Good

Notes:
Several pages contain corrections in the same handwriting as the original text.
Scholars remain uncertain whether these constitute amendments or whether the original author simply changed his mind repeatedly.

Second Known Record

Custodian: Unknown Pirate Crew
Location: Neverland
Condition: Poor
Damage Noted: Water damage, Rum stains, Burn marks, Knife marks, and one page appears to have been eaten.
No explanation was provided.

Third Known Record

Custodian: Jolly Roger Quartermaster
Location: Neverland
Condition: Fair
Missing Materials: Rules 18, 43, and 71.
Margin notation states "Captain says they're still there."

Fourth Known Record

Custodian: Captain Killian Jones
Location: Between Realms
Condition: Good
Official Comment: "Temporary removal of several unnecessary rules."
No further explanation accompanies this statement.

Fifth Known Record

Custodian: Storybrooke Edition
Location: Storybrooke Harbor
Condition: Restored
Modifications: Addition of:

- Rule 101
- Rule 102
- Rule 106
- Rule 107
- Rule 108
- Rule 110

Collectively referred to as "The Modern Nuisance Amendments"

Sixth Known Record

Custodian: Storybrooke Library
Condition: Incomplete
Missing Materials: Unknown.

Librarian's Note:
No one admits placing it here.
No one admits removing it.

Recovered Marginal Annotations

The following notes have been authenticated as being written in the hand of Captain Killian Jones. Several have been disputed by Prince David Nolan. One has been formally challenged by Leroy.

Rule 18: Counter-Counter Tide
Missing Rule
Handwritten note: "Removed because everyone kept getting it wrong."
Lower margin: "This means Charming."

Rule 29: Harbor Fog Conditions
Water Damaged
Handwritten note: "Perfectly readable if viewed in proper fog."

Rule 37: Emergency Realignment
Removed
Handwritten note: "Technically no longer necessary."
Different ink added later: "Still necessary."
Original ink: "Disagree."

Rule 43: Invalid Captain's Folly Strategy
Missing
Handwritten note reads: "If a strategy fails, it was obviously invalid."

Rule 58: Harbor Mutiny Dispute Procedure
Partially Missing
Surviving note: "Leroy may not cite this rule."
A second note beneath it: "Especially Leroy."

Rule 68: Cross Current Mutiny Clause
Numerous margin notes appear beside this rule.
One reads: "Entirely straightforward."
Another: "Archie overcomplicates things."
A third: "Charming also overcomplicates things."

Rule 71: Leeward Reversal
Missing
Margin note: "I know where this one is."
Additional note: "No, you don't."
Handwriting analysis suggests both notes were written by the same person.

Rule 74: Clarification Amendment
Removed
Margin note: "Clarification created confusion."

Rule 75: Amendment Reversal
Missing
Margin note: "See Rule 74."

Rule 88: Emergency Counter-Mutiny
Page contains six separate annotations.
Most recent reads: "Only use if absolutely necessary."
Someone has underlined "Absolutely." Three times.

Rule 96: Kraken Exception
Entire page blacked out.
The only visible note states: "If you're reading this, things have gone poorly."

Rule 102: Municipal Parking Exception
Handwritten note: "Not my fault."
Additional Note: "Entirely your fault."

Rule 103: Kraken Exception Clarification
Margin note: "Made things worse."

Rule 104: Clarification Clarification
Margin note: "See previous mistake."

Rule 106: Cell Phone Distraction Clause
Handwritten note: "Put it away."
Additional note: "You also have one."

Rule 111
Reserved
Margin note: "Keeping this one open."

Rule 112
Reserved
Margin note: "Future emergency."

Rule 113
Reserved
Margin note: "Winter rule." No description provided.

Rule 114
Reserved
Margin note: "Realm rule." No description provided.

Rule 115
Reserved
Margin note: "Do not use during Blood Moons." No explanation provided.

Rule 116
Reserved
Margin note: "Hopefully never required."

DISPUTED ANNOTATIONS

The following comments have been entered into the record by other known readers.

Annotation A
Attributed to Prince David Nolan
Written beside Rule 117: "He absolutely makes these up."

Annotation B
Attributed to Archie Hopper
Written inside the front cover: "Requested complete rulebook. Request denied."

Annotation C
Attributed to Leroy ("Grumpy")
Written in three separate locations: "FRAUD."

Annotation D
Attributed to Leroy ("Grumpy")
Written beneath the Captain's signature: "STILL FRAUD."

Annotation E
Attributed to Killian Jones
Written beneath Annotation D: "Prove it."

Annotation F
Attributed to Leroy ("Grumpy")
Written directly beneath Annotation E: "WORKING ON IT."

Seasonal Amendments

Winter Amendment
During Winter conditions, all Tide effects become Frozen Tide effects.
Any dispute regarding Frozen Tide effects is automatically postponed until Spring.
Nobody understands the difference.
Captain Jones insists the distinction is extremely important.

Summer Amendment
Players may declare Open Sea conditions.
Results vary dramatically.
Complaints regarding Summer conditions are traditionally ignored.

Realm Amendments

Neverland Amendment
Time-related penalties may be ignored. Nobody remembers why. This amendment creates significant accounting difficulties.

Enchanted Forest Amendment
Magical interference is considered a legitimate defense during rules disputes. Supporting magical evidence is encouraged but not required.

Wonderland Amendment
All contradictory rules are considered simultaneously valid.
Attempts to challenge this amendment generally strengthen it.
This amendment has never been successfully challenged.

Oz Amendment
Flying monkey incidents are resolved according to Rule 103.
This has never been successful.
Rule 103 remains missing.

Storybrooke Amendment
During periods of active curse-breaking, players may briefly remember rules they never learned.
Any such memories are considered valid until disproven.

Underworld Amendment
Eliminated players may continue participating in arguments.

Camelot Amendment
All disputes must be conducted politely.
This amendment has the lowest compliance rate in recorded history.
David Nolan considers this entirely predictable.

Arendelle Amendment
Ice-related incidents may be classified as weather. Several players contest this ruling annually.

Captain's Final Disclaimer

Captain's Folly is a simple and straightforward game. Any confusion regarding the rules is the sole responsibility of the players. Any contradictory rules are to be resolved according to the Captain's judgment. Any disputes regarding the Captain's judgment are to be resolved according to the Captain's judgment regarding the dispute. Any further disputes are considered mutiny. — Captain Killian Jones (Captain of the Jolly Roger)

Handwritten notations discovered beneath the signature:
"This explains nothing." — Leroy
"It explains everything." — Killian

Appendix 6
Poems

Poems By Billy

Killian and Hook, The Hook's Two Tunes

Killian's a Cap'n with a carefree roar,
His hook's a gleam in the mornin' light,
Hook's the shade what stalks the shore,
A vengeful growl in the dead o' night.
He's one bold rogue with a split refrain,
A shanty's verse o' joy and pain.

Killian struts and the sails do sway,
He's rum and song, a pirate's cheer,
Hook'll snarl in a darker play,
His hook a blade what hunts with leer.
He's danced with glee, he's danced with doom,
Two tunes o' one what fill the gloom.

Killian's hook be a golden jest,
He'll swing it high with a hearty yell,
Hook's a claw what ne'er do rest,
A Cap'n lost in a vengeful spell.
I've sung his mirth by the fire's glow,
Then sung his wrath when the winds do blow.

The carefree Cap'n's a saucy knave,
He'll laugh at storms with a pirate's grin,
Hook'll curse o'er a watery grave,
A soul what's bound by a crocodile's sin.
He's light as breeze, then dark as sea,
A pirate's heart what's wild and free.

Killian sails with a roguish flair,
His hook a spark in the sunny tide,
Hook does brood with a icy stare,
A Cap'n scarred where his hate reside.
He's one man's tale in a shanty's beat,
A duel o' souls where the wild winds meet.

Six verses for the hook's two cries,
Killian and Hook, one pirate's frame,
He's free with rum, then vengeance flies,
A Cap'n split 'twixt joy and shame.
Raise a mug to his double tune,
A pirate's life 'neath the sun and moon.

Killian and Hook, The Hook-Sharp Reel

Killian's a Cap'n with a hook o' flame,
A pirate bold with a roarin' yell,
Then Hook strides in with a fearsome name,
A shadowed rogue from a tale to tell.
They've crossed the seas with a shanty's beat,
Two hooks o' steel where the wild winds meet.

Killian’s a storm with a hearty grin,
His hook do dance in the cannon’s glare,
Hook’s a specter, all guile and sin,
A Cap’n carved from a dark despair.
They’ve clashed their steel ‘neath a thunder’s boom,
Yet shared the loot in the tavern’s gloom.

The sea’s their stage, the night their tune,
Killian’s laugh be a gust o’ cheer,
Hook’s got a sneer ‘neath the silver moon,
A pirate’s growl what the dead might hear.
Their hooks do gleam in a pirate’s dance,
A pair o’ rogues what take their chance.

They’ve sailed through gales with a pirate’s pride,
Killian’s swift with a hearty roar,
Hook’s a shadow on the ocean’s side,
A claw what’s hunted a hundred shore.
I’ve sung their clash by the fire’s light,
Two Cap’ns fierce in the black o’ night.

Their blades do sing when the foes draw near,
Killian’s hook be a golden spark,
Hook’s a terror with a icy leer,
A pirate’s wrath in the deep and dark.
They’ve split the gold and they’ve split the sea,
A duo grand for a shanty’s glee.
Six verses for the hooks o’ lore,
Killian and Hook, a salty pair,
They rule the waves from core to shore,
A pirate’s tale in the stormy air.
Raise a mug to their hook-sharp reel,
Two Cap’ns born o’ the ocean’s steel.

The Jolly Roger’s Reel

The Jolly Roger’s a saucy dame,
She cuts the waves with a roarin’ cheer,
Her timbers sing o’ a pirate’s fame,
A gal I’ve sailed for many a year.
She’s weathered gales with a salty grin,
A ship o’ dreams where the wild begin.

Her sails be wings o’ the midnight kind,
They flap and billow ‘neath stormy skies,
She’s hauled me loot when the winds unwind,
A lass what laughs where the weaklings cry.
Her deck’s a stage for a pirate’s tune,
She dances bold ‘neath the risin’ moon.

She’s faced the cannon, she’s dodged the shot,
Her hull’s a tale o’ the battles won,
Her charmed oak mends, she’ll ne’er rot
She’s borne me safe ‘til the mornin’ sun.
Her creak’s a song I’ve learned by rote,
A pirate’s lass in a wooden coat.

The sea’s her lover, the wind’s her mate,
She rides the swells with a hearty roar,
She’s scorned the law and she’s tempted fate,

A rebel ship on a rebel shore.
Her cannon's bark be a thunder's call,
A queen o' brine what stands so tall.

I've swabbed her boards when a fierce squalls hits,
She's rocked me drunk through the blackest night,
Her ropes be taut, her spirit ne'er quits,
A vessel grand in a pirate's sight.
She's carried me through the deep and dire,
A floatin' home 'neath the storm's wild fire.

Six verses for the Roger's sway,
She's rough, she's tough, a pirate's pride,
She'll sail us on 'til the judgment day,
A saucy lass on the ocean's tide.
Raise a mug to her timbers strong,
The Roger's reel's me hearty song.

Killian, The Hook o' Gold

Killian's a rogue with a hook o' gleam,
A Cap'n bold with a devil's stare,
He rules the deck like a livin' dream,
A pirate king with a flair so rare.
His grin's a blade what cuts the air,
He leads us lads through hell to share.

His voice be rough as a cannon's boom,
It rings o'er waves with a hearty yell,
He's faced the dark and he's beat the gloom,
A man what's dodged old Davy's spell.
That hook o' his, it shines like fate,
A claw o' steel what seals our rate.

He's drunk the sea and he's spat it back,
A pirate born with a thirst for gold,
His coat's all black, his soul's on track,
A tale o' guts in the night so cold.
He swings that hook with a wicked glee,
A Cap'n fierce as the ragin' sea.

The helm's his throne, the storm's his game,
He'll steer us blind through the tempest's roar,
He's carved his mark in a pirate's name,
A man what's fought on a bloody shore.
His laugh's a gust what shakes the mast,
A leader bold from the shadowed past.

He's snatched the loot from a hundred hands,
His hook's a terror, his will's a flame,
He's danced with death on the shiftin' sands,
And won the prize in a pirate's claim.
I've sung his deeds by the firelight,
A rogue what shines in the black o' night.

Six verses for the Hook o' Gold,
Killian's a tale what ne'er grows old,
He's fierce, he's wild, a sight to behold,
A Cap'n's heart in a story told.
Raise a cheer for his pirate's way,
He's led us true through the fray o' day.

Desylva, The Stormy Queen

Desylva's a storm with a siren's call,
Her eyes be gray like a thunderhead,
She'll whip the winds 'til the skies do fall,
A lass what's woke the sleepin' dead.
Her voice be lightning, sharp and grand,
A queen o' gales with a pirate's hand.

Her mark do blaze with a cursed blue light,
A spark o' magic what bends the breeze,
She'll call the rain in the dead o' night,
And shake the sea with a wild caprice.
She's fierce as waves what crash and foam,
A stormy lass what's made her home.

Her laugh's a peal o' the thunder's might,
It rolls o'er decks with a roarin' din,
She's fought the dark with a fiery sight,
A tempest born where the fights begin.
Her hair's a tangle o' wind and spray,
A queen what rules the stormy day.

She'll crack the sky with a flick o' will,
Her power's a song what the sailors sing,
She's drowned the calm and she's drowned the still,
A force o' nature with a pirate's sting.
I've seen her dance when the gales do rise,
A stormy queen with a witch's eyes.

Her wrath be wild, her heart be true,
She'll bend the tides with a whispered tune,
She's carved her name where the tempests brew,
A lass what's lit by the crescent moon.
Her rain's a cloak, her wind's a crown,
A pirate storm what won't back down.

Six verses for the Stormy Queen,
Desylva's a gale what sweeps the sea,
She's fierce, she's free, a sight serene,
A pirate's muse what calls to me.
Raise a glass to her thunder's play,
She's ruled the deep since the dawn o' day.

Killian and Desylva, The Hook and the Storm

Killian and Desylva, a pair o' might,
His hook a flash, her storm a cry,
They rule the seas by day and night,
A love what soars 'neath a pirate sky.
He's steel and fire, she's wind and rain,
Together they're a wild refrain.

His grin's a spark, her glare's a blast,
They've danced through blood and cannon's peal,
A Cap'n bold, a lass so vast,
Their hearts be twined in a pirate's zeal.
His hook do shine, her tempests call,
A tale o' two what conquered all.

The Roger sways when they entwine,
Her gales do howl, his growl do ring,
A stormy lass, a hook divine,
They share a lust what makes us sing.
I've seen 'em fight, I've seen 'em cling,
A pirate's love on a wildcat's wing.

They've snatched the gold from the devil's grip,
His blade's her shield, her rain's his song,
They've dodged the noose with a hearty quip,
A pair what's right where the weak go wrong.
Her thunder rolls, his steel do bite,
A bond o' fire in the black o' night.

The seas do roar when they embrace,
Her lightning cracks, his laugh's a cheer,
They've carved their mark in ev'ry place,
A love what's fierce and crystal-clear.
The crew do shout their names in glee,
A hook and storm what set us free.

Six verses for the two I praise,
Killian, Desylva, wild and grand,
Their tale's a shanty through the days,
A pirate heart on the open sand.
Raise a mug to their stormy reign,
The Hook and Storm what break the chain.

The Tempest Lovers

Killian's hook's a wicked blade,
Desylva's storms ain't never fade,
They rut and roar 'cross deck and sea,
A lusty pair, both wild and free.
He pins her close, she cracks the sky,
A bawdy love that won't run dry.

Her thunder's loud when he's in sight,
His grin's a spark to set her right,
The Roger bucks beneath their game,
A ship that knows their randy fame.
She calls the rain, he growls her name,
A pirate's romp, a blazing flame.

She whips the wind with saucy glare,
He hooks her hip, they've lust to spare,
The seas do boil when they're a-pair,
A tempest born o' lover's dare.
Her mark flares blue, his steel bites deep,
A rowdy love they'll always keep.

Through cannon's din and blood-soaked fray,
They dance their wild and wanton way,
Her lightning strikes, his voice cuts through,
A greedy clash o' me and you.
The crew just cheers, we raise our grog,
Their heat's a tale to clog the log.

When calm creeps in, they're soft as sin,
Her rain turns sweet, he pulls her in,

But don’t be fooled, they’re fierce as hell,
A love that rings like battle’s bell.
She’s storm-made lass, he’s hook-made man,
Together bold since time began.

Oh, Killian fierce, Desylva grand,
Ye shake the seas with lovin’ hand,
Your lust and storm, a pirate’s tune,
A fire that burns beneath the moon.
We’ll sing yer tale ‘til throats run dry,
A love to make the devil cry!

Poems By Smee

Killian and Hook, Me Cap’n’s Sides

Killian’s me Cap’n, bright and free,
His hook’s a gleam when the sun do shine,
Hook’s the shadow I sometimes see,
A vengeful soul with a darker line.
He’s one man split, both wild and grim,
Two hearts in one what I sail with him.

Killian laughs and the crew does sing,
He’s rum and jests, a carefree lad,
Hook’ll brood with a bitter sting,
His eye on foes what drove him mad.
I swab the deck for both, ye know,
A Cap’n’s moods what ebb and flow.

Killian’s hook do dance with cheer,
He’ll swig and grin ‘neath the open sky,
Hook’s a claw what hunts with fear,
A wrathful ghost what won’t let by.
He’s split ‘twixt joy and vengeance cold,
A pirate’s tale in two parts told.

The carefree Cap’n shares his loot,
He’s quick to clap me back with glee,
Hook’ll curse ‘neath a stormy root,
A man what’s lost to memory’s sea.
I’ve seen him switch from light to dark,
Two sides o’ one what leave their mark.

Killian sails with a roguish grace,
His hook a toy in a pirate’s game,
Hook does stalk with a haunted face,
A soul consumed by a vengeful flame.
He’s me own Cap’n, both bold and dire,
A man o’ mirth and a man o’ fire.

Six verses for me Cap’n’s ways,
Killian and Hook, one flesh, one bone,
He’s free one hour, then vengeance plays,
A pirate heart what’s ne’er alone.
I’ll follow both, through storm and sun,
Two sides o’ him what make him one.

Killian and Hook, The Cap’ns Two

Killian’s me Cap’n, stout and grand,
His hook’s a shine o’ pirate’s might,
Hook’s the one with a claw so bland,
A pair o’ rogues what rule the fight.
They’ve crossed the seas with a hearty cheer,
Two mates o’ steel I hold so dear.

Me Cap’n Killian’s a jolly sort,
He grins and leads with a pirate’s call,
Hook’s a shadow from some old port,
A grim old dog what’s seen it all.
They’ve clashed their hooks in a stormy fray,
Yet sailed as one by the break o’ day.

Killian’s hook’s a gleam o’ gold,
He swings it quick in battle and fun,
Hook’s got a tale that’s dark and old,
A hand was taken by the Dark One
I’ve swabbed the deck for both, ye see,
Two Cap’ns bold what mean much to me.

They’ve shared a mug, they’ve shared a fight,
Killian’s laugh and Hook’s cold stare,
One’s warm as rum, one’s black as night,
A pirate duo beyond compare.
I’ve seen ‘em carve the sea in two,
A pair o’ hooks what see us through.

When winds do howl, they stand as kin,
Killian’s bold, Hook’s sly and lean,
They’ve dodged the noose with a pirate’s grin,
And kept the Roger sharp and keen.
I’d sail with both, through thick and thin,
Two Cap’ns fierce where the tales begin.

Six verses for the hooks I know,
Killian and Hook, a salty blend,
They steer us where the wild winds blow,
A pirate’s life what ne’er do end.
Raise a cheer for their double reign,
Two masters o’ the briny main.

