The first thing that struck me about the kiss was their awkward positioning. They are both positioned out, it takes effort for their bodies to turn into each other. They are positioned how you might shoot a side-by-side shot, or how you might stage this in a proscenium theater. This conversation is not familiar or comfortable, in fact, they've very much been set up to fail by the environment around them. However, they still do turn to each other. They stretch across the space, willing to put in the work even if they haven't been set up perfectly.

The first contact is initiated by Ed, he puts his hand to Stede's shoulder. Given their angle, it might've been more comfortable to put his hand on Stede's neck, or maybe behind Stede to change his positioning. But he puts his hand on Stede's shoulder. This, from an anatomical standpoint, takes pressure off of Stede's lower back and side. From an intimacy standpoint, it grounds Stede without cornering him. He is being held, but can turn away at any moment.

Stede stays still, arms at his side, not making contact other than the kiss. Then, he holds the kiss for *three beats* (!!!!!!!!!!!). Why is this significant? Because