The Jolly Roger, Me Home

The Jolly Roger’s me old lass,
She’s creaky, sure, but tough as nails,
Her decks are made from enchanted oak and brass,
She cuts through seas with billowed sails.
She’s hauled me through the briny deep,
A ship I’d never trade nor weep.

Her masts do groan when winds blow high,
A bit o’ pitch keeps her at bay,
She’s dodged the rocks, she’s sailed the sky,
But luck’s her mate, I’m proud to say.
Her cannon’s loud, her timbers strong,
She’s home to me, where I belong.

I swab her planks ‘neath sun or rain,
She’s seen me drunk and seen me fight,
Through squalls and calm, she don’t complain,
A sturdy gal by day or night.
She’s held up strong through ev’ry bout,
And keeps sailing on, there ain’t no doubt.

The helm’s a wheel I’ve spun with care,
She answers slow but true, me dear,
Her ropes ne’er fray, her hull’s a scare,
Yet through the waves she’ll always steer.
She’s carried loot and mates alike,
A pirate’s dream, the sort I like.

When seas get rough, she holds us tight,
A wooden lass with grit and grace,
She’s dodged the law by moon’s pale light,
And kept us safe in ev’ry place.
I swab her boards with no regret,
She’s me old friend, I won’t forget.

Six verses for the Roger’s tale,
She’s weathered all, both fair and foul,
A ship to love through wind and gale,
She’s more than wood, she’s got a soul.
The Roger’s me, and I’m her own,
A pirate’s life on waves she’s sewn.

Cap’n Killian, The Man

Cap’n Killian’s a sight to see,
His hook a-shinin’ in the sun,
He’s sharp as steel, as bold as me,
But better—aye, he’s number one.
He leads us lads with grit and guile,
A pirate boss with roguish style.

His voice be loud, it shakes the deck,
“Hoist the sails!” he’ll bark at morn,
That hook o’ his can slit a neck,
Or carve a tale where tales are born.
He’s fierce, he is, but fair to boot,
A captain grand, I can’t dispute.

He’s fought the sea and won her gold,
A man who’s danced with Davy’s crew,
His coat’s all black, his heart’s so bold,
He’ll see us through what storms may brew.
I’ve seen him laugh when cannons blaze,
A pirate’s life in all his ways.

He steers the Roger straight and true,
His eye’s a glint o’ devil’s play,
He’s lost a hand, but mates, he grew,
A hook that’s worth ten men, I’d say.
He’s quick with rum and quicker still,
To lead us lads o’er ev’ry hill.

When trouble comes, he’s first to stand,
That hook a-flashin’ in the fray,
He’s got a plan in ev’ry hand,
Or one, at least, to save the day.
I’d follow him through hell’s own gate,
A Cap’n fierce, a friend so great.

Six verses for me Cap’n’s name,
Killian, bold as bold can be,
He’s carved his mark in pirate fame,
A leader strong for likes o’ me.
His hook’s me guide, his word’s me law,
The finest man I ever saw.

Desylva, The Stormy Lass

Desylva’s got a stormy way,
Her eyes be gray like clouds o’ rain,
She’ll call a squall by night or day,
And set the sea to howl again.
She’s wild and free, a thunder’s kin,
A lass I’d never cross nor spin.

Her voice can boom like cannon shot,
Or whisper soft when winds be still,
She’s got a spark I can’t forgot,
A power bent to her own will.
The waves do dance when she’s around,
A stormy gal, both fierce and sound.

That mark o’ hers, it glows right blue,
A sign she’s more than meets the eye,
She’ll whip a gale from skies so new,
And rain’ll fall ‘fore I can cry.
I’ve mopped the deck when she’s been mad,
A tempest lass, both good and bad.

She fights like ten, she don’t back down,
Her lightning’s cracked the blackest night,
She’s wore a snarl, she’s wore a crown,
A pirate queen in ev’ry fight.
I’ve seen her calm the worst o’ seas,
A wonder, aye, she does it with ease.

Her hair’s a mess when storms do blow,
She laughs at wind and scorns the tide,
She’s strong as oak, yet soft, I know,
A heart o’ gold she keeps inside.
She’s magic, mates, in ev’ry vein,
A lass who rules the hurricane.

Six verses for the stormy one,
Desylva, fierce as seas can be,
She’s thunder’s lass, she’s rain and sun,
A marvel grand for likes o’ me.
I tip me hat when she walks by,
A pirate storm ‘neath open sky.

Killian and Desylva, The Pair

Killian and Desylva, see,
A pair like none I've ever known,
His hook's a blade, her storm's a spree,
Together they've a fire grown.
They steer the Roger side by side,
A pirate love on waves so wide.

The Cap'n grins, she calls the wind,
He'll carve a path, she'll light the way,
Their hearts be twined, their souls unpinned,
A dance o' night and stormy day.
I've seen 'em fight and seen 'em kiss,
A bond like that's me truest bliss.

His hook do gleam, her mark do shine,
They've faced the deep and laughed at fate,
A pirate king, a queen divine,
They share a love what storms can't break.
The sea's their home, their tale's me song,
A pair so right, they can't go wrong.

When cannons roar, they stand as one,
He'll swing his steel, she'll crack the sky,
Through blood and loot, their work's well done,
A love that soars where eagles fly.
I've washed the sails when they're at play,
Their sparks do set the night ablaze.

They'll drink and duel, then hold so near,
Her rain'll fall, his laugh'll ring,
A stormy lass, a captain dear,
Together all the bells they'll sing.
The crew's in awe, and so am I,
A love that's fierce 'neath pirate sky.

Six verses for the two I cheer,
Killian, Desylva, bold and grand,
Their tale's a yarn we hold so dear,
A pirate heart in ev'ry hand.
Hook and storm, they lead us true,
The finest pair me eyes e'er knew.

The Storm and the Hook

Killian's hook doth catch the light,
Desylva's storm doth split the night,
A love that's fierce as cannon's blast,
Born on waves, it holds us fast.
He grins at her, she calls the gale,
Two hearts entwined in sea's own tale.

Her thunder sings when he's around,
His steel's a match for tempest's sound,
The Roger sways beneath their fire,
A dance of lust, of wild desire.
I see 'em clash, I see 'em blend,
A pirate's love that'll never end.

She stirs the skies with fingers bold,
He grips her tight, worth more than gold,
The rain she calls doth kiss his skin,
A storm that's wild, yet pulls him in.
His hook's a vow, her gales a cheer,
A bond that's strong through every fear.

When seas do rage and cannons bark,
Their love's the flame that lights the dark,
Her lightning cracks, his voice doth roar,
They fight as one on bloody shore.
The crew just gawks, we're all agog,
Two souls like them, thick as fog.

Her eyes do flash, his laugh rings free,
A pair to rule o'er any sea,
The winds obey, the tides do part,
She's got his soul, he's got her heart.
Through squall and calm, they stand so tall,
A love that's grander than us all.

Oh, Cap'n Killian, Desylva dear,
Ye brew a storm we all revere,
Your steel and wind, a mighty song,
A love so wild, it carries on.
I'd sail with ye to death's own door,
For love like yours is pirate lore.

Poems By One-Eyed Jack

Killian and Hook, The Hook's Two Faces

Killian's a lout with a hook o' shine,
A carefree cur with a drunken cheer,
Hook's the bastard what draws the line,
A vengeful dog with a claw o' fear.
He's one damned soul with a split-up mind,
A pirate's snarl o' the double kind.

Killian grins and the rum does flow,
His hook's a toy for a pirate's jest,
Hook'll growl from the dark below,
A Cap'n cursed with a hateful quest.
He's loose one breath, then tight with spite,
A rogue what shifts 'twixt day and night.

Killian's hook be a flash o' fun,
He'll swig and swagger 'neath the sun,
Hook's a blade what's ne'er done,
A claw what hunts 'til the blood do run.
I've squinted hard at his two-faced game,
A pirate split, yet one in name.

The carefree fool do laugh at fate,
He'll dance through storms with a saucy leer,
Hook does rise with a load o' hate,
A Cap'n mad from a crocodile's sneer.
He's rum and jest, then wrath and gloom,
A hook what's split 'twixt bloom and doom.

Killian sails with a pirate's guff,
His hook a glint in the salty spray,
Hook's a ghoul what's mean and rough,
A vengeful git what won't fade away.
He's free one hour, then bound by gall,
A pirate's soul what's cracked in thrall.

Six verses for the hook's two guises,
Killian and Hook, one rotten core,
He's loose with mirth, then vengeance rises,
A Cap'n torn on a bloody shore.
Raise a curse to his twisted reign,
A pirate halved by glee and pain.

Killian and Hook, The Hooks o' Hell

Killian's a brute with a hook o' spite,
A Cap'n mean with a devil's glare,
Hook's a spectre from the blackest night,
A claw what's cursed beyond repair.
They've sailed the deep with a pirate's snarl,
Two hooks o' hell what brawl and spar.

Killian's a storm, all rage and guile,
His hook's a slash o' bloody gleam,
Hook's a shade with a crooked smile,
A Cap'n lost in a vengeful dream.
They've crossed their steel in a squall o' hate,
Yet split the loot when the hour grew late.

The sea's their pit, the wind's their whip,
Killian's growl be a thunder's crack,
Hook's a ghost what'll never slip,
A claw what's clawed his own way back.
Their hooks do clash like a devil's jest,
A pair o' rogues what ne'er find rest.

They've gutted fleets with a pirate's greed,
Killian's hook be a butcher's blade,
Hook's a terror what makes 'em bleed,
A Cap'n forged where the shadows played.
I've squinted hard through me keen eye,
Two bastards fierce what'll never die.

Their reign's a curse on the briny tide,
Killian's bold with a savage cheer,
Hook's a wraith on a dead man's ride,
A claw what's chilled by a crocodile's leer.
They've fought as kin, they've fought as foes,
A pair o' hooks what the devil knows.

Six verses for the hooks o' doom,
Killian and Hook, a wretched lot,
They've sown their wrath 'neath a pirate's moon,
A tale o' steel what's ne'er forgot.
Raise a spit to their bloody game,
Two Cap'ns grim o' a hellish fame.

The Jolly Roger's Bones

The Jolly Roger's a mighty fierce beast,
Her planks ne're scar from cannon's teeth,
She groans and sways like a drunkard's feast,
Yet sails the red with a devil's wreath.
She's a hag o' the deep, all creak and strain,
A pirate's crypt on a watery plain.

Her sails hang proud, though bathed in sin,
They catch the wind like a tattered shroud,
She's dodged the noose and the reaper's grin,
A scowlin' wench, both fierce and proud.
Her hull's a tomb for dreams gone cold,
A ship o' ghosts, worth more'n gold.

She's drunk the blood o' a thousand fights,
Her decks, at times, covered in ichor and gore,
She laughs at storms in the dead o' night,
A rogue who's spat at Davy's door.
I've clung to her when the seas went mad,
She's all I've got, the cranky hag.

Her timbers moan like a widow's cry,
Each nail a curse, each board a spar,
She's sailed where weaker ships would die,
A pirate's wench, both near and far.
Her cannon's belch a thunderous cheer,
A growl o' death we all hold dear.

The wheel's a grind 'neath me calloused hand,
She bucks and twists through ev'ry swell,
She's hauled me loot from ev'ry land,
And kept me clear o' brimstone hell.
She's mean, she's tough, a battered jade,
A ship o' fate what ne'er decayed.

Six verses for the Roger's frame,
A surly lass with a pirate's soul,
She's borne me through both storm and flame,
And kept me whole when seas did roll.
The Roger's bones be rough and grim,
But I'd not trade her on a whim.

Killian, The Devil's Claw

Killian's a bastard, sharp and sly,
His hook a glint o' wicked steel,
One hand's gone, but he don't cry,
He cuts the world with a pirate's zeal.
A Cap'n born from hell's own brew,
He'd slit yer throat and laugh it through.

His grin's a blade, his eye's a snare,
He's danced with death and won the game,
A rogue who's sniffed the cannon's flare,
And carved his mark in blood and fame.
That hook o' his, it's stained with years,
A claw what drowns a man in fears.

He’s drunk on rum and lust for gold,
A voice like gravel, rough and deep,
He’ll lead us where the tales are told,
Through seas where shadows never sleep.
I’ve seen him stand when all went black,
A devil’s son who don’t look back.

His coat’s a shroud o’ midnight’s hue,
He swings that hook like a reaper’s scythe,
He’s lost to none, he’s fought a few,
A man who thrives where others writhe.
He’s cruel, he’s quick, a pirate’s king,
A storm o’ flesh what makes us sing.

The deck’s his turf, the sea his bitch,
He’ll steer us blind through fog and squall,
He’s dodged the noose without a twitch,
And laughed at fate when fates do fall.
His hook’s a tale o’ battles won,
A Cap’n fierce ‘neath ev’ry sun.

Six verses for the man I curse,
Killian, grim as grim can be,
He’s led us through the damned and worse,
A pirate claw what sets us free.
I’d follow him, though he’s a brute,
For gold and glory’s me pursuit.

Desylva, The Witch o’ the Wind

Desylva’s a witch with a stormy glare,
Her eyes like squalls o’ gray and doom,
She’ll whip the sea with a banshee’s prayer,
And call down hell from a thunder’s gloom.
She’s a gale o’ wrath, a pirate’s bane,
A lass what drives the world insane.

Her voice be jagged, a tempest’s howl,
It splits the night and wakes the dead,
She’s fierce as sharks what prowl and prowl,
A crown o’ lightning ‘round her head.
She’s cursed, she’s wild, a stormy blight,
A force o’ nature day or night.

That mark o’ hers, a blue-lit scar,
It flares when she’s got blood in mind,
She’ll bend the winds from near to far,
And leave the calm fools far behind.
I’ve ducked her rain when she’s been cross,
She’s trouble’s queen, and I’m the loss.

She fights like a demon, swift and sure,
Her storms can sink a fleet o’ foes,
She’s got no peace, no soft allure,
Just rage what blooms where chaos grows.
Her laugh’s a crack o’ thunder’s peal,
A witch who makes the oceans reel.

The waves do bow when she’s on deck,
Her hands be sparks o’ livin’ flame,
She’s wrecked more ships than I can reck,
And ne’er a one can speak her name.
She’s mad, she’s mean, a tempest’s bride,
A force what turns the sea aside.

Six verses for the storm I dread,
Desylva, wild as wild can be,
She’s shook the skies ‘til they’ve bled red,
A witch o’ wind what haunts the sea.
I squint at her with me one eye,
And pray her gales don’t make me die.

Killian and Desylva, The Hook and the Gale

Killian and Desylva, a cursed pair,
His hook a fang, her storm a whip,
They stalk the seas with a devil’s glare,
A love what sinks a weaker ship.
He’s steel and spite, she’s wind and woe,
Together they’re a hellish show.

His grin’s a snarl, her eyes a blast,
They carve their tale in blood and squall,
A Cap’n grim, a witch so vast,
They’ve danced through death and mocked it all.
His claw do gleam, her tempests roar,
A bond o’ ruin on the shore.

The Roger shakes when they collide,
His hook’ll slash, her gales’ll scream,
They’ve fought the fates and never cried,
A pirate’s lust, a bloody dream.
I’ve seen ‘em clash, then cling so tight,
A storm and steel in ev’ry fight.

They’ve plundered deep, they’ve burned the skies,
His blade’s her shield, her rain’s his crown,
A pair o’ wolves with murder’s eyes,
They’ll drag the world o’ sailors down.
Their love’s a fire what don’t go dim,
A savage hymn ‘twixt her and him.

When nights grow black, they take their fill,
Her thunder rolls, his growl replies,
They’ll rut and rage on ev’ry hill,
A lust what lights the darkest skies.
The crew do gape, I squint and grin,
For they’re the storm we’re livin’ in.

Six verses for the two I’ve seen,
Killian, Desylva, fierce and dire,
Their love’s a blade, both sharp and keen,
A pirate’s wrath in flesh and fire.
Hook and gale, they rule the sea,
A bloody tale for likes o’ me.

The Blade and the Gale

Killian's hook's a jagged scar,
Desylva's storm brews near and far,
Their love's a clash o' steel and squall,
A brutal dance that binds 'em all.
He snarls at fate, she bends the breeze,
Two rogues who rule the raging seas.

Her gales howl fierce when he draws nigh,
His grin's a blade that cuts the sky,
The Roger groans 'neath their rough play,
A ship that's seen their wilder day.
She throws the rain, he grips her tight,
A love that's born o' dark and fight.

Her mark burns bright, a cursed sign,
His steel's a match, a grim design,
The waves do crash when passions flare,
A bond o' blood and salty air.
She's wind and wrath, he's hook and guile,
A pair to make the devil smile.

Through battle's smoke and splintered bone,
They carve a path that's theirs alone,
Her thunder cracks, his voice holds sway,
A love that don't brook no delay.
I've seen 'em fight, I've seen 'em kiss,
A savage thing, this lover's bliss.

When storms do fade, they stand as one,
Her rain turns soft 'neath settin' sun,
But mark me well, they're fierce as sin,
A fire that's kindled deep within.
His hook's her anchor, her storm's his call,
A love that's wild beyond us all.

Oh, Killian grim, Desylva strong,
Ye weave a tale both sharp and long,
Your steel and tempest, pirate's pride,
A love that rides the darkest tide.
I'd wager me eye they'll never part,
For storm and hook share one black heart.

Hook's Flame: Milah's Ember, Desylva's Blaze

Oh Hook once loved a lass named Milah fair,
A slow-burn glow in his youthful air.
Her smile was soft, like a candle's spark,
But it flickered weak in the pirate's dark.

He was a lad, all heart and no guile,
Milah's touch warmed him for a short while.
A tender flame, it could never endure,
Not like the fire that Desylva's conjured.

Desylva's his storm, a blaze that consumes,
Her lightning cracks through the ocean's glooms.
Their love's a tempest, heart, soul, and mind,
One flesh, one will, in a knot entwined.

Milah was embers, a glow that would fade,
A boy's first love, in the moonlight played.
But Desylva's his match, a fire so deep,
It burns through the seas where the krakens sleep.

Her storm-gray eyes set his blood to boil,
Each thrust, each kiss, binds their souls in toil.
No slow-burn love could compare to this heat,
Desylva's his true, where his heart's complete.

Young Killian's Milah was a fleeting dream,
A spark too frail for the pirate's scheme.
Desylva's his blaze, all body and soul,
Their rutting shakes the Roger whole.

Her magic sparks when their bodies clash,
A love so fierce it turns stars to ash.
Milah's dim light was a boy's brief trance,
Desylva's the fire that makes Hook's heart dance.

This love's the truth, burns hot through the night,
Hook and his storm, they're the sea's own might.
No ember's glow could outshine their flame,
Desylva's his forever, his wild, true claim.

Killian's Heart

Yo ho, the seas do tell,
where love's true fire dwells,
Milah's ember fades,
Desylva's blaze compels!

Young was Killian, a lad with a spark,
With Milah he sailed 'neath the stars in the dark.
A slow flame it grew, like a coal in the night,
Soft glow in his heart, but it weren't full alight.

Milah's love was steady, a hearth's gentle bloom,
A whisper of warmth in a young sailor's gloom.
But embers grow cold when the winds turn to strife,
Her shadow's a flicker in Killian's past life.

Then came Desylva, a storm in her stride,
Her gray eyes like tempests where lightning resides.
She lit Killian's soul with a fire fierce and bold,
A blaze that no ocean could ever make cold.

With Milah he wandered, a boy's heart to learn,
Their love a soft tide, with a slow, gentle turn.
But Desylva's a maelstrom, his heart she commands,
Her storm binds his soul with unbreakable bands.

Desylva's his fire, his mind she consumes,
Her touch sparks his body, her love's a wild bloom.
Heart, soul, and desire, they merge as one flame,
No shadow of Milah could rival her claim.

Through lava and starlight, their passion does soar,
Desylva and Killian, one heart evermore.
No slow burn could match this, no flicker compare,
Their love's a fierce beacon that lights up the air.

Milah was a memory, a youth's tender dream,
A candle's faint glow by a quiet, calm stream.
But Desylva's true love, it burns hot, burns deep,
A fire eternal, no darkness can keep.

So raise up your tankards, let shanties resound,
For Killian and Desylva, true love they have found.
One heart, one soul, in the storm's fiery embrace,
Her blaze lights his world, none could take her place.

Yo ho, the seas do tell,
where love's true fire dwells,
Milah's ember fades,
Desylva's blaze compels.

Poems By Black Tom

The Jolly Roger

The Jolly Roger cuts the brine,
A lass of wood and salt-soaked line,
Her sails snap taut 'gainst wind's rough play,
A queen of seas, both night and day.
Her hull's a beast, dark and bold,
A tale of storms and loot retold.

She rocks through waves, a wild embrace,
Her timbers groan with pirate grace,
The deck's alive with boots and cheer,
A home for rogues who know no fear.
She's seen the squalls, the cannon's roar,
And still she craves the sea for more.

Her mermaid figurehead, oak hewn shot,
Guides through the deep, where seas are got,
She's weathered gales and cannon fire,
A ship of grit, of dark desire.
Through mist and blood, she holds her course,
A pirate's pride, a sea's fierce horse.

The ropes do sing when tempests call,
Her masts stand proud, unbowed, and tall,
She's borne us through the devil's maw,
A faithful wench, both fierce and raw.
No harbor binds her restless soul,
She's free to chase the world's dark goal.

When moon doth gleam on waters black,
She glides with shadows at her back,
A hunter swift, a thief of night,
Her planks hum low with grim delight.
The Roger's heart beats wild and true,
A ship for me, and all her crew.

Oh, Jolly Roger, queen of fate,
You bear us past each deadly gate,
Through seas that rage and skies that weep,
Your wooden bones our secrets keep.
A pirate's love, a rogue's own star,
You carry us where legends are.

Killian

Killian strides with hook in hand,
A captain carved from sea and sand,
His eyes like coals, they burn through haze,
A rogue who's walked through darker days.
His voice cuts sharp, a blade's own song,
Commands the crew, both fierce and strong.

That hook of steel, it gleams with spite,
A claw that's danced with death by night,
He's slashed through foes, left blood in wake,
A pirate born for storm's own sake.
His coat flaps wild in salty breeze,
A king of waves, a scourge with ease.

He's faced the gallows, laughed at doom,
Escaped the noose, the sea's dark womb,
With rum in gut and steel in grip,
He steers us through each cursed trip.
No man nor beast can chain his will,
A shadow swift, a soul to kill.

His grin's a dare, his heart a flame,
He plays the tides like some mad game,
The Roger bends to his rough call,
A captain feared by one and all.
Yet deep within, a spark does flare,
For one wild lass, his soul laid bare.

Through cannon smoke and splintered deck,
He stands unbowed, a living wreck,
His hook's a tale, his scars a map,
A man who's dodged fate's cruelest trap.
The sea's his blood, the wind his kin,
A pirate lord with devil's grin.

Oh, Killian, ye rogue of might,
You lead us bold through endless fight,
Your steel's a mark, your will a guide,
A captain fierce on every tide.
We'd sail to hell at your command,
With hook and heart, you rule this band.

Desylva

Desylva walks with storm in stride,
A lass with thunder deep inside,
Her gray eyes flash like lightning's gleam,
A force of sea, a waking dream.
The winds do bend to her fierce call,
A tempest's queen, she rules it all.

Her mark does glow, a cursed blue,
A sign of power, wild and true,
She conjures gales with flick of hand,
And rains that drown the driest land.
Her voice can soothe or crack the sky,
A siren's grace, a warrior's cry.

The seas do rage when she's afire,
Her magic weaves through storm's desire,
The waves obey her every whim,
A dance of chaos, dark and grim.
Yet soft she turns, a calmer tide,
When love's the wind she chooses to ride.

Her scars tell tales of battles won,
A lass who's faced the darkest sun,
She's fierce as steel, yet warm as flame,
A storm with soul, a pirate's claim.
The crew does watch with awe and dread,
For she could sink us all to bed.

Through squalls and mist, she holds her ground,
A woman wild, unbound, profound,
Her laughter rings o'er thunder's peal,
A heart of storm, yet soft to feel.
She's nature's wrath in flesh and bone,
A force no man could e'er dethrone.

Oh, Desylva, ye storm-born lass,
You wield the skies like molten glass,
Your gales can break or gently sing,
A pirate's muse, a tempest's wing.
We sail with you through hell's own gate,
For you're the storm that seals our fate.

Killian and Desylva

Killian stands with hook held high,
Desylva calls the storm-lit sky,
A pair of rogues, both fierce and free,
Their love's a fire 'cross the sea.
His steel meets her electric might,
A clash of souls that burns the night.

Her gales do dance when he's in sight,
His grin ignites her wild delight,
The Roger rocks beneath their flame,
A ship that bears their tangled game.
He lifts her close, she pulls him near,
A bond of lust, of storm, of fear.

Through cannon's roar and awash with flood,
They carve their tale in salt and blood,
His hook does gleam, her mark does flare,
A pirate's oath, a lover's prayer.
The seas do boil when passions rise,
Their hunger glints in stormy eyes.

She bends the wind, he cuts the tide,
Together forged, no place to hide,
Her thunder rolls, his voice commands,
A dance of fate in reckless hands.
The crew looks on with knowing cheer,
For love like this breeds tales to hear.

United they stand ‘neath the blazing sun,
Their storm-born love forever spun,
Her rain turns soft, his grip turns kind,
A peace that only they can find.
Yet wild they stay, a tempest’s kin,
A love that’s born where storms begin.

Oh, Killian bold and Desylva fair,
Ye rule the waves, a fearsome pair,
Your steel and storm, a pirate’s song,
A bond unbowed, fierce and strong.
We sail with ye through hell’s own din,
For love like yours doth ever win.

Killian and Hook, The Soul’s Two Blades

Killian strides with a carefree flame,
His hook a glint o’ a pirate’s jest,
Hook’s the shadow what bears his name,
A vengeful heart what ne’er find rest.
He’s one dark soul with a riven core,
Two blades o’ fate on a stormy shore.

When Killian laughs, the winds do sing,
He’s rum and gold, a reckless spark,
Then Hook do rise with a bitter sting,
A claw what hunts in the endless dark.
He’s free one breath, then bound by ire,
A pirate torn ‘twixt glee and fire.

Killian’s hook be a roguish toy,
It dances light ‘neath the open sky,
Hook’s a steel what vengeance employ,
A Cap’n scarred by a lost bye-bye.
He’s split ‘twixt mirth and a grim desire,
A soul what’s forged in a vengeful pyre.

The carefree Cap’n do roam with ease,
He’ll drink and jest where the seas run wide,
Hook does stalk ‘neath the storm’s unease,
A wrath what festers deep inside.
I’ve seen his grin turn to icy dread,
A pirate’s life where two souls tread.

Killian sails with a pirate’s grace,
His hook a gleam in the sunny spray,
But Hook’s a ghost with a hollow face,
A Cap’n lost to a vengeful day.
He’s light and shadow in one man’s frame,
A duel o’ spirits what bear one name.

Six verses for the soul’s two cries,
Killian and Hook, one flesh, one fight,
He’s free with rum, then vengeance flies,
A pirate’s heart ‘twixt day and night.
Raise a dirge to his riven reign,
A Cap’n cleaved by joy and pain.

Killian and Hook, The Claws o' Fate

Killian strides with a hook o' fire,
A pirate lord with a raven's crown,
Hook, a shade from a cursed desire,
A claw what's dragged a kingdom down.
They've sailed the black with a pirate's oath,
Two hooks o' steel, both fierce with wroth.

Killian's a gale, a thunder's son,
His hook do gleam like a bloody star,
Hook's a ghost what the light do shun,
A Cap'n scarred by a war so far.
They've locked their steel in a bitter fray,
Yet broke the rum at the end o' day.

The sea's their blood, the wind their breath,
Killian's laugh be a wildcat's cry,
Hook's a shadow what courts with death,
A pirate's soul what'll never die.
Their hooks be kin, though they clash and spark,
A dance o' fate in the endless dark.

They've reaped the gold from a hundred graves,
Killian's bold with a pirate's jest,
Hook's a reaper o' the stormy waves,
A claw what's torn through a navy's best.
I've watched 'em carve the brine in twain,
Two Cap'ns fierce o' the same grim vein.

Their eyes do meet like a storm and blade,
Killian's hook be a blazing brand,
Hook's a chill what the deep has made,
A pirate forged when he lost his hand.
They've sailed as foes, they've sailed as one,
A pair o' claws 'neath the settin' sun.

Six verses for the hooks o' strife,
Killian and Hook, a tangled lore,
They've carved their names with a pirate's knife,
A tale o' steel on a bloody shore.
Raise a curse to their fateful reign,
Two masters grim o' the ocean's chain.

The Fire in the Storm

Killian's hook doth gleam with might,
Desylva's storm doth claim the night,
Their love's a blaze o' wind and steel,
A pirate's oath, a bond so real.
He pulls her close, she calls the rain,
Two souls afire through joy and pain.

Her thunder rolls when he's at hand,
His grin's a spark o'er sea and land,
The Roger bends to their fierce will,
A ship that knows their passion's thrill.
She stirs the gale, he stands unbowed,
A love that's fierce and unavowed

Her mark glows blue, a wild display,
His steel's a mate in every fray,
The seas do roar when they entwine,
A tempest forged in love divine.
She's storm's own queen, he's sea's own king,
A tale o' lust the waves do sing.

Through blood and squall, they hold their ground,
A pair no fate can e'er confound,
Her lightning splits the dark apart,
His hook's a blade to guard her heart.
The crew looks on, we're struck with awe,
A love so raw, without a flaw.

When calm doth fall, they share a glance,
Her rain turns soft, he leads the dance,
Yet wild they stay, a restless flame,
A storm and hook that stake their claim.
She bends the wind, he cuts the tide,
Their souls as one, no need to hide.

Oh, Killian brave, Desylva true,
Ye burn a path the seas run through,
Your steel and storm, a pirate's lore,
A love that echoes evermore.
We sail with ye, through hell's own gate,
For love like yours doth twist our fate.

Poems By Killian Jones

The Jolly Roger, Lass o' the Deep

The Jolly Roger's my truest flame,
A lass o' wood with a pirate's soul,
Her sails do snap in the wind's wild game,
She's borne me whole where the tempests roll.
She's creaked and groaned 'neath my heavy tread,
A ship what's mine 'til the sea's my bed.

Her hull has seen o'er a hundred fights,
She's dodged the shot and she's laughed at gales,
Her decks borne witness to my roguish nights,
A sturdy wench what ne'er fails.
I've gripped her wheel with my hook and hand,
She's my own heart on the ocean's strand.

She's danced through squalls with a saucy sway,
Her timbers sing when the cannons roar,
She's hauled my gold on a carefree day,
And kept me safe from a vengeful shore.
Her masts stand tall 'gainst the blackest sky,
A pirate's lass what'll never die.

The sea's her blood, the storm's her breath,
She's rocked me drunk 'neath a silver moon,
She's scorned the law and she's cheated death,
A rebel dame with a hearty tune.
I've paced her planks with a pirate's care,
She's my own love in the salty air.

When foes did chase, she flew like wind,
Her cannon's growl be my battle cry,
She's borne my sins what I've ne'er rescind,
A ship what's free 'neath a vengeful eye.
Her ropes be taut, her spirit's grand,
She's my own will on the shiftin' sand.

Six verses for me Roger's reign,
She's fierce, she's wild, a pirate's dream,
She's borne me through both joy and pain,
A lass o' steel in the ocean's gleam.
Raise my hook to her timbers strong,
The Roger's mine, where I belong.

Ode to the Jolly Roger

She was born in chains of royal gold and oak,
a jewel polished for a king who never sailed her true—
then I took her name, her heart, her crimson cloak,
and made her mine beneath a sky of blackened blue.

Her keel still remembers Liam's steady tread,
the measured beat of duty, honor, pride;
but I taught her hunger, taught her how to bleed,
and now she sings the wind where good men died.

Those sails—once white as oaths we swore to keep—
now drink the sunset red as Milah's lips;
they snap like laughter over graves we heap,
and every billow bears the taste of her eclipse.

Twelve iron mouths along her ribs still grin,
hungry for the thunder they were forged to speak;
the powder sleeps like lovers locked within,
and wakes to roar when vengeance calls her weak.

Her figurehead, that mermaid fierce and cold,
stares down the deep as though it owes her debt—
trident raised, she carves the waves of old,
and every reef she splits remembers yet.

The helm still knows the press of hook and hand,
the quarterdeck remembers every scar;
she turns for me alone across the sand,
a lover's sigh disguised as cannon's jar.

Through Neverland she glides, ageless, sly,
where time itself forgets to count the cost;
her shadow-route still lets me slip and fly
from cabin heart to hold where dreams are lost.

And when the gales come howling from the deep,
when stars refuse to guide and heaven's blind,
she does not beg, she does not ask to sleep—
she simply lifts her crimson wings and finds.

So let them call her pirate, curse, or ghost—
let kings and gods and shadows speak her name;
she answers only to the man she chose
to bear her weight, her rage, her endless flame.

The Jolly Roger—my heart, my blade, my sin,
my cradle, coffin, compass, and my crown.
Wherever I may go, whatever end,
she carries me, and I shall never drown.

She carries me, and I shall never drown.

My Crew, The Rogues o' the Brine

My crew's a pack o' salty knaves,
A rowdy lot with a pirate's cheer,
They've danced with me o'er bloody waves,
And drowned their fears in a mug o' beer.
They're my own blood, though none by birth,
A band o' rogues what prove their worth.

There's Smee with his mop and simple grin,
He swabs the deck with a loyal heart,
And Billy's voice what cuts the din,
His shanties lift when the storms do start.
They're my own lads, both rough and true,
A scrappy mob what see me through.

Black Tom, mute, wields his harpoon's might,
His aim's a storm in the ocean's sprawl,
One-Eyed Jack keeps the cannon's ready for fight,
His squint's as sharp as the sea can call.
They've fought me wars with a hearty yell,
My crew o' devils what scorned hell.

They've hauled the loot with a greedy hand,
Their curses fly when the winds turn sour,
They've stood by me on a vengeful strand,
And cheered my name in a carefree hour.
They're my own strength, my ragged kin,
A pirate's soul in their roguish din.

When cannons blaze, they hold the line,
Their blades do flash 'neath a stormy sky,
They've drunk my rum and they've shared my wine,
And ne'er asked why when I've bid 'em die.
They're my own eyes, my hook's own might,
A band o' mates in the black o' night.

Six verses for my crew o' brine,
They're wild, they're fierce, a pirate's brood,
They've sailed my ship through fate's design,
And kept my fed on their salty food.
Raise my hook to their ragged cheer,
My rogues o' heart what I hold dear.

A Gentle Tide (Tame Version)

My lass, your eyes hold storms at bay,
A quiet sea beneath the stars' soft glow.
Your touch ignites the night's sweet sway,
And in your arms, my heart does gently row.

The Jolly Roger rocks with tender grace,
As whispers weave our love in candlelight.
Your breath's a breeze upon my face,
A warmth that calms the dark and endless night.

Your fingers trace my scars with care,
Each mark a tale we've fought and overcome.
In your embrace, I find my air,
A harbor safe where weary souls become.

The sea outside sings soft and low,
Her waves a mirror to our gentle dance.
Your laughter stirs the winds to blow,
And in your gaze, I'm lost in sweet romance.

My hook rests still, your hand it holds,
A vow unspoken in the quiet deep.
Your warmth enfolds me, soft and bold,
As dreams arise where love and passion sleep.

The rain you call falls light and sweet,
A misty veil to cloak our tender play.
Our hearts entwine where soft tides meet,
And night dissolves into the break of day.

Your lips, a haven, soft they press,
Each kiss a spark that sets my soul alight.
In you, I find my heart's caress,
A beacon glowing through the fog of night.

The ship sways slow, our rhythm sure,
As love's own tide does lift us to the skies.
Your sighs, a song so clear and pure,
Reflect the stars that shimmer in your eyes.

No storm could break this bond we share,
For you're the calm within my wildest sea.
Your touch, my lass, beyond compare,
It anchors me through all eternity.

So here we lie, as one we blend,
The world beyond forgotten in our bliss.
My Desylva, love without end,
In every gentle wave, I find your kiss.

The dawn creeps soft, yet still we stay,
Entwined in warmth, no haste to greet the morn.
Your heartbeat sings, it leads my way,
A melody where love is ever born.

The window glows with silver light,
Your skin a canvas kissed by moon's caress.
Each touch we share ignites the night,
A quiet vow of love we both profess.

The sea's sweet hum, your magic's call,
It wraps us close, a cradle for our peace.
In your embrace, I give my all,
Where time and tide and longing gently cease.

My hand in yours, my heart laid bare,
Your smile's the sun that breaks the stormy gray.
No wealth could match the love we share,
A treasure found where gentle lovers stray.

Forevermore, my storm, my guide,
Through every squall, your love will lead me true.
In you, I've found my heart's own tide,
My Desylva, I'm bound to none but you.

The Tempest's Claim (Graphic Version)

Your storm-gray eyes ignite my blood,
A hunger raw that claws beneath my skin.
I pin you hard against the wood,
And in your heat, my wicked games begin.

The cabin shakes as seas arise,
Your nails rake fire across my battered chest.
I tear your shirt, your gasps my prize,
Your curves laid bare, my hand will claim the rest.

My hook bites deep into the wall,
Your thighs lock tight, they pull me to your core.
I thrust inside, your wildcat call,
A primal scream that shakes the ocean's roar.

The rain you summon pounds the deck,
Each drop a pulse that matches your sweet grind.
Your lips attack, they bruise my neck,
Our bodies clash where lust and storm entwined.

I lift you rough, your back to me,
The desk groans low beneath your writhing frame.
I drive in deep, your cries run free,
Each brutal plunge sets fire to your name.

Your mark glows bright, a cursed flame,
As lightning cracks to light your sweat-slick skin.
I grip your hips, no thought of shame,
Your tightness pulls me deeper into sin.

The ship careens, her timbers wail,
Your screams outmatch the thunder's feral boom.
I spin you round, your breasts I assail,
My mouth devours where passion's tides consume.

You claw my back, you draw my blood,
Each thrust a war to claim your trembling peak.
The storm outside, a raging flood,
Reflects the chaos where our bodies speak.

I pin your wrists, my rhythm fierce,
Your legs spread wide, you beg for harder still.
Each pulse of you, my soul does pierce,
Till shattering, we bend the night to will.

We crash as one, a howling crest,
You cry my name, my seed within you spills.
The tempest calms, we sink to rest,
Yet in your arms, my hunger never stills.

When first I breach your velvet gate,
A molten rush consumes my every nerve.
Your heat's a vise, my mind's elate,
Each inch I claim, my sanity you swerve.

To ride you hard, my pace a storm,
Your walls grip tight, they milk my throbbing need.
Your gasps ignite my primal form,
Each slam a vow to sate our burning greed.

Your breasts bounce wild, I seize their swell,
My teeth graze flesh, your moans a feral plea.
The bed's a wreck where passions dwell,
Your body bends to lust's unyielding spree.

When I erupt, a molten flood,
Your depths drink deep, my roar joins thunder's din.
Our juices mix, your pulse my blood,
A savage mark of where our souls have been.

We lie in ruin, soaked and torn,
Your mark still glows, my hunger's never done.
The storm may fade, yet lust reborn,
My Desylva, our fire's never won.

A Pirate's Oath to His Storm

I've sailed through hells of blackest ink,
Where krakens coil and sirens drink
The marrow from a drowning man—
Yet none could break me like you can.

Your eyes are thunderheads at war,
Gray as the sea before the roar,
And when they flash, I feel the tine
Of lightning running down my spine.

I've bartered gold and blood and years,
I've laughed at death between the tears,
But every coin and every scar
Is worthless next to where you are.

You are the gale that splits my sails,
The maelstrom caught in mortal rails,
The curse I wear upon my skin
And still would beg to take again.

My hook was forged for vengeance cold,
Yet you have made the steel feel old—
Now it reaches only for your waist,
To pull you closer, never waste
A single heartbeat of the storm
That keeps my wretched soul reborn.

Let kingdoms fall and heavens crack,
Let Rumpelstiltskin have his black
Revenge—I care not for the cost
When every tempest leaves me lost
Inside the thunder of your name,
My Desylva, my endless flame.

The Jolly Roger may be mine by right,
But every plank and every night
Belongs to you, my wildest sea,
The only port that ever set me free.

So let the world call me a monster,
A villain carved from salt and anger—
They'll never know the quiet truth,
My heart has only ever sailed for you.

A Pirate's Vow

Through seas of wrath, I carve my way,
Your shadow lingers, night and day.
My heart's a compass, fixed on thee,
Desylva, love, I'll set you free.

The stars grow dim, their light betrayed,
Yet still I sail where hopes don't fade.
Your storm's my guide, your ring's my chart,
I'll find you, lass, though worlds apart.

The Jolly Roger groans with grief,
Each plank a cry for my belief.
Your laughter haunts these salt-worn beams,
I chase your echo through my dreams.

No imp's deceit can break my will,
When I find you, his blood I'll spill.
Your sapphire gleams in memory's hold,
A fire that burns through lies so cold.

The waves may roar, the skies may rend,
But love like ours will never end.
Your voice, a shanty, calls me near,
I swear, my tempest, I'll not veer.

Three years of pain, my soul's been torn,
Yet still I fight, by love I'm sworn.
Your mark's a flame that lights my sea,
I'll find you, Des, or cease to be.

No realm, no dark can keep us twain,
I'll sail through hell to ease this pain.
My hook, my heart, my vow I send,
To you, my storm, until the end.

Through mists of doubt, my course is true,
Each breath, each beat, it screams for you.
Desylva, hold, your pirate's near,
Our love will conquer fate and fear.

A Pirate's Ravenous Devotion

I have drowned men in my shadow,
carved my name into the throats of kings,
watched empires bleed out on my deck like cheap wine,
tasted the copper of revenge so long it became all I craved,
drunk the blackest revenge until it stained my teeth.
I would set every last drop ablaze
watch it burn to ash and salt and silence
until the sea itself screamed,
if it brought me one more second, one more heartbeat,
buried inside the hurricane of you.

I have gutted men for less than a glance,
watched their life spill red across my boots
while I smiled like the devil who finally learned to love—
and I would slaughter every last soul I ever hated,
carve their screams into the hull of the Roger
and set the whole damn ship ablaze
just to feel you clench around me one more time.

Your eyes are not gray—
they are the sky the moment before lightning
tears the world open and swallows the pieces
Every time they lock on mine
I feel the first brutal crack of thunder
shatter straight through my ribcage
and lodge in my soul.

You are violence wrapped in velvet, war dressed in silk,
an apocalypse wearing skin,
a hurricane that learned how to love and kiss
a storm that learned how to ride a man
until he begs for mercy and then denies it anyway.

When your mouth crashes into mine
I taste ozone, blood, lightning, iron, the sweet rot of surrender
and the end of everything—
and I beg, gods damn me, I beg
for you to ruin me until there's nothing left
but smoke and salt and the echo of your name.

My hook was made for throats,
born to rip vengeance from bone,
forged in hate so cold it froze the forge,
tempered in the blood of every man who ever took from me

Now it trembles like a virgin boy's first touch
when it slides down between your breasts,
when it hooks behind your knee and yanks you wider,
when it pins your wrists above your head so I can watch
every inch of you take me
while you snarl my name like a curse you love too much.

Like a man praying at an altar
he knows will one day consume him,
or clawing at the gates of hell
because heaven would be too small for us.

I would trade every chest of gold I ever stole,
every map to lost realms, and forgotten hells,
every night I thought I owned the dark,
thought revenge was the only god worth praying to—
for the privilege to be the ship you wreck
until the keel snaps and the mast splinters
and the only thing left floating
is the sound of you coming undone on my tongue.

Let the sea rise up, choke me, and swallow me,
let Rumpel take my heart again,
Let every curse I ever laughed at finally find me
and bury me alive—

I do not care.
None of it matters.

Because when your storm slams down on me,
when your thighs lock around my waist like manacles forged in hell,
when your nails rake bloody rivers down my back,
while you scream mine like a war cry turned prayer,
while your teeth sink into my shoulder while you grind yourself onto my cock
like you're trying to take the soul straight out of me—

I am not a pirate anymore. I am yours.
I am no longer a captain. I am wreckage.
I am nothing. I am ruin.
Utterly. Violently. Eternally.
Savagely. Completely. Irrevocably.
Until the marrow in my bones is soaked in you.

And I would sail into every hell
just to hear you scream mine
one more time.

Desylva—
my lightning, my ruin, my home,
my apocalypse, my only salvation
wreck me until the sky splits open,
until the stars bleed,
until the ocean forgets how to breathe,
until the sea forgets its own name,
until there is nothing left
but the raw, ragged sound of your pleasure ripping through my throat
the echo of your name on the wind
and the taste of salt on broken lips that still smile
because they were arrogant enough to think they could ever belong to anyone else.

The Storm I Seek

The wind howls her name, a banshee's wail,
Through mighty sails and a sea gone pale.
He took her, my storm, my wild gray flame,
Desylva, ripped from my deck, my claim.

Her lightning's gone, her thunder mute,
A void where once she carved our route.
I sail through mist, through blood-red tide,
My hook a claw, my heart untied.

The Jolly Roger groans, her timbers weep,
Each creak a vow I swore to keep.
I've chased his wake, the shadow thief,
Through siren coves and coral reef.

My blade drank deep, his screams my chart,
I carved her name in every heart.
No port, no rum, no dawn's reprieve,
Till I find her storm, my soul won't grieve.

The realms I scoured, from Oz's green veil,
To Maelstrom's eye where tempests flail.
Her cloak, her mark, her storm-touched gleam,
A ghost that haunts my every dream.

I bartered gold, I broke through lies,
Sought whispers 'neath the crimson skies.
The map's amber runes, once our prize,
Now mock me blind with hollow cries.

A crone in shadows, her voice a knell,
Spoke words that dragged me down to hell.
"She's gone, ye fool, her storm's run dry,
Desylva's dead, no spark to spy."

The rum turned ash, my blood went cold,
Two centuries young, yet twice as old.
Her gray eyes fade, her tempest stills,
A silence worse than siren trills.

I stood at the rail, the sea a shroud,
My scream a storm that shook the cloud.
The lass who matched my sea with fire,
Snuffed out by fate, a croc's desire.

Milah's ghost had scarred me deep,
But Desylva's loss cuts past my sleep.
No imp, no queen, just void to fight,
A captain lost in endless night.

The hook gleams sharp, my heart turns black,
Captain Hook stirs, that pirate's back.
No warmth, no spark, just steel and spite,
I'll hunt her shade through cursed delight.

The Jolly Roger flies my rage,
A skull unfurls on every gauge.
Smee quails, Jack growls, Tom stands grim,
Billy's lute hums a requiem hymn.

I'll scour the seas, I'll rend the skies,
For every tear her storm disguised.
If she's a ghost, I'll chase her wail,
Through Styx's depths, beyond the veil.

Rumpelstiltskin's laugh, Regina's cruel jeer,
They'll pay in blood for stealing my dear.
My love, my storm, my wild refrain,
Captain Hook reigns, through grief and pain.

Poems By Desylva

My Heart's True Tide

My love, you stand where oceans roar,
A pirate bold with eyes of flame,
Your heart's the tide that pulls me ashore,
And calls my soul to speak your name.

Through shadowed realms we carved our way,
Your hook a gleam in twilight's glow,
My storms would rise, yet you would stay,
To guide me where the wild winds blow.

Beneath the stars, the Roger sways,
her timbers hum our lover's song,
Your whispered vows light up my days,
With you, my heart will e'er belong.

The seas may rage, the skies may weep,
But in your arms, I find my peace,
Your steady gaze, my soul to keep,
Our love a tide that'll never cease.

Each scar you bear, I trace with care,
A map of trials we've overcome,
Your strength, your laugh, beyond compare,
My heart's your hearth, my only home.

In crimson depths, you held my hand,
When abyss's chill would claim my breath,
Your courage lit the darkened strand,
And pulled me back from tides of death.

The rain I call, it sings for you,
A gentle mist to kiss your skin,
My magic bends where love is true,
With you, my world will e'er begin.

Your leather coat, your roguish grin,
They spark a warmth no storm can quell,
In every port, through every din,
My heart for you will ever dwell.

We've faced the ghosts, the siren's wail,
Yet side by side, we've never faltered,
Your love's the wind that fills my sail,
My course by you forever altered.

The moonlight gilds your tousled hair,
When night enfolds us, soft and near,
Your touch a vow, beyond compare,
My haven safe, with you, my dear.

Through labyrinths of echoed pain,
Your voice was light to guide me through,
My storms would rage, yet you'd remain,
My anchor strong, my love so true.

The cliffs of bone, the peaks that break,
We've conquered all with hearts entwined,
For you, my love, I'd tempests wake,
Yet calm them for the peace we find.

Your hook's a star in battle's fray,
Yet gentle when it brushes me,
In every dawn, in every day,
My soul's your tide, eternally.

The sea may part us, time may try,
But love like ours will never fade,
Beneath the storm, beneath the sky,
With you, my heart is ever stayed.

So here I stand, your storm, your mate,
My Killian, my heart's own call,
Through every sea, through every fate,
I'll love you fierce, through rise and fall.

Tempest of Our Flesh

Your body calls, a siren's plea,
My pirate bold, my fevered dream,
I crave your heat, your weight on me,
To drown in lust's unyielding stream.

Against the wall, your hook's cold bite,
It pins my hip, a thrilling sting,
Your lips devour, ignite the night,
My storms unleash what passion brings.

The Roger rocks, her timbers groan,
As flesh meets flesh in urgent clash,
Your thrusts a fire that claims my moan,
My nails carve trails in heated flash.

My magic surges, skies ignite,
With every grind, the thunder rolls,
Your hand's rough grip, it holds me tight,
Our rhythm burns through both our souls.

The bed's our stage, I straddle low,
Your eyes blaze dark with hunger's plea,
I ride your need, my tides to show,
Each pulse a wave consuming me.

Your hook's sharp edge, it grazes skin,
A danger sweet, it spurs my cry,
I arch for you, let sin begin,
Our bodies lock beneath the sky.

The desk's hard bite beneath my back,
You lift me high, your strength my cage,
My screams escape, no turning back,
As lightning cracks our lover's rage.

My cursed mark, it glows for you,
A beacon bright in passion's haze,
Your breath's a growl, it tears me through,
Our fever sets the night ablaze.

The sea responds, it churns and heaves,
As I do you, with greedy thrust,
Your fingers bruise, my body weaves,
We meld in fire, in sweat, in trust.

Your lips on mine, they bruise and take,
A kiss that's war, a lover's fight,
My core's alive, it bends, it breaks,
With every stroke, you claim the night.

I claw your chest, I beg for more,
Your hook's a threat that drives me wild,
The rain outside, it pounds the shore,
As you possess me, undefiled.

The cabin shakes, the storm's my voice,
It screams your name with every peak,
Your rhythm rough, it leaves no choice,
My body yields to what you seek.

We crash as one, a primal tide,
My cry a gale, your roar its twin,
The skies explode, no place to hide,
Our climax storms where love's within.

The rain subsides, yet still I burn,
Your hook beside me, warm from fight,
My flesh still hums, for you I yearn,
Each pulse a spark to reignite.

My Killian, my tempest's king,
Our bodies sing what hearts confess,
Through every storm, through everything,
I'll crave your touch, your wild caress.

Ode to Killian

From Veyra's cliffs, where storms did wail and roar,
I clung to jagged rock, my strength near spent,
Your ship emerged, a beacon's soar,
Your hook a gleam, to save me you were sent.

My cursed mark flared, my heart a battered shore,
Yet in your eyes, a fire of love was lent,
You pulled me from the sea's unyielding lore,
My pirate, Killian, my soul's ascent.

Your black coat danced with winds that tore the night,
Your voice, a steady call through crashing waves,
My rain awoke, a shield of silver light,
To meet your heart, where courage never caves.

No shadow's curse could dim your daring sight,
Your cutlass carved through foes in darkened naves,
With you, my storm found peace in love's delight,
My captain, love, who storms and seas enslaves.

Through realms of shadow, where the dark did creep,
Your hook flashed bright, a star to guide my way,
My lightning struck to guard you in your leap,
Your grin a spark that turned night to day.

No sorcerer's spell could chain us in its deep,
My gusts arose to sweep their lies away,
In your embrace, my heart's no longer steep,
My Killian, my dawn in storm's gray fray.

The seas did rage, their fury cold and vast,
Yet you, my love, did steer with iron hand,
My thunder roared to break the tempest's blast,
Your steady helm brought us to safer land.

When cursed enchantments sought to bind us fast,
My rain would fall, a shield at your command,
Your touch, a warmth that holds me to the last,
My pirate bold, my heart's eternal strand.

In caverns deep, where echoes mocked our tread,
Your courage shone, a flame no dark could quell,
My lightning danced to strike the fear and dread,
Your hook a vow that broke each cursed spell.

No golden foe could tear the love we've bred,
My storm's your home, where all our fears did dwell,
With you, I'm whole, no matter where we're led,
My Killian, my shield 'gainst seas of hell.

Your laughter rings like bells across the tide,
A melody that calms my restless soul,
My gusts entwine to sail where you abide,
Your heart's the chart that makes my spirit whole.

Through mists and perils, side by side we ride,
My rain a kiss to mend each wound and toll,
Your blue eyes gleam, my haven and my pride,
My captain, love, who steers my heart's true goal.

When icy winds did bite with cruel intent,
Your warmth, a fire, did thaw my frozen core,
My thunder cracked to rend the sky's lament,
Your hook a spark that lit the heavens' lore.

No queen's dark magic could our love prevent,
My lightning struck to guard our sacred shore,
With you, my storm's a song of sweet ascent,
My Killian, my light forevermore.

The crew, they cheer, Smee's shout, Jack's gruff call,
Billy's whoop, and Tom's mute, steady hand,
Yet you, my love, stand tallest of them all,
Your swagger leads where seas and stars expand.

My rain falls soft to answer love's sweet thrall,
Your hook entwines with my heart's wild demand,
Through every gale, we rise and never fall,
My pirate, heart, who holds me in his band.

In depths where shadows twisted into lies,
Your steady gaze did pierce the cursed veil,
My gusts arose to clear the blackened skies,
Your cutlass swung where dark enchantments fail.

No gilded trick could dim your fierce blue eyes,
My thunder sang to shatter spellbound shale,
With you, my love, my storm will never die,
My Killian, my wind in every sail.

When waves did tower, threatening to consume,
Your hand in mine, a vow that held us fast,
My lightning flared to light the ocean's gloom,
Your hook a guide through dangers vast and vast.

No wicked curse could weave our love's dark doom,
My rain a balm for wounds from battles past,
In your embrace, my heart finds endless room,
My captain, star, whose love will ever last.

Your voice, a tide that pulls my soul to sea,
A gentle call amidst the storm's wild cry,
My thunder hums to echo love's decree,
Your grin a spark that lights the darkened sky.

Through realms where shadows sought to bind us free,
My gusts would rise to guard you till we die,
With you, my love, my heart's a boundless lea,
My Killian, my truth that storms defy.

In nights where stars were drowned by cursed shade,
Your hook did gleam, a beacon through the strife,
My rain did fall to wash the fear we braved,
Your heart a flame that kindled all my life.

No sorceress could break the bond we've made,
My lightning struck to sever spellbound knife,
With you, my storm's a song that won't degrade,
My pirate, love, my shield in every rife.

The seas may roar, their fury fierce and wild,
Yet you, my love, are steady as the dawn,
My thunder rolls to guard our love exiled,
Your hook a vow that carries us along.

No dark enchantment holds us in its child,
My rain a kiss where all our fears are gone,
In your embrace, my heart is reconciled,
My Killian, my strength when storms are drawn.

Your touch, a calm that stills my tempest's rage,
A gentle hand that tames my wildest sea,
My lightning softens, love its only gauge,
Your eyes the home where all my dreams run free.

Through every storm, we write our love's new page,
My gusts a vow to guard you endlessly,
With you, my heart's no longer bound by cage,
My captain, soul, my love's eternity.

So here I stand, my storm forever yours,
Your hook, your heart, the anchor of my tide,
My thunder sings where love forever soars,
Your name, my Killian, my heart's fierce pride.

No sea, no curse, can bar our love's great doors,
My rain, my lightning, ever by your side,
Through endless waves, we sail to starlit shores,
My pirate, love, my storm's unyielding guide.

My Hook, My Storm

Beneath the sails of a moonless night,
I found you—rogue of salt and starlit spite.
A man carved sharp by centuries of rage,
Yet soft when your blue eyes met my gray stage.

Your hook is cold, a blade forged in grief's fire,
But when it traces my skin, it wakes desire.
Not the steel of vengeance, no—not anymore,
It's become my anchor, my safe, steady shore.

I am thunder wrapped in woman's skin,
Lightning veins where the wild winds begin.
They called me cursed, a tempest to be feared,
But you looked at the storm and called it dear.

You never asked me to quiet the gale,
Never begged the rain to be less pale.
You laughed when my mark burned bright and blue,
Said, "Burn it down, love—I'll burn with you."

Through blood-red abysses and emerald lies,
Through ice that bites and phoenix skies,
We've sailed every realm that tried to break us apart,
And every time, you still hold my heart.

Your voice is rum and gravel, low and true,
The only sound my storm ever listens to.
When the kraken rises and the heavens roar,
I don't call the lightning—I call for more.

More of your grin, wicked and bright,
More of your touch in the dead of night.
More of the way you say my name like a vow,
Like I'm the only horizon you'll ever bow to.

So let the stars fall, let the seas run dry,
Let the Dark One laugh, let the old gods die.
I'll still be here, storm in my veins, fire in my chest,
Loving the pirate who loved me best.

Killian Jones, my hook, my sea, my sin—
You are the only calm I've ever been in.
And if the world ends tomorrow in flame,
I'll meet it grinning, whispering your name.

Appendix 7
Shanties

Shanties By Billy

Hook and His Storm Love

Oh, Cap'n Hook was young and spry,
A naval lad beneath the sky,
With brother bold, he'd sail and fly,
A heart o' dreams that wouldn't die!

But fate did strike his kin away,
A cursed isle took Liam's day,
He turned to sea in dark dismay,
A pirate born from grief's cold play!

The Jolly Roger's deck he took,
His hand was lost, replaced by hook,
Through Neverland, his soul forsook,
A vengeance sworn in every look!

His blue eyes blazed with wild intent,
Each raid a fight, each storm was sent,
A rogue alone, his heart was bent,
To hunt the dark where shadows went!

Hoist the sails and sing it clear,
For Hook and love through storm and fear!
With heart and hook, he'll ne'er be swayed,
A pirate's tale o' love remade!

Through centuries, he sailed the tide,
With crew like me to stand beside,
A captain fierce with pirate pride,
His lonely soul the seas did ride!

Then came Desylva, storm so grand,
Her gray eyes flashed o'er sea and land,
She struck with rain from cursed hand,
And Hook, he loved her wild demand!

Through Skull's dark bones, they fought as one,
Her lightning danced, his steel begun,
From crow's nest high, I saw their run,
A love like storms beneath the sun!

In Siren's Mist, she pulled him near,
Her gusts did save from watery fear,
His hook did gleam, her voice so dear,
A bond o' thunder I could hear!

Hoist the sails and sing it clear,
For Hook and love through storm and fear!
With heart and hook, he'll ne'er be swayed,
A pirate's tale o' love remade!

The Maelstrom's roar, they faced with glee,
Her tempest sang, his heart broke free,
With Crystal Heart, their love decree,
A pirate pair o'er every sea!

By Roger's mast, he bent his knee,
"Marry me, lass," his heartfelt plea,
Her storm did vow, their souls agree,
A love to shine eternally!

But shadows stole her in the night,
A curse did tear her from his sight,
Hook's heart did break, his soul took flight,
A stormless man in endless fight!

His blue eyes weep, his hook does rend,
He searches still, no hope to mend,
Through realms o' dark, his love won't bend,
A broken Cap'n till the end!

Hoist the sails and sing it clear,
For Hook and love through storm and fear!
With heart and hook, he'll ne'er be swayed,
A pirate's tale o' love remade!

Hook and His Storm Love (Alternate Version)

Oh, Cap'n Hook was young and keen,
A naval lad with dreams serene,
With brother Liam, bold and green,
He sailed the seas, a sight unseen!

But fate did strike with cursed blow,
His kin was lost to dark below,
He turned to rage, his heart did grow,
A pirate's path through grief to know!

The Roger's deck he claimed with might,
His hand was gone, a hook so bright,
Through Neverland, he fought the night,
A soul o' vengeance, wild in flight!

His blue eyes burned with lonesome fire,
Each raid a step to dark desire,
A captain lone, no heart to tire,
He ruled the waves in black attire!

Hoist the sails and sing it clear,
For Hook and love through storm and fear!
With heart and hook, he'll ne'er be swayed,
A pirate's tale o' love remade!

The day they met, a storm did brew,
Her gray eyes flashed, a wild debut,
She called the rain with strength so true,
And Hook's lone heart began to view!

Her thunder rolled, his steel did gleam,
That first day sparked a pirate's dream,
Her voice a gust, his soul's new seam,
A love took root in storm's esteem!

First year o' fight, she stood his side,
Her lightning danced, his heart untied,
Through battles fierce, his love did bide,
A storm so bold he'd not deride!

Next year, her rain would soothe his pain,
Her wildness grew, his heart's refrain,
Each clash they shared, his love did gain,
A bond o' tempest none could chain!

Hoist the sails and sing it clear,
For Hook and love through storm and fear!
With heart and hook, he'll ne'er be swayed,
A pirate's tale o' love remade!

Third year, her gusts did call his name,
His blue eyes soft, her gray the same,
Her storm o' might, his heart aflame,
He knew his soul she'd fully claim!

Through days o' strife, her strength held fast,
His hook would gleam, her thunder cast,
Three years o' wild, his heart amassed,
A love to bloom from storm's vast blast!

Her spirit fierce, his will did bend,
Through stormy nights, his heart'd amend,
Three years she wove, his soul to mend,
A pirate's love to ne'er descend!

By Roger's mast, he made his stand,
"Marry me, lass," with storm in hand,
Her gray eyes vowed o'er sea and land,
His heart was hers, a love so grand!

Hoist the sails and sing it clear,
For Hook and love through storm and fear!
With heart and hook, he'll ne'er be swayed,
A pirate's tale o' love remade!

But shadows snatched her from his hold,
A curse o' dark, so cruel and cold,
His heart did break, his soul unsold,
A stormless Hook, no longer bold!

His blue eyes weep through endless night,
He searches realms with fading light,
The Roger sails, a mournful sight,
His love's sweet storm beyond his fight!

Through Labyrinth's maze, he calls her name,
His hook does rend, his heart aflame,
Each echo mocks his lonely claim,
A broken man in cursed game!

His quest goes on, though hope does fade,
A captain lost where love was made,
Through seas o' grief, his heart's betrayed,
For Desylva's storm, his soul's last trade!

Hoist the sails and sing it clear,
For Hook and love through storm and fear!
With heart and hook, he'll ne'er be swayed,
A pirate's tale o' love remade!

Ridin' the Storm

Oh, the rain it falls so soft and sweet,
A lover's tune where shadows meet,
The sea she hums, the night's her own,
With every kiss, the wind's been sown.

The calm returns, the tempest sleeps,
A quiet love the ocean keeps,
The stars wink down, the night's so still,
Two hearts as one, the sea's their will.

Oh, the wind it howls, the sea she cries,
A lover's storm lights up the skies,
The waves they crash, the night's alive,
With every thrust, the tempest thrives!

The gale's gone still, the night's so fair,
A quiet love hangs in the air,
The sea she sleeps, the storm's no more,
Two hearts at peace on this old shore.

Oh, the rain it falls so light and fine,
A lover's touch in every line,
The sea she sways, so soft and slow,
With every sigh, the breezes blow.

The night's so still, the storm's at rest,
A tender love beats in their chest,
The sea she shines, the calm's our guide,
Two hearts as one on this fair tide.

Oh, the wind it screams, the sea she fights,
A lover's clash in stormy nights,
The waves they roar, the thunder's call,
With every cry, the tempest's thrall!

The night's so calm, the storm's away,
A fierce love rests till break of day,
The sea she gleams, the peace is true,
Two hearts beat soft when night is through.

Oh, the rain it falls so kind and slow,
A lover's touch where soft winds blow,
The sea she hums, so sweet and fair,
With every sigh, love's in the air.

The night's so clear, the storm's at rest,
A quiet love beats in their chest,
The sea she shines, the calm's our guide,
Two hearts as one on this fair tide.

Oh, the wind it roars, the sea she breaks,
A lover's fire the night forsakes,
The waves they pound, the thunder's might,
With every clash, the storm takes flight!

The night's at peace, the gale's no more,
A wild love rests on this calm shore,
The sea she gleams, the calm's our friend,
Two souls as one till journey's end.

Oh, the rain it falls so mild and true,
A lover's touch comes shinin' through,
The sea she sways, so soft and grand,
With every sigh, love's gentle hand.

The night's so clear, the storm's asleep,
A tender love the ocean keeps,
The sea she glows, the calm's our guide,
Two hearts at peace on this dark tide.

Oh, the wind it howls, the sea she shakes,
A lover's fire the night remakes,
The waves they crash, the thunder's near,
With every cry, the storm we hear!

The night's so still, the gale's at bay,
A wild love rests till break of day,
The sea she shines, the calm's our own,
Two hearts at peace where winds have blown.

Oh, the rain it falls so calm and fair,
A lover's touch floats in the air,
The sea she sways, so sweet and slow,
With every kiss, the breezes grow.

The night's so still, the storm's at ease,
A tender love rides on the seas,
The sea she glows, the calm's our friend,
Two hearts as one till night's sweet end.

Oh, the wind it roars, the sea she cries,
A lover's storm tears through the skies,
The waves they smash, the thunder's loud,
With every thrust, the tempest's proud!

The night's at peace, the gale's gone still,
A wild love bends the ocean's will,
The sea she gleams, the calm's our guide,
Two hearts at rest on this dark tide.

Oh, the rain it falls so calm and slow,
A lover's touch where soft winds blow,
The sea she sways, so sweet and grand,
With every sigh, love's gentle hand.

The night's so clear, the storm's at peace,
A tender love the seas release,
The sea she glows, the calm's our friend,
Two hearts as one till night's sweet end.

Oh, the wind it roars, the sea she breaks,
A lover's fire the night remakes,
The waves they pound, the thunder's might,
With every clash, the storm takes flight!

The night's at peace, the gale's no more,
A fierce love rests on this dark shore,
The sea she gleams, the calm's our friend,
Two souls as one till journey's end.

Oh, the rain it falls so mild and sweet,
A lover's tune where wild hearts meet,
The sea she sways, so soft and grand,
With every kiss, love's gentle hand.

The night's so clear, the storm's asleep,
A tender love the ocean keeps,
The sea she glows, the calm's our guide,
Two hearts at peace on this strange tide.

Oh, the wind it roars, the sea she cries,
A lover's storm tears through the skies,
The waves they crash, the thunder's loud,
With every thrust, the tempest's proud!

The night's at peace, the gale's gone still,
A wild love bends the ocean's will,
The sea she gleams, the calm's our guide,
Two hearts at rest on this green tide.

Oh, the rain it falls so calm and fair,
A lover's touch floats in the air,
The sea she sways, so sweet and slow,
With every kiss, the breezes grow.

The night's so still, the storm's at ease,
A tender love rides on the seas,
The sea she glows, the calm's our friend,
Two souls as one till journey's end.

You're a Dark One, Rumpel Dear
(tune "You're a Mean One, Mr. Grinch")

You're a dark one, Rumpel dear,
A trickster clad in scales,
Your giggle's sharp as cutlass steel,
Your deals are forged in gales,
Rumpel dear!
You'd trade a soul for gold, aye, And leave us lost in tales!

You're a sly one, Rumpel dear,
With a heart o' twisted thread,
We'd rather face a kraken's maw,
Than shake yer hand instead,
Rumpel dear!
The devil hisself would blush, At the mischief in yer head!

You're a foul one, Rumpel mate,
With fingers quick to spin,
You weave yer webs o' glitterin' gold,
To trap us deep within,
Rumpel mate!
Yer dagger's dark as nightfall, And yer grin's a crocodile's sin!

You're a cursed one, Rumpel lad,
A shadow on the sea,
Yer bargains snatch our names away,
And bind us cruelly free,
Rumpel lad!
We'd sail through storms and cannon fire, To dodge yer crooked glee!

The Storm Lass's Reel

Oh, the captain's lass with storm in her gaze,
She rocks the ship in a lover's haze,
The waves do dance, the winds do play,
For Killian's heart she's swept away!

Oh, the lass with thunder in her soul,
She rocks the ship from pole to pole,
The waves do crash, the winds do bite,
For Killian's fire burns the night!

Oh, the lass with gales in her cry,
She rocks the ship 'neath a thunderin' sky,
The waves do break, the timbers sway,
For Killian's wild love leads the fray!

Oh, the lass with winds so sweet and low,
She rocks the ship where soft tides flow,
The waves do sigh, the breezes play,
For Killian's love she lights the way!

Oh, the lass with lightning in her vein,
She rocks the ship through storm and strain,
The waves do leap, the thunder calls,
For Killian's hunger shakes the walls!

Oh, the lass with fury in her roar,
She rocks the ship to the ocean's core,
The waves do smash, the gales do sing,
For Killian's wild heart wears her sting!

Oh, the lass with dusk in her sigh,
She rocks the ship 'neath a velvet sky,
The waves do hum, the breezes glide,
For Killian's gentle love's her tide!

Oh, the lass with hunger in her call,
She rocks the ship 'gainst the tempest's thrall,
The waves do surge, the winds do race,
For Killian's fire sets the pace!

Oh, the lass with fury in her glare,
She rocks the ship through the tempest's snare,
The waves do rage, the winds do fight,
For Killian's wild love burns the night!

Oh, the lass with tides so sweet and still,
She rocks the ship with a lover's will,
The waves do hum, the breezes glide,
For Killian's gentle heart's her guide!

Oh, the lass with fire in her vein,
She rocks the ship through the tempest's strain,
The waves do leap, the thunder calls,
For Killian's fevered love enthralls!

Oh, the lass with hunger in her roar,
She rocks the ship to the ocean's core,
The waves do smash, the gales do sing,
For Killian's savage love's her king!

Oh, the lass with mischief in her grin,
She rocks the ship with a playful spin,
The waves do skip, the breezes tease,
For Killian's laugh she aims to please!

Oh, the lass with shadows in her sway,
She rocks the ship through the misty gray,
The waves do cloak, the winds do hum,
For Killian's quiet love she's come!

Oh, the lass with embers in her breath,
She rocks the ship 'gainst the storm's own death,
The waves do flare, the winds do chase,
For Killian's spark lights up her face!

Oh, the lass with echoes in her tune,
She rocks the ship 'neath a silver moon,
The waves do sing, the breezes blend,
For Killian's song she'll never end!

Oh, the lass with chaos in her grip,
She rocks the ship through a wilder rip,
The waves do thrash, the winds do howl,
For Killian's fierce love makes her growl!

Oh, the lass with dawn in her embrace,
She rocks the ship with a tender grace,
The waves do glow, the breezes mend,
For Killian's light's her journey's end!

Oh, the lass with whispers in her stare,
She rocks the ship through the twilight's glare,
The waves do hush, the winds do weave,
For Killian's calm she'll ne'er deceive!

Oh, the lass with venom in her bite,
She rocks the ship 'neath a stormy night,
The waves do snap, the winds do clash,
For Killian's edge she'll fiercely lash!

Oh, the lass with starlight in her hold,
She rocks the ship through the dark so bold,
The waves do gleam, the breezes soar,
For Killian's dream she's evermore!

Oh, the lass with secrets in her wake,
She rocks the ship for her lover's sake,
The waves do veil, the winds do sigh,
For Killian's trust she'll never deny!

Oh, the lass with iron in her will,
She rocks the ship through the tempest's thrill,
The waves do pound, the winds do scream,
For Killian's strength she reigns supreme!

Oh, the lass with roses in her bloom,
She rocks the ship 'neath a gentle gloom,
The waves do sway, the breezes kiss,
For Killian's peace she brings her bliss!

Oh, the lass with frost in her caress,
She rocks the ship through a chill's duress,
The waves do freeze, the winds do bite,
For Killian's warmth she holds so tight!

Oh, the lass with amber in her glow,
She rocks the ship where the embers grow,
The waves do blaze, the breezes fan,
For Killian's flame she's everyman!

Oh, the lass with laughter in her gale,
She rocks the ship 'neath a joyous sail,
The waves do leap, the winds do cheer,
For Killian's mirth she holds so dear!

Oh, the lass with echoes in her wail,
She rocks the ship through a haunting tale,
The waves do moan, the winds do keen,
For Killian's ghost she's ever seen!

Oh, the lass with steel in her stride,
She rocks the ship 'gainst a warring tide,
The waves do clash, the winds do roar,
For Killian's fight she's battle's core!

Oh, the lass with velvet in her plea,
She rocks the ship 'neath a soft decree,
The waves do purr, the breezes sing,
For Killian's touch she's everything!

Oh, the lass with tempest in her clasp,
She rocks the ship with a mighty grasp,
The waves do churn, the winds do blast,
For Killian's might she holds steadfast!

Oh, the lass with twilight in her trance,
She rocks the ship in a lover's dance,
The waves do glide, the breezes sway,
For Killian's grace she'll always stay!

Oh, the lass with fury in her flight,
She rocks the ship through a raging night,
The waves do strike, the winds do tear,
For Killian's wrath she'll always bear!

Oh, the lass with moonlight in her care,
She rocks the ship through the night so fair,
The waves do shine, the breezes lift,
For Killian's hope she's heaven's gift!

Oh, the lass with thunder in her stride,
She rocks the ship 'gainst a booming tide,
The waves do roll, the winds do boom,
For Killian's power she'll consume!

Oh, the lass with sunrise in her cheer,
She rocks the ship when the dawn is near,
The waves do laugh, the breezes bloom,
For Killian's joy she'll chase the gloom!

Oh, the lass with coral in her crown,
She rocks the ship where the depths abound,
The waves do swirl, the winds do dive,
For Killian's deep she'll always thrive!

Oh, the lass with whispers in her tide,
She rocks the ship with a secret's pride,
The waves do curl, the breezes hide,
For Killian's lore she'll e'er abide!

Oh, the lass with wildfire in her core,
She rocks the ship ‘til the heavens soar,
The waves do blaze, the winds do sweep,
For Killian’s heat she’ll ever keep!

Oh, the lass with echoes in her sigh,
She rocks the ship ‘neath a fading sky,
The waves do fade, the winds do mourn,
For Killian’s past she’s gently torn!

Oh, the lass with sapphire in her gleam,
She rocks the ship through a lover’s dream,
The waves do spark, the breezes shine,
For Killian’s soul she’s pure divine!

Oh, the lass with thunder in her grasp,
She rocks the ship with a stormy clasp,
The waves do boom, the winds do lash,
For Killian’s force she’ll ever crash!

Oh, the lass with petals in her wake,
She rocks the ship for her lover’s sake,
The waves do drift, the breezes bloom,
For Killian’s calm she’ll soothe the gloom!

Oh, the lass with iron in her glare,
She rocks the ship through the storm’s own lair,
The waves do pound, the winds do clash,
For Killian’s will she’ll never dash!

Oh, the lass with starfire in her call,
She rocks the ship ‘gainst the night’s great fall,
The waves do flare, the winds do sing,
For Killian’s light she’s everything!

Oh, the lass with shadows in her grace,
She rocks the ship through a mystic space,
The waves do veil, the breezes drift,
For Killian’s heart she’ll ever lift!

Oh, the lass with fury in her song,
She rocks the ship where the wild belong,
The waves do roar, the winds do cry,
For Killian’s rage she’ll never shy!

Oh, the lass with sunrise in her reign,
She rocks the ship through the storm’s disdain,
The waves do gleam, the breezes soar,
For Killian’s dawn she’s evermore!

Tales of Killian and Desylva

Yo ho, through shadows deep we crept,
lass bold with storm in tow,
A forest cursed where spirits wept,
and Hook his steel did show.
The shades did wail, the trees did bend,
her lightning cracked the gloom,
With cutlass sharp and thunder’s friend,
we carved our way to bloom.

Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
yo ho ho and a stormy jest,
Her tempest's kiss brought love's sweet rest,
for Killian's heart she stole!

Yo ho, to vaults of black we dared,
her storm a blazing crown,
Obsidian gleamed, the dark we snared,
Hook's blade cut shadows down.
The walls did quake, her thunder roared,
a tempest fierce and free,
With loot in hand and lust restored,
they danced 'neath lightning's glee.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
yo ho ho and a stormy jest,
Her gale blew hot, his heart confessed,
in passion's wild decree!

Yo ho, through seas of flame we sailed,
her calm a guiding star,
The glass did burn, the fire assailed,
Hook's hook shone near and far.
Her rain did fall, a tender sheet,
to soothe the blazing tide,
With love so deep, their hearts did beat,
in peace they'd soon abide.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
yo ho ho and a stormy jest,
Her drizzle sweet, his soul caressed,
by Desylva's gentle side!

Yo ho, to whispers' isle we strode,
her storm a raging shout,
The voices hissed, the winds bestowed,
Hook slashed their lies about.
Her thunder cracked, the ghosts did flee,
her fury lit the dark,
With lust unbound,
they claimed their spree,
a wild and savage spark.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
yo ho ho and a stormy jest,
Her tempest fierce, his heart possessed,
their love a blazing mark!

Yo ho, from crimson depths we rose,
her calm a saving grace,
The abyss did clutch, the blood did close,
Hook's steel kept death's embrace.
Her rain did weep, a tender shroud,
to wash the red away,
With love so pure, their hearts avowed,
in peace they'd gently sway.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
yo ho ho and a stormy jest,
Her mist so kind, his soul professed,
to Desylva's warm display!

Yo ho, through echoes' maze we fought,
her storm a howling guide,
The walls did scream, the paths distraught,
Hook's hook carved truth inside.
Her lightning split the madd'ning sound,
her fury shook the stone,
With wild desire, their love unbound,
they claimed the night their own.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
yo ho ho and a stormy jest,
Her thunder fierce, his heart addressed,
in passion's savage throne!

Yo ho, o'er cliffs of bone we climbed,
her calm a steady hand,
The skulls did grin, the winds did chime,
Hook's steel defied the strand.
Her drizzle fell, a soothing veil,
to hush the dead's lament,
With love so deep, their hearts set sail,
in tender peace they went.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
yo ho ho and a stormy jest,
Her rain so sweet, his soul expressed,
by Desylva's soft ascent!

Yo ho, through peaks that broke we stormed,
her gale a battle cry,
The rocks did split, the heights deformed,
Hook's blade raised mountains high.
Her thunder crashed, the earth did quake,
her fury lit the fray,
With lust unleashed, their love did wake,
a wild and ruthless play.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
yo ho ho and a stormy jest,
Her storm unbound, his heart impressed,
in passion's fierce array!

Yo ho, past sirens' song we steered,
her calm a shield so true,
The voices lured, the deep we feared,
Hook's will the spell broke through.
Her rain did fall, a tender guard,
to drown the haunting call,
With love so pure, their hearts unmarred,
in peace they'd gently fall.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
yo ho ho and a stormy jest,
Her mist so kind, his soul caressed,
by Desylva's soft enthrall!

Yo ho, 'cross skulls we danced with glee,
her storm a wicked flame,
The bones did clack, the sea ran free,
Hook's hook staked bloody claim.
Her lightning struck, the dead did reel,
her hunger lit the fight,

With lust ablaze, their love did seal,
a fierce and greedy night.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
yo ho ho and a stormy jest,
Her tempest wild, his heart professed,
in passion's hot delight!

Yo ho, through swirling death we passed,
her calm a beacon bright,
The eye did rage, the winds amassed,
Hook's steel held firm the fight.
Her drizzle fell, a tender shroud,
to still the chaos' roar,
With love so deep, their hearts avowed,
in peace forevermore.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
yo ho ho and a stormy jest,
Her rain so sweet, his soul expressed,
by Desylva's gentle shore!

Yo ho, from death's own grip we tore,
her storm a raging blade,
The shades did howl, the fires swore,
Hook's hook their doom was made.
Her thunder cracked, the gates did fall,
her fury shook the deep,
With lust unbound, they claimed it all,
a wild and savage sweep.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
yo ho ho and a stormy jest,
Her tempest fierce, his heart addressed,
in passion's fiery keep!

Yo ho, through madness' twist we roamed,
her calm a steady thread,
The cards did dance, the tea did foam,
Hook's steel cut nonsense dead.
Her rain did fall, a gentle jest,
to wash the wild away,
With love so true, their hearts at rest,
in peace they'd softly play.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
yo ho ho and a stormy jest,
Her mist so kind, his soul caressed,
by Desylva's warm ballet!

Yo ho, to Oz's gold we flew,
her storm a blazing crown,
The witches wailed, the winds we knew,
Hook's blade brought towers down.
Her lightning flared, the skies did bend,
her hunger lit the chase,
With lust in tow, their love did rend,
a fierce and greedy race.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
yo ho ho and a stormy jest,
Her gale blew hot, his heart confessed,
in passion's wild embrace!

Yo ho, from sunken halls we rose,
her calm a guiding tide,
The depths did gleam, the sea enclosed,
Hook's steel defied the ride.
Her drizzle fell, a tender veil,
to soothe the ancient lore,
With love so deep, their hearts set sail,
in peace forevermore.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
yo ho ho and a stormy jest,
Her rain so sweet, his soul expressed,
by Desylva's gentle core!

Yo ho, through Camelot we charged,
her storm a knightly flame,
The swords did clash, the skies enlarged,
Hook's hook staked honor's claim.
Her thunder rolled, the banners tore,
her hunger lit the fray,
With lust ablaze, their love they swore,
a fierce and greedy play.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
yo ho ho and a stormy jest,
Her tempest wild, his heart professed,
in passion's hot display!

Yo ho, past lion's roar we strode,
her calm a regal grace,
The woods did sing, the dawn bestowed,
Hook's steel kept evil's place.
Her rain did fall, a tender guard,
to bless the sacred land,
With love so pure, their hearts unmarred,
in peace they'd gently stand.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
yo ho ho and a stormy jest,
Her mist so kind, his soul caressed,
by Desylva's noble hand!

Yo ho, through seas unknown we roamed,
her storm a lusty blaze,
The winds did howl, the waters foamed,
Hook's steel set hearts ablaze.
Her thunder crashed, the tides did break,
her fury lit the dark,
With lust unleashed, their love did wake,
a wild and ruthless spark.

The Stormy Love of Killian and Desylva

Yo ho, aboard the Roger we sail,
With Killian bold and his lass's sweet gale.
Her eyes like the sea, they sparkle and shine,
Their love's gentle tide, like a soft-spoken line.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
Yo ho ho, and a stormy caress,
Her whispers of rain make the captain's heart sing!

Yo ho, in their cabin they meet,
The ship rocks so soft with their tender heartbeat.
Her hands trace his scars with a lover's kind care,
His hook holds her close, in the candlelight's glare.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
Yo ho ho, and a stormy caress,
Their sighs weave a spell 'neath the starlight's soft wing!

Yo ho, the night's calm don't last,
Her magic stirs waves as their kisses amass.
His lips find her throat, where her pulse starts to race,
The rain falls outside, keeps their secrets in place.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
Yo ho ho, and a stormy caress,
The sea hums along with their love's gentle spring!

Yo ho, now the tempo does climb,
Their touches grow bold as the storm hits its prime.
Her fingers dig in, and his growl fills the air,
The ship starts to sway with the heat that they share.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
Yo ho ho, and a stormy caress,
Her drizzle turns wild with the passion they bring!

Yo ho, clothes are scattered and torn,
The desk takes their weight as desire's newly born.
His hook scars the wood, her breath's sharp as a blade,
Their hunger's a fire that no ocean could fade.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
Yo ho ho, and a stormy caress,
The thunder applauds where their bodies now cling!

Yo ho, now she's pinned to the wall,
His thrusts find their mark as her wild cries do call.
Her nails carve his back, leave a map of her need,
The lightning outside sparks their ravenous greed.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
Yo ho ho, and a stormy caress,
Her mark burns alive with the pleasure they wring!

Yo ho, seas are churning with might,
Her screams shake the hull in the heart of the night.
He lifts her with force, and she arches to meet,
Each plunge like a wave where their wildfire's complete.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
Yo ho ho, and a stormy caress,
The tempest roars loud for the love they now fling!

Yo ho, now the bed's their domain,
She's bent 'neath his strength, and she's calling his name.
His hook tears the frame, as her thighs lock him tight,
The storm's at its peak, drowning all in its fight.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
Yo ho ho, and a stormy caress,
Her cries split the dark like a bell's brazen ring!

Yo ho, they're a tangle of lust,
Each thrust shakes the ship till the timbers near bust.
Her mark's blazing bright, and his blood's on her nails,
The rain's like a flood, and the wind's like a wail.

Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
Yo ho ho, and a stormy caress,
Their passion's a gale that no rigging can string!

Yo ho, they collapse as one soul,
The storm dies to whispers, their fire takes its toll.
Her gasps slow to sighs, and his touch turns to care,
Yet the spark in their eyes says they're never done there.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
Yo ho ho, and a stormy caress,
Their love's left a mark where the wild seas still sing!

Yo ho, now she's sprawled on the floor,
His weight pins her down, and she's begging for more.
Her breasts heave and quake as he drives to her core,
The deck's soaked with rain, like their lust's open sore.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
Yo ho ho, and a stormy caress,
Her screams tear the night where their passions take wing!

Yo ho, he's a beast 'twixt her thighs,
Her legs spread to skies as her pleasure's reprise.
His hook rips the wall, and her juices run free,
The lightning's their pulse in this wild, carnal sea.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
Yo ho ho, and a stormy caress,
Their rutting's a fire that the heavens can't sting!

Yo ho, now she rides him astride,
Her hips grind like waves in a merciless tide.
His hands bruise her flesh, and her cries shake the mast,
The ship's near to split from their frenzied repast.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
Yo ho ho, and a stormy caress,
Her mark's molten glow sets the darkness a-swing!

Yo ho, he's unleashed in her depths,
Her walls clutch him tight as she screams through her sweats.
His seed floods her core, and the thunder's their drum,
The window near burst from the storm they've become.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
Yo ho ho, and a stormy caress,
Their climax a tempest no sailor could bring!

Yo ho, they lie wrecked, soaked in sin,
Her thighs slick with lust, and his fire within.
The seas calm at last, but their hunger's alive,
They'll spark it again when the next storm arrives.
Fifteen souls on a pirate's chest,
Yo ho ho, and a stormy caress,
Their love's a wild gale that forever will ring!

The Ballad of the Stormborn Love

The skulls did quake, the sea did moan,
Cap'n and his lass, they rocked the throne,
With hook and storm, they shook the night,
A tempest born o' love's delight!

Through the veil they fought and won,
Cap'n's hook and storm begun,
Waves did crash, the sirens wailed,
Love's fierce tempest never failed!

In Wonderland they danced with glee,
Cap'n's hook and storm set free,
Mad seas rose, the jabber roared,
Love's wild chaos struck a chord!

Through the maelstrom's eye they flew,
Cap'n's hook and storm so true,
Waves did rise, the tempest spun,
Love's fierce gale 'til dawn was won!

From shattered peaks they stole the prize,
Cap'n's hook and storm did rise,
Seas did quake, the cliffs did fall,
Love's fierce tempest shook it all!

In Oz they pranced with ruby gleam,
Cap'n's hook and storm supreme,
Seas did whirl, the winds did play,
Love's wild storm swept night away!

From Atlantis' depths they rose,
Cap'n's hook and storm in throes,
Waves did crash, the tides did sway,
Love's fierce surge lit up the day!

In shadow realms they fought the night,
Cap'n's hook and storm so bright,
Seas did moan, the dark did sway,
Love's fierce tempest cleared the way!

From obsidian vault they stole the flame,
Cap'n's hook and storm the same,
Seas did boil, the fire did play,
Love's wild blaze lit up the day!

From depths so grim, they rise to win,
Cap'n and his storm begin,
With a hook and a gust, they break the dust,
A tempest born where souls have been!

In Camelot's gleam, they live the dream,
Cap'n and his storm supreme,
With a kiss and a gust, they hold their trust,
A tempest born where honor beams!

In fireglass glow, their love does grow,
Cap'n and his storm bestow,
With a thrust and a blast, their love holds fast,
A tempest born where embers flow!

In Narnia's snow, their love does grow,
Cap'n and his storm bestow,
With a thrust and a gust, they hold their trust,
A tempest born where winters blow!

In whispers' veil, they never fail,
Cap'n and his storm prevail,
With a hook and a gust, they rise from dust,
A tempest born where secrets sail!

In abyss so red, they've faced the dread,
Cap'n and his storm are led,
With a thrust and a tide, they side by side,
A tempest born where blood is shed!

On cliffs so stark, they light the dark,
Cap'n and his storm embark,
With a thrust and a blast, their love holds fast,
A tempest born where bones do mark!

In echoes' maze, they set ablaze,
Cap'n and his storm amaze,
With a thrust and a gust, they hold their trust,
A tempest born where sounds do play!

The Ballad of the Stormborn Love (Alternate Version)

The skulls did quake, the sea did shake,
Cap'n and his storm did wake,
With a hook and a gust, they love in trust,
A tempest born from pirate's thrust!

Through siren's call, they stood so tall,
Cap'n and his storm enthrall,
With a kiss and a gale, they never fail,
A love that churns the sea's wild tale!

In madness they play, through night and day,
Cap'n and his storm hold sway,
With a hook and a blast, their love so vast,
A whirlwind born where wonders cast!

Through whirl and tide, they side by side,
Cap'n and his storm abide,
With a thrust and a gale, they never pale,
A maelstrom's love in wild sea's tale!

From peaks so high, they touch the sky,
Cap'n and his storm defy,
With a hook and a blast, their love holds fast,
A tempest carved where crystals lie!

In Oz so green, a sight unseen,
Cap'n and his storm convene,
With a kiss and a gust, they build their trust,
A tempest born where magic's been!

From depths so blue, they broke on through,
Cap'n and his storm so true,
With a thrust and a tide, they side by side,
A tempest born where oceans brew!

In shadows deep, their love they keep,
Cap'n and his storm do sweep,
With a hook and a gust, they rise from dust,
A tempest born where darkness creeps!

From vault so dire, they stoke the fire,
Cap'n and his storm aspire,
With a thrust and a blast, their love holds fast,
A tempest born where flames rise higher!

From underworld they snatched the soul,
Cap'n's hook and storm took toll,
Seas did wail, the dark did sway,
Love's fierce tempest lit the way!

Shanties By Smee

Hook and the Storm Lass

Verse
Oh, Cap'n Hook's a pirate bold,
His hook o' steel's a sight to hold,
Through Neverland with tales untold,
He sailed for blood and heaps o' gold!

With blue eyes sharp as any blade,
He fought the dark and never swayed,
A heart o' vengeance, unafraid,
The sea's own rogue, his name was made!

Then came a lass with storm in tow,
Desylva wild, her eyes aglow,
She struck with thunder, winds that blow,
And Hook, he grinned—she matched his show!

Her lightning danced, his cutlass swung,
Through cursed realms their song was sung,
A pair o' rogues, their fates were strung,
The Roger shook where they begun!

Chorus
Heave ho, me lads, and sing it high,
To Hook and storms that split the sky!
With rum in hand and sails unfurled,
We chase the wild across the world!

Verse
From Skull's dark bones to Siren's call,
They fought as one, they'd never fall,
Her rain would crash, his hook'd enthrall,
A storm and sea to rule it all!

He asked her hand by mast so grand,
A vow in gales o'er sea and land,
With crew to cheer, their hearts expand,
Two wild souls in tandem stand!

But shadows snatched her from his side,
A curse o' dark, our lass they hide,
Hook's rage a storm o'er oceans wide,
He'll tear the realms till she's espied!

His blue eyes blaze, his hook does gleam,
A vow to break their wicked scheme,
The Roger sails through fog and dream,
For storm and Hook, one desperate team!

Chorus
Heave ho, me lads, and sing it high,
To Hook and storms that split the sky!
With rum in hand and sails unfurled,
We chase the wild across the world!

Hook and the Storm Lass (Alternate Version)

Verse
Oh, Cap'n Hook was born to roam,
A sailor lad from hearth and home,
With brother Liam, seas they'd comb,
A naval heart in salt was grown!

The Navy shaped his steady hand,
Through storms he sailed by king's command,
Till fate did strike upon the strand,
His brother lost to cursed land!

He turned a pirate, fierce and free,
The Jolly Roger's his decree,
With black hull bold o'er every sea,
A rogue to fight eternity!

His hook o' steel, it gleams so bright,
A mark o' loss from dark o' night,
He swore to hunt with all his might,
The Dark One's end his guiding light!

Chorus
Heave ho, me lads, and sing it high,
To Hook and storms that split the sky!
With rum in hand and sails unfurled,
We chase the wild across the world!

Verse
Through Neverland, time stood so still,
He chased his foe with iron will,
Each raid a tale, each fight a thrill,
A heart o' vengeance none could fill!

His blue eyes cut through fog and flame,
A captain carved in pirate fame,
With crew to cheer his fearsome name,
Alone he sailed, a wild untame!

Then came Desylva, storm in flight,
A lass o' thunder, wild and bright,
From Veyra's chains she took her might,
And Hook, he met her in the fight!

Her gray eyes flashed, his blade did swing,
Through Skull's dark bones their tale did spring,
Her rain would crash, his shanties ring,
A storm and sea, a wilder thing!

Chorus
Heave ho, me lads, and sing it high,
To Hook and storms that split the sky!
With rum in hand and sails unfurled,
We chase the wild across the world!

Verse
In Siren's mist, her gusts did blow,
She pulled him from the deep below,
His hook did gleam, her lightning grow,
A pair to thwart the darkest foe!

Through Wonderland's mad twistin' play,
They carved a path where none could stay,
Her thunder roared, his steel held sway,
Their bond grew strong with every fray!

The Maelstrom's Eye, they faced the tide,
Her tempest raged, his heart beside,
With Crystal Heart, they turned the ride,
A love to match the sea so wide!

By Roger's mast, he bent his knee,
"Marry me, lass," in storm's decree,
Her gray eyes shone, their fates agree,
Two souls as one o'er every sea!

Chorus
Heave ho, me lads, and sing it high,
To Hook and storms that split the sky!
With rum in hand and sails unfurled,
We chase the wild across the world!

Verse
But shadows struck, a cursed blow,
They snatched Desylva, swift and low,
Hook's heart did break, his rage did grow,
A stormless sea he'd overthrow!

He swore to search through realms unknown,
Each wave a path to claim his own,
His hook a vow in steel and bone,
To find her 'neath the dark's cold throne!

Through Shattered Peaks, he braved the chill,
Her tear he'd won, yet searched he still,
His blue eyes burned with pirate will,
No ice could quell his heart's shrill!

To Crimson Abyss, he plunged below,
With pearl in hand, through depths he'd go,
The Jolly's crew, his strength to show,
Her storm's echo in undertow!

Chorus
Heave ho, me lads, and sing it high,
To Hook and storms that split the sky!
With rum in hand and sails unfurled,
We chase the wild across the world!

Verse
In Labyrinth's maze, he carved her name,
Through echoes wild, he staked his claim,
Each stone a step, each fight the same,
To bring her back from cursed flame!

His search endures, a pirate's quest,
Through realms o' dark, he'll never rest,
Till storm and Hook are reunited, blessed,
A love to conquer every test!

Chorus
Heave ho, me lads, and sing it high,
To Hook and storms that split the sky!
With rum in hand and sails unfurled,
We chase the wild across the world!

The Jolly's Storm and Hook

Verse
Oh, the Jolly Roger's a beauty bold,
Her mighty sails catch the wind's wild hold,
Through storms and reefs, she's never slowed,
A pirate's lass with a heart o' gold!

Her timbers groan with tales o' fight,
Cannon roar in the dead o' night,
From Neverland to realms so bright,
She sails where shadows fear the light!

No scars o' battle on her side,
She cuts the waves with pirate pride,
A ship to brave the fiercest tide,
The Jolly's home where we abide!

Chorus
Heave ho, lads, and raise the cheer,
To the Jolly Roger, rum and beer!
Through tempest's roar and cannon's din,
We sail her wild, we'll always win!

Verse
Now Hook's the captain, fierce and grand,
A hook o' steel where once a hand,
His blue eyes blaze o'er sea and land,
A rogue to lead this merry band!

He's faced the Dark One, blade in tow,
With cutlass flash and pirate glow,
Through centuries, his hate don't slow,
For vengeance drives where winds do blow!

From naval lad to pirate king,
He's danced with death, oh hear him sing,
A heart o' storm, a wild thing,
Our Cap'n Hook, the sea's own sting!

Chorus
Heave ho, lads, and raise the cheer,
To the Jolly Roger, rum and beer!
Through tempest's roar and cannon's din,
We sail her wild, we'll always win!

Verse
Then came Desylva, storm in gray,
Her thunder cracks the night to day,
With Hook she fights, they're wild at play,
A pair to chase the dark away!

Her lightning strikes, his hook does gleam,
Together they're a pirate's dream,
Through cursed realms, a fearsome team,
Their love's a gale o'er sea's wide stream!

Chorus
Heave ho, lads, and raise the cheer,
To the Jolly Roger, rum and beer!
Through tempest's roar and cannon's din,
We sail her wild, we'll always win!

Shanties By One-Eyed Jack

"Hook and the Thunder Lass"

Verse
Hook's brother fell to cursed green,
A naval dream turned dark and mean,
He swore revenge, his heart obscene,
A pirate born from grief's keen sheen!

The Jolly Roger's deck he claimed,
With black hull bold, his soul untamed,
Through cannon smoke, his name was famed,
A rogue o' wrath, the seas he maimed!

A hook o' steel replaced his hand,
A mark o' loss that wasn't planned,
He hunted dark o'er every land,
The Dark One's doom his fierce demand!

Chorus
Boom and blast, ye salty crew,
To Hook and storms, we'll see it through!
With cannon's might and thunder's call,
We'll raid the seas and never fall!

Verse
In Neverland, he roamed the years,
With cutlass clash and pirate cheers,
Through time's still grip, he shed no tears,
A captain forged in cannon sneers!

His blue eyes blazed with vengeful fire,
Each raid a step to dark desire,
The Roger's guns his wild empire,
A king o' seas in black attire!

Then came the lass with thunder's roar,
Desylva wild from Veyra's shore,
Her lightning cracked, her storm outpoured,
And Hook, he grinned—she matched his war!

Chorus
Boom and blast, ye salty crew,
To Hook and storms, we'll see it through!
With cannon's might and thunder's call,
We'll raid the seas and never fall!

Verse
Through Skull's dark bones, they carved their way,
Her rain did crash, his steel did flay,
With cannon's boom, they'd have their say,
A pair to blast the night to day!

In Siren's mist, she broke his fall,
Her gusts did howl, his guns did bawl,
Through reef and wave, they stood so tall,
A storm and hook to rule it all!

The Maelstrom's Eye, they faced the tide,
Her tempest roared, his shot defied,
With Crystal Heart, they turned the ride,
Two cannons fierce, side by side!

Through Shattered Peaks, her thunder gleamed,
His hook did slash, my guns did scream,
The Banshee's Tear, their wildest dream,
A duo bold, a thunder team!

Chorus
Boom and blast, ye salty crew,
To Hook and storms, we'll see it through!
With cannon's might and thunder's call,
We'll raid the seas and never fall!

Killian's Heart

Verse
I've steered the Roger through squall and spray,
With one keen eye on the Cap'n's way,
Young Killian loved with a heart so green,
Milah's glow was soft, a gentle sheen.

A slow-burn flame in his youthful chest,
It warmed his soul, but it weren't the best.
Now Desylva's fire's what sets him free,
A love that roars like the boundless sea!

Milah was sweet, like a candle's spark,
A tender light in his wanderin' dark,
He was but a lad, his heart half-grown,
Her love a seed on a breeze was sown.

It flickered soft through his early years,
A quiet warmth 'mid his pirate fears.
But Desylva's flame is a wilder call,
It binds his heart, his soul, his all!

Chorus
Ho, the flame o' Killian's heart burns bright,
With Desylva's storm, it lights the night!
No slow ember's glow could e'er compare,
Their love's a blaze, a pirate's prayer!

Verse
Young Killian's love was a simmerin' coal,
Milah's touch stirred his restless soul,
But time was short, and their spark did fade,
A gentle burn that the fates betrayed.

Desylva's fire, though, it never dims,
It sears his mind, it flows through his limbs.
Her storm-gray eyes make his spirit soar,
A love so deep, it shakes the shore!

Milah's love was a hearth's soft glow,
A steady warmth where his heart could grow,
But youth ain't made for a lasting flame,
It flickered out 'neath a darker claim.

Desylva's fire's a tempest's roar,
It welds their souls on the ocean's floor.
Heart and body, they're one, complete,
A love that hums with a pirate's beat!

Chorus
Ho, the flame o' Killian's heart burns bright,
With Desylva's storm, it lights the night!
No slow ember's glow could e'er compare,
Their love's a blaze, a pirate's prayer!

Verse
I've seen 'em duel through the cannon's din,
Young Billy's torch and Black Tom's grin,
Milah walked beside him, a softer stride,
Her love was true, but it lacked the tide.

Desylva's lightning, it cracks the sky,
Her storm's the match to his battle cry.
They're forged as one in the tempest's heat,
A love that death itself can't cheat!

Milah's spark was a lad's first dream,
A quiet brook 'neath a moon's pale beam,
It taught him love, but it couldn't stay,
The fates had plans for a fiercer play.

Desylva's fire burns hot and true,
It lights his hook and his heart clear through.
Mind and soul, they're a single flame,
A pirate's love with a boundless claim!

Chorus
Ho, the flame o' Killian's heart burns bright,
With Desylva's storm, it lights the night!
No slow ember's glow could e'er compare,
Their love's a blaze, a pirate's prayer!

Verse
Smee's shaky laugh and the Roger's creak,
We've sailed with Cap'n through strong and weak,
Milah's love was a tender song,
But youth don't hold what don't belong.

Desylva's fire is a molten core,
It drives his blade through the battle's roar.
Their bond's the anchor, the sail, the sea,
A love that's true as a pirate's glee!

So raise yer rum to the Cap'n's tale,
Through storm and strife, he'll never fail,
Milah's ember was a fleeting light,
A spark that faded in the night.

Desylva's fire is his truest home,
It burns through realms where the brave dare roam.
Heart, soul, and mind, they're one, I swear,
Killian's love is beyond compare!

Chorus
Ho, the flame o' Killian's heart burns bright,
With Desylva's storm, it lights the night!
No slow ember's glow could e'er compare,
Their love's a blaze, a pirate's prayer!

"The Roger and the Hook"

Verse
The Jolly Roger's a beast o' war,
Her mighty sails roar from shore to shore,
With cannons primed, she'll settle scores,
A pirate's queen, we can't ignore!

Now Hook's the man to steer her true,
His blue eyes cut the dark right through,
A hook o' steel, a devil's brew,
He leads us wild, a fearsome crew!

Her hull's seen many a storm and fight,
She laughs at gales in dead o' night,
Through kraken's grip, she holds her might,
The Roger's fire burns ever bright!

The Cap'n's danced with death, ye see,
From naval lad to piracy,
His vengeance burns eternally,
A rogue o' legend, wild and free!

Chorus
Boom and blast, me hearty mates,
The Roger sails, she tempts the fates!
With cannon's roar and Hook's command,
We rule the seas o'er every land!

Verse
She's faced the maelstrom, ice, and flame,
Enchantments and runes protecting her frame,
No king's decree can stake her name,
The Roger's ours, our pride, our fame!

Hook's faced the Dark One, blade in hand,
His cutlass sings o'er sea and sand,
Through realms o' curse, he'll take his stand,
A pirate king o' blood-soaked land.

Her guns'll blaze when foes draw near,
The Roger's wrath, they'll learn to fear,
With oak and iron, stout and sheer,
She's home to us through every year!

And Hook, he grins with pirate glee,
His hook'll carve our destiny,
Through centuries, he'll never flee,
The Cap'n bold o' storm and sea!

Chorus
Boom and blast, me hearty mates,
The Roger sails, she tempts the fates!
With cannon's roar and Hook's command,
We rule the seas o'er every land!

Shanties By Desylva

Out There on the Sea" (Tune "Somewhere Out There") (alternate version)

Out there on the sea, beneath the moon's pale gleam,
A rogue sails wild and free, he's livin' in my dream,
And though the tides may part, my heart still holds ye near,
Out there on the sea, me love, I feel ye here.

And even though the storms divide,
I'll wield the winds to yer side,
Out there on the sea, my rogue, ye're callin' me,
Our fates entwine, through dark and brine, eternally.

Out there on the waves, yer hook cuts through the night,
A pirate bold and brave, ye set me soul alight,
Me mark does glow and flare, a tempest's wild decree,
Out there on the sea, me love, ye're home to me.

And even though the storms divide,
I'll wield the winds to yer side,
Out there on the sea, my rogue, ye're callin' me,
Our fates entwine, through dark and brine, eternally.

When cannons roar and shadows fall,
I hear yer voice, I heed yer call,
Through every gale, I'll find ye there,
Out there on the sea, we'll share.

Out there on the sea, beneath the stars so bright,
A storm and pirate be, together we'll unite,
And though the tides may part, my heart still holds ye near,
Out there on the sea, my love, I feel ye here.

“I Need a Pirate” (Tune “I Need a Hero” Version 1)

Where’s the fire in the night,
where the seas are wild and free?
Where’s the man with a hook so bright, to sail the storm with me?
Through the realms where shadows creep,
where the monsters hunt and wail,
I need a pirate, strong and deep,
to brave the howling gale!

I need a pirate! I’m holdin’ out for a pirate till the end of the sea!
He’s gotta be bold, gotta be fierce, gotta steal my heart from me!
I need a pirate! I’m holdin’ out for a rogue with a silver hook’s gleam!
He’s gotta be true, gotta be mine, the man of my wildest dream!

In the Abyss where the crimson flows,
where the serpents coil and bite,
I need his blade to strike my foes,
his kiss to spark the night!
Through the Echoes’ maddened roar,
where the wraiths all scream and call,
I need his heart to guide me ashore,
to catch me when I fall!

I need a pirate! I’m holdin’ out for a pirate till the end of the sea!
He’s gotta be bold, gotta be fierce, gotta steal my heart from me!
I need a pirate! I’m holdin’ out for a rogue with a silver hook’s gleam!
He’s gotta be true, gotta be mine, the man of my wildest dream!

Up where the lightning cracks the sky,
where my thunder shakes the mast,
I see his eyes, they never lie,
holdin’ fast through every blast!
Through the Maelstroms eye, through the Peaks’ frost,
he’s the fire that I crave,
My pirate’s heart, no matter the cost,
will sail me through the wave!

I need a pirate! I’m holdin’ out for a pirate till the end of the sea!
He’s gotta be bold, gotta be fierce, gotta steal my heart from me!
I need a pirate! I’m holdin’ out for a rogue with a silver hook’s gleam!
He’s gotta be true, gotta be mine, the man of my wildest dream!

Smee hollers, “Sing it, lass!”
as the crew stomps, Billy’s torch flarin’ high,
My pirate’s here, my heart’s at last,
with Killian ‘neath the sky!

I Need a Captain (tune “I Need a Hero” Version 2)

Where’ve all the calm seas gone, and where’s the clear sky fled?
The winds are howlin’ fierce, the stars are lost in dread.
Out in the dark we sail, where shadows twist and roam,
I’m callin’ for my captain, to lead us through the foam!

*I need a captain! *(I need a captain!)**
He’s gotta be strong, and he’s gotta be bold, with a hook for a hand!

*I need a captain! *(I need a captain!)**
He's gotta be swift, with a heart full of fire, to conquer the strand!
Through the storm and the shadow, where the tempests collide,
I'll wield my winds beside him, on the seas we'll ride!

Out in the Crimson Reach, where fire burns the shore,
We fought the war god's wrath, and heard his battle's roar.
In Agrabah's dunes we ran, with scorpions at our heels,
My captain's blade was lightning, his will as tough as steel!

*I need a captain! *(I need a captain!)**
He's gotta be strong, and he's gotta be bold, with a hook for a hand!
*I need a captain! *(I need a captain!)**
He's gotta be swift, with a heart full of fire, to conquer the strand!
Through the storm and the shadow, where the tempests collide,
I'll wield my winds beside him, on the seas we'll ride!

Through the Shadow Isles' dark veil, where wraiths and whispers creep,
In Neverland's cursed lagoon, where echoes haunt the deep.
My storms will break the chains, my lightning cracks the sky,
With my captain at the helm, we'll never say goodbye!

In Wonderland's mad maze, where mirrors twist our fate,
We carved a path through chaos, defied the gods' cruel hate.
The Veil, the Horn, the Compass—through realms we've made our claim,
My captain's heart's my anchor, his fire my burning flame!

*I need a captain! *(I need a captain!)**
He's gotta be strong, and he's gotta be bold, with a hook for a hand!
*I need a captain! *(I need a captain!)**
He's gotta be swift, with a heart full of fire, to conquer the strand!
Through the storm and the shadow, where the tempests collide,
I'll wield my winds beside him, on the seas we'll ride!

Out on the open sea, where fates and stars align,
My captain's hand in mine, our hearts forever twine.
Through every realm and peril, my storm will light his way,
With the Jolly Roger sailin', we'll fight another day!

*I need a captain! *(I need a captain!)**
He's gotta be strong, and he's gotta be bold, with a hook for a hand!
*I need a captain! *(I need a captain!)**
He's gotta be swift, with a heart full of fire, to conquer the strand!
Through the storm and the shadow, where the tempests collide,
I'll wield my winds beside him, on the seas we'll ride!

"Stormin' for My Captain" ("I Need A Hero" Version 3)

Where's the rogue with steel in hand, to cut the dark asunder?
Through the gales and cannon's roar, I hear his wild heart thunder.
On the deck, the shadows dance, the sea's a ragin' beast,
I need a man with fire bold, to claim me from the east!

I'm stormin' for my captain, with a hook of gleam and might,
I'm stormin' for my captain, to sail the endless night!
Through the tempest's fury, with his blade to lead us free,
He's the pirate of my soul—Killian, my sea!

Up the mast, the lightning cracks, my magic stirs the tide,
He's the spark in midnight's grasp, my rogue who'll never hide.
With his grin, he dares the fates, his coat flaps in the squall,
A devil's charm, a lover's steel, he answers to my call!

I'm stormin' for my captain, with a hook of gleam and might,
I'm stormin' for my captain, to sail the endless night!
Through the tempest's fury, with his blade to lead us free,
He's the pirate of my soul—Killian, my sea!

Out where the krakens roar, and the cannons blaze the sky,
He's the storm I'm yearnin' for, with a fire in his eye!
Racin' 'gainst the devil's breath, he's cutlass, hook, and flame,
My captain bold, my heart's own gold, forever he'll remain!

I'm stormin' for my captain, with a hook of gleam and might,
I'm stormin' for my captain, to sail the endless night!
Through the tempest's fury, with his blade to lead us free,
He's the pirate of my soul—Killian, my sea!

"Hungry for the Fight" (Tune "Hungry Like the Wolf" by Duran Duran)

Blood in the sea, the abyss is red,
my lightning cracks the night,
I'm huntin' foes where the shadows tread,
my storm's their final fright.
Through the realms we sail, my thunder's roar,
it breaks the beastly throng,
My dagger's sharp, I'll settle the score,
my heart's where I belong.

Hungry for the fight, I'm surgin' through the dark,
Hungry for the fight, my lightning leaves its mark,
Burnin' with my magic, my rain's the battle's spark,
Hungry for the fight, I'm tearin' through the dark!

In a far off realm, I struck the beast, its venom met my rain,
With Killian's hook, we made it squirm, sent it screamin' in pain.
Through the Peaks' frost, I broke the ice, my thunder smashed the beast,
My storm's alive, I'll pay the price, for glory's my true feast!

Hungry for the fight, I'm surgin' through the dark,
Hungry for the fight, my lightning leaves its mark,
Burnin' with my magic, my rain's the battle's spark,
Hungry for the fight, I'm tearin' through the dark!

Smee's shoutin' high, Jack's cannons blaze, Tom's harpoons fly with might,
Billy's torch is bright, in the battle's haze, we're conquerin' the night!
My mark's afire, my storm's my blade, I'll carve through every foe,
With Killian near, I'm never afraid, my lightning's set to go!

Hungry for the fight, I'm surgin' through the dark,
Hungry for the fight, my lightning leaves its mark,
Burnin' with my magic, my rain's the battle's spark,
Hungry for the fight, I'm tearin' through the dark!

Aye, the sea's my war, my storm's my call,
I'll fight till the end's in sight,
With my pirate's love, I'll never fall,
I'm hungry for the fight!

Shanties By Killian

Jolly Roger (based on “Grease Lightning”)
(Alternate Version)

[Verse 1: Killian]
Well, this ship’s a terror, she’s carved from the night,
With timbers of shadow, she’s a hell of a sight!
She’s swift as a cutlass, cuts waves like a blade,
The Jolly Roger’s glory, the seas she’s remade!

[Chorus: Crew]
Go, Jolly Roger, you’re tearin’ up the brine supreme! (Jolly Roger!)
Go, Jolly Roger, the fiercest ship you’ve ever seen! (Jolly Roger!)
With a gale and a roar, she’s the pirate’s dream,
Oh, Jolly Roger—queen of the stormy stream!

[Verse 2: Killian]
Her sails catch the thunder, her hull’s black as sin,
She’s rigged for the plunder, we’ll always begin!
With my hook at the helm, and a storm in her wake,
Desylva’s lightning cracks, make no mistake!

[Chorus: Crew]
Go, Jolly Roger, you’re tearin’ up the brine supreme! (Jolly Roger!)
Go, Jolly Roger, the fiercest ship you’ve ever seen! (Jolly Roger!)
With a gale and a roar, she’s the pirate’s dream,
Oh, Jolly Roger—queen of the stormy stream!

[Verse 3: Killian]
She’s got cannons a-thunderin’, a deck built for fight,
Her speed’s like a demon, she’s gone in the night!
The foes flee her shadow, their sails torn apart,
This ship’s got a soul, and a wild pirate heart!

[Chorus: Crew]
Go, Jolly Roger, you’re tearin’ up the brine supreme! (Jolly Roger!)
Go, Jolly Roger, the fiercest ship you’ve ever seen! (Jolly Roger!)
With a gale and a roar, she’s the pirate’s dream,
Oh, Jolly Roger—queen of the stormy stream!

[Bridge: Killian & Crew Together]
Killian: With grog in our bellies, we ride every swell,
Crew: She’s swift as the devil, sends foes straight to hell!
Killian: Her legend’s a tempest, her name’s never tame,
Crew: The Jolly Roger sails, forever our claim!

[Final Chorus: Crew, louder]
Go, Jolly Roger, you’re tearin’ up the brine supreme! (Jolly Roger!)
Go, Jolly Roger, the fiercest ship you’ve ever seen! (Jolly Roger!)
With a gale and a roar, she’s the pirate’s dream,
Oh, Jolly Roger—queen of the stormy stream!

[Outro: Killian]
Raise the red flag high, lads, and let’s take the sea,
With Jolly Roger’s might, we’ll always be free!

"Shadows of the Deep" (Tune: "Demons" by Imagine Dragons)

[Verse 1]
When the seas grow dark, and the winds turn cold,
I'm a pirate lost, with tales untold,
The blood on my hook, it stains my soul,
A rogue's old scars, they take their toll.

[Chorus]
Look to the deep, where the shadows creep,
The demons I hide, in my heart they sleep,
Desylva, my lass, your storm's my keep,
But the darkness calls from the shadows of the deep!

[Verse 2]
When the skies ignite with your thunder's might,
I see your glow, my guiding light,
But the sins I've sown, they claw and fight,
A cursed man's weight in the dead of night.

[Chorus]
Look to the deep, where the shadows creep,
The demons I hide, in my heart they sleep,
Desylva, my lass, your storm's my keep,
But the darkness calls from the shadows of the deep!

[Bridge]
I'd shield you, love, from the fates I've known,
The beast within, on a wretched throne,
Through gales and squalls, I've sailed alone,
Yet your wild heart keeps my hope full-grown!

[Chorus]
Look to the deep, where the shadows creep,
The demons I hide, in my heart they sleep,
Desylva, my lass, your storm's my keep,
But the darkness calls from the shadows of the deep!

[Outro]
So weigh the anchor, let the tides decree,
I'll fight the dark for you and me,
With hook and storm, we'll still be free,
Despite the shadows of the deep, my sea!

"Lass of the Storm"

The Jolly Roger was me pride, me all,
Her timbers creaked through every squall,
A ship o' dreams on seas so wide,
Me life was hers, me heart's own tide.

Till a lass with storms in her gray eyes came,
And turned me world to a wilder game,
She stole the helm with a tempest's gleam,
Now she's me life, me every dream.

I sailed the seas with a heart so cold,
A pirate bold with tales untold,
Till a lass with hair like raven's wing,
Set me heart to reel and sing.

Her eyes a storm, gray as the tide,
She took me soul with a captain's pride,
No gold nor grog could match her might,
My love's the flame that burns so bright.

Heave ho, me lads, for the lass of the storm!
Her winds'll blow, keep us safe and warm!
Raise the sail, give a hearty cheer,
For the love o' the lass who steers us clear!
Heave ho, me hearties, sing it loud and true,
She's the gale, the flame, the crew's own brew,
Lass o' the storm, our queen o' the sea,
With her we sail eternally!

Through wind and wave, she stands so tall,
A tempest fierce through every squall,
Her voice commands the wildest gale,
A shanty sweet in every tale.

I'd chart no course without her near,
She's me compass, me north, me dear,
A rogue like me, once lost at sea,
Found me lass, me destiny.

The oceans rage, the skies turn black,
But she's the spark that brings me back,
Her hands can tame the fiercest swell,
A pirate's dream, a siren's spell.

I've faced the deep where shadows play,
Yet she's the dawn that lights me day,
No chain nor cage could hold her fire,
She's me wind, me heart's desire.

Heave ho, storm lass, rule the sea,
Fierce and wild, she's the key!
Haul away, lads, shout her name,
She's our fire, our claim to fame!
Sing it loud, ye hearty throng,
Winds'll howl her shanty strong,
Lass o' the storm, our cheer, our might,
Lead us bold through day and night!

Her laughter rings o'er briny foam,
A call that guides this wanderer home,
Her strength's a tide no man can tame,
A storm o' love that bears me name.

I'd brave the depths, the cannon's roar,
For one more glance on her wild shore,
No treasure gleams like her fierce grin,
She's me lass, me next o' kin.

The tides may pull, the tempests rise,
But she's me star in darkened skies,
A beacon bold through fog and fight,
She turns me dark to purest light.

I've sailed where devils claim their due,
Yet she's the strength that pulls me through,
No grog nor gold could e'er compare,
To me lass with the raven hair.

Heave ho, me lads, the storm's our queen,
Wild and fierce, the finest seen,
Haul the line, let spirits soar,
She's the lass we all adore!

Sing it high, ye salty crew,
Winds and waves she'll see us through,
Lass o' the storm, our heart's delight,
Rulin' seas both day and night!

Her spirit dances o'er the waves,
A fire that frees me from me graves,
She's wild as seas, yet soft as morn,
A love in every storm reborn.

I'd trade me hook, me ship, me pride,
To stand forever by her side,
Through every clash, through every fray,
She's me dawn at break o' day.

So here's me vow, me shanty's call,
To her, me love, through rise and fall,
Through every tide, through every blast,
Her heart's the anchor holdin' fast.

No sea nor foe could tear us 'part,
She's the rhythm o' me beating heart,
Me lass o' storms, me endless sea,
Forever hers, eternally.

Heave ho, me lads, for the lass of the storm!
Her winds'll blow, keep us safe and warm!
Raise the sail, give a hearty cheer,
For the love o' the lass who steers us clear!
Heave ho, me hearties, sing it loud and true,
She's the gale, the flame, the crew's own brew,
Lass o' the storm, our queen o' the sea,
With her we sail eternally!

I swear me love 'neath moon and sun,
A flame she sparked when all was done,
Her stormy gaze lit up me soul,
Made this pirate's spirit whole.

No cannon's blast could match her spark,
She fired me heart through deepest dark,
A vow I sing with every breath,
I'll love her fierce beyond me death.

Her wild winds woke this heart o' mine,
A blaze o' love no storm could confine,
She set me blood to boil and race,
With every glance, her fierce embrace.

I'd roam no sea without her call,
She's me rise, me all, me fall,
This pirate's love, forever sworn,
To the lass who fired me storm.

Heave ho, storm lass, rule the sea,
Fierce and wild, she's the key!
Haul away, lads, shout her name,
She's our fire, our claim to fame!

Sing it loud, ye hearty throng,
Winds'll howl her shanty strong,
Lass o' the storm, our cheer, our might,
Lead us bold through day and night!

"Pirate's Rhapsody" (Tune: "Bohemian Rhapsody" by Queen)

[Intro]
Is this the real sea? Or cursed fantasy?
Caught in a storm's grip, no shore to set me free,
Open your eyes, lass, sail up and see,
I'm just a pirate, the waves my decree!

[Ballad]
Desylva, my storm lass, I've sailed so far astray,
Lost you to the tempest on that fateful day,
The Jolly Roger weeps, her timbers groan with me,
But now you're back, love, and my heart's at sea!

Desylva, ooh, didn't mean to drift apart,
Your lightning calls me through the dark and briny heart,
Desylva, ooh, my soul's a-tossed tonight,
I need your thunder, lass, to set my course aright!

[Operatic Section]
I see a shadowed lass with storm-gray eyes,
Hook and thunder, Hook and thunder, will you strike me 'cross the skies?
Gales a-howling, lightning flashing through the night—
By the sea! By the sea! (She's my wild decree!)
I'm a rogue with a hook, sailed cursed and free,
Fought the devils of the deep, oh, bloody misery!
Smee cries out, "Cap'n, the rum's run dry!"
Oh, tempest lass, tempest lass, bring your storm or I'll die!
Rumple's a trickster, spinning webs to bind my fate,
Gotta sail, gotta fight—can't be too late!
Oh-oh-oh-oh, yo-ho-ho-ho,
The seas rage on, but my love won't fade away—
Desylva's storm, Desylva's storm, she's my only stay!

[Rock Outburst]
I've killed a man or two, with steel and might,
But your wild gales, lass, they haunt my every fight!

Oh, Desylva, can't you see? I'm lost without your rain,
Gotta feel your thunder crashin' through my veins!
Oh-oh-oh, yeah! Oh-oh-oh, yeah!
The curse can't hold me, I'll break its chain,
My hook'll carve our tale through storm and pain—
Sail on, sail on, sail on—yo-ho-ho!

[Outro]
Nothing really matters, the sea's my only friend,
Nothing really matters, 'cept where the tides may bend,
Desylva, my storm queen, your wind's my final call,
Through the squall, I'll find you—my love, my all,
Aye, the pirate's rhapsody—sets me free at last!

"Tempest of My Heart"

Verse 1 & 2
Beneath the stars on restless seas,
Your raven hair's my guiding breeze,
A storm-gray gaze that pierces night,
You stole my soul with wild delight.
No map nor chart could lead me true,
I found my course when I found you,
A pirate's heart, once lost, now free,
Bound to your tide eternally.

The oceans roar, the skies may rend,
But by your side, I'll never bend,
Your voice a song through thunder's din,
A melody where dreams begin.
I've sailed through dark, through squall and strife,
Yet you're the calm that saves my life,
A captain bold, I'd stake my claim,
On you, my love, my truest aim.

Chorus
Oh, tempest of my heart, my flame,
Through wind and wave, I'll call your name,
Your storm's the light that guides my way,
My love for you will never sway.
In every gale, in every fight,
You're my dawn, my endless night,
Desylva, lass, my sea, my soul,
With you, I'm whole, I'm finally whole.

Verse 3 & 4
Your hands command the wildest gales,
A force that rights my tattered sails,
No treasure gleams like your fierce grace,
No jewel could match your radiant face.
I've faced the deep, the cold, the void,
But in your arms, my fears destroyed,
A rogue like me, once cursed to roam,
Found harbor sweet, found hearth and home.

The tides may pull, the currents fight,
But you're my star in endless night,
A compass true, a beacon bright,
You turn my dark to purest light.

I'd brave the depths, the siren's call,
For you, my love, I'd risk it all,
No gold nor grog could e'er compare,
To you, my wind, my answered prayer.

Chorus
Oh, tempest of my heart, my flame,
Through wind and wave, I'll call your name,
Your storm's the light that guides my way,
My love for you will never sway.
In every gale, in every fight,
You're my dawn, my endless night,
Desylva, lass, my sea, my soul,
With you, I'm whole, I'm finally whole.

Verse 5 & 6
Your laughter dances on the breeze,
A sound that sets my heart at ease,
Your strength's a fire, fierce and free,
A storm that's claimed the best of me.
I've sailed where shadows cloak the day,
Yet you're the sun that lights my bay,
No chain nor cage could hold you still,
My wild love, my heart's own thrill.

The seas may rage, the heavens fall,
But you're my shield through every squall,
A pirate's life was cold and lone,
Till you turned my heart from stone to home.
Your eyes, a storm that holds me fast,
A love to weather any blast,
I'd trade my hook, my ship, my lore,
For one more day on your wild shore.

Chorus
Oh, tempest of my heart, my flame,
Through wind and wave, I'll call your name,
Your storm's the light that guides my way,
My love for you will never sway.
In every gale, in every fight,
You're my dawn, my endless night,
Desylva, lass, my sea, my soul,
With you, I'm whole, I'm finally whole.

Verse 7
So here's my vow, my song, my creed,
To you, my love, my every need,
Through every tide, through every storm,
Your heart's the hearth that keeps me warm.
No fate nor foe could tear us apart,
You're the rhythm of my beating heart,
Desylva, lass, my endless sea, Forever yours, eternally.

"Hungry for My Storm" (Tune "Hungry Like the Wolf" by Duran Duran)

Verse 1
Dark in the night, the sea's aglow,
her lightning cracks the sky,
I'm chasin' her storm, where the wild winds blow,

her gray eyes make me fly.
Through the realms we sail, her thunder's call,
it pulls me like a tide,
My heart's on fire, I'm bound to fall,
with her I'll take the ride.

Chorus
Hungry for my storm, I'm sailin' in the dark,
Hungry for my storm, she's stealin' my heart,
Burnin' with her lightning, her rain's my only spark,
Hungry for my storm, my love in the dark!

Verse 2
In the Abyss, her rain washed my wounds,
her thunder broke the beast,
Her lips like wine, under crescent moons,
she's my heart's eternal feast.
Through the Echoes' wail, her gusts they guide,
my hook holds her so near,
She's my wild sea, my tempest bride,
I'm hers without a fear.

Chorus
Hungry for my storm, I'm sailin' in the dark,
Hungry for my storm, she's stealin' my heart,
Burnin' with her lightning, her rain's my only spark,
Hungry for my storm, my love in the dark!

Bridge
Smee's laughin' low, Jack's eye's a-glint,
Tom's noddin' to the tune,
Billy's torch is high, in the moonlight's tint,
she's my star, my sea, my moon!
Her mark's aglow, her storm's my call,
I'm lost in her wild embrace,
Through every realm, I'll give my all,
for her love's my savin' grace!

Chorus
Hungry for my storm, I'm sailin' in the dark,
Hungry for my storm, she's stealin' my heart,
Burnin' with her lightning, her rain's my only spark,
Hungry for my storm, my love in the dark!

Outro
Aye, Desylva's my fire, my wild sea's flame, I'm hungry for her still,
With my hook and heart, I'll call her name, my storm, my thrill, my will!

Shanties By Killian & Desylva

"Born To Sail" (Tune "Born to be wild")(Another version)

Desylva
Get your sails up, let the tempests roar,
I'm callin' down the winds to shake the shore!
Through the Shadow Isles, where the dark winds wail,
My lightning cracks the night, we'll never fail!

*Storm on the tide! *(Storm on the tide!)**
We're born to sail where the wild waves collide!
Risin' through the fire, with my captain bold,
Storm on the tide, our tale will be told!
Agrabah's dunes tried to bury our flame,
Scorpions and shadows, we broke their game!
Wonderland's mirrors couldn't cage my fight,
My winds'll tear the stars to light the night!

*Storm on the tide! *(Storm on the tide!)**
We're born to sail where the wild waves collide!
Risin' through the fire, with my captain bold,
Storm on the tide, our tale will be told!

Neverland's lagoon, where the lost boys scream,
I blasted through their shadows, lived the dream!
The Crimson Reach burned, but we stole the horn,
With my captain's hook, we're wild, reborn!

The Veil of Shadows tried to dim our way,
But my storms lit the dark, we seized the day!
No god or wraith can chain this heart of mine,
With my captain by me, our stars align!

*Storm on the tide! *(Storm on the tide!)**
We're born to sail where the wild waves collide!
Risin' through the fire, with my captain bold,
Storm on the tide, our tale will be told!

Through the realms we roam, my winds will soar,
With Killian's heart, we'll conquer evermore!
The Jolly Roger flies, our spirits free,
Storm on the tide, forever we'll be!

Killian
Raise the red flag, let the seas run red,
I'm steerin' through the storms where angels dread!
The Iron Vale burned, but we claimed the shield,
My hook's the blade that makes the shadows yield!

*Hook on the helm! *(Hook on the helm!)**
We're born to chase the fire through every realm!
Sailin' with my tempest, her winds so wild,
Hook on the helm, we're fate's own child!

Camelot's waters tried to drown our fight,
But my sword cut through, with her storm's bright light!
The Underworld's souls couldn't chain our course,
With my lass's lightning, we broke their force!

*Hook on the helm! *(Hook on the helm!)**
We're born to chase the fire through every realm!
Sailin' with my tempest, her winds so wild,
Hook on the helm, we're fate's own child!

Ares caged her, then asked me to track,
Artemis's bow to get my storm back
The Compass led us through the stars' cruel maze,
Her gray eyes light my soul, set my heart ablaze!

The Sword of Dominion, we snatched from doom,
Through Neverland's dark, we outran the gloom!
No kraken, no god, can break our stride,
With my tempest's winds, we'll rule the tide!

*Hook on the helm! *(Hook on the helm!)**
We're born to chase the fire through every realm!
Sailin' with my tempest, her winds so wild,
Hook on the helm, we're fate's own child!

Out on the wild seas, our legend's spun,
With Desylva's storms, our battles won!
The Jolly Roger sails, our hearts unbound,
Hook on the helm, our freedom's found!

Hungry for my Hook/Storm (Tune: Hungry Like The Wolf)

Desylva
Dark seas rise, the night's alive with flame,
I'm wieldin' storms, but he's the one to tame.
His shadow cuts through mist, his hook's a spark,
My captain's fire lights the wildest dark!

*Hungry for my Hook, I'm sailin'! *(Hungry for my Hook, we're sailin'!)**
Through the realms, where shadows stalk, I'm trailin'!
*Hungry for my Hook, I'm callin'! *(Hungry for my Hook, we're callin'!)**
With his heart, I'll break the night, I'm fallin'!

In Agrabah's dunes, he fought the scorpion's sting,
His blade flashed bright, made the desert sing.
The Shadow Isles tried to cloak his fight,
But my winds tore through, brought him to the light!

*Hungry for my Hook, I'm sailin'! *(Hungry for my Hook, we're sailin'!)**
Through the realms, where shadows stalk, I'm trailin'!
*Hungry for my Hook, I'm callin'! *(Hungry for my Hook, we're callin'!)**
With his heart, I'll break the night, I'm fallin'!

Ares caged me, thought he'd bend my soul,
But my captain stormed the Vale, he took control!
The Compass led us through the stars' cruel maze,
His hook's my anchor, sets my storms ablaze!

Neverland's lagoon, where ghosts and echoes wail,
He carved our path, his courage never frail.
Relics of power, we snatched from gods' cruel hands,
My Hook's the fire that rules these wild lands!

*Hungry for my Hook, I'm sailin'! *(Hungry for my Hook, we're sailin'!)**
Through the realms, where shadows stalk, I'm trailin'!
*Hungry for my Hook, I'm callin'! *(Hungry for my Hook, we're callin'!)**
With his heart, I'll break the night, I'm fallin'!

On the Roger's deck, his eyes burn like the sea,
My captain's mine, through fates we'll always be!
With every storm I wield, his name's my cry,
Hungry for my Hook, we'll sail until we die!

Killian
***Verse 1**Night's alive, the seas are wild and free,*
Her raven hair's the tempest callin' me.
Her storm-gray eyes cut through the darkest fight,
My lass's winds ignite the starless night!

*Hungry for my Storm, I'm sailin'! *(Hungry for my Storm, we're sailin'!)**
Through the realms, where perils rise, I'm trailin'!
*Hungry for my Storm, I'm callin'! *(Hungry for my Storm, we're callin'!)**
With her fire, I'll conquer all, I'm fallin'!

Wonderland's mad maze, her lightning broke the spell,
Her gale tore through, sent shadows back to hell.
The Crimson Reach burned hot, but she was bold,
Her storms outfought the war god's fiery hold!

*Hungry for my Storm, I'm sailin'! *(Hungry for my Storm, we're sailin'!)**
Through the realms, where perils rise, I'm trailin'!
*Hungry for my Storm, I'm callin'! *(Hungry for my Storm, we're callin'!)**
With her fire, I'll conquer all, I'm fallin'!

In the Underworld's gloom, her winds lit up the gray,
She broke the souls' cruel tide to lead me through the fray!
The Veil of Shadows fell, her light my only guide,
My Storm's the heart that pulls me to her side!

Camelot's waters burned, but she outshone their glow,
Her tempest carved our path where no man dared to go.
The Compass showed our fate, her eyes my only star,
My Storm's the flame that's carried us this far!

*Hungry for my Storm, I'm sailin'! *(Hungry for my Storm, we're sailin'!)**
Through the realms, where perils rise, I'm trailin'!
*Hungry for my Storm, I'm callin'! *(Hungry for my Storm, we're callin'!)**
With her fire, I'll conquer all, I'm fallin'!

On the open sea, her winds will light our way,
My Storm's my heart, through every storm we'll stay!
With every wave we ride, her name's my battle cry,
Hungry for my Storm, we'll sail until we die!

"Last Stormy Night" (Tune: "Last Friday Night" by Katy Perry)
Version 1: Sung in the Past on the Jolly Roger

[Killian]
There's a storm in my sails tonight,
Rum's a-flowin', the crew's alight,
Desylva's thunder cracked the sky so bright,
We danced on deck 'til mornin' light!

[Both]
Last stormy night, we raised the fight,
Swords and lightning, stars ignite,
Hook and tempest, bold and tight,
Oh-oh-oh, we ruled that stormy night!
Sailed so wild, we lost our sight,
Cursed the fates with pure delight,
Pirate hearts in thunder's flight,
Oh-oh-oh, we ruled that stormy night!

[Desylva]
Waves went crashin', the wind did roar,
I called the gale to the ocean's core,
Killian's hook flashed 'cross the floor,
We stole the loot and begged for more!

[Both]
Last stormy night, we raised the fight,
Swords and lightning, stars ignite,
Hook and tempest, bold and tight,
Oh-oh-oh, we ruled that stormy night!
Sailed so wild, we lost our sight,
Cursed the fates with pure delight,
Pirate hearts in thunder's flight,
Oh-oh-oh, we ruled that stormy night!

[Killian]
Broke the rum casks, spilled the grog,

[Desylva]
Lightning danced through mist and fog,

[Together]
Crew went mad, we sang this log— Yo-ho-ho, what a stormy night!

[Both]
Last stormy night, we raised the fight,
Swords and lightning, stars ignite,
Hook and tempest, bold and tight,
Oh-oh-oh, we ruled that stormy night!
Sailed so wild, we lost our sight,
Cursed the fates with pure delight,
Pirate hearts in thunder's flight,
Oh-oh-oh, we ruled that stormy night!

Version 2: Sung in the Present in Storybrooke

[Killian]
There's a buzz in the town tonight,
Granny's ale flows, the diner's bright,
Desylva's storm shook the streetlight's height,
We tore through town 'til dawn's first sight!

[Together]
Last stormy night, we stirred the fight,
Magic cracklin', town alight,
Hook and tempest, hearts unite,
Oh-oh-oh, we owned that stormy night!
Danced so wild, we lost our plight,
Gold's schemes faded out of sight,
Love reborn in thunder's might,
Oh-oh-oh, we owned that stormy night!

[Desylva]
Winds went wild down Main Street's core,
I sparked the sky, let lightning soar,
Killian's hook gleamed by the store,
We shook the curse and claimed much more!

[Together]
Last stormy night, we stirred the fight,
Magic cracklin', town alight,
Hook and tempest, hearts unite,
Oh-oh-oh, we owned that stormy night!
Danced so wild, we lost our plight,
Gold's schemes faded out of sight,
Love reborn in thunder's might,
Oh-oh-oh, we owned that stormy night!

[Killian]
Spilled the beer at Rabbit Hole,

[Desylva]
Thunder woke the town's old soul,

[Together]
True love's kiss, we took control. Yo-ho-ho, what a stormy night!

[Together]
Last stormy night, we stirred the fight,
Magic cracklin', town alight,
Hook and tempest, hearts unite,
Oh-oh-oh, we owned that stormy night!
Danced so wild, we lost our plight,
Gold's schemes faded out of sight,
Love reborn in thunder's might,
Oh-oh-oh, we owned that stormy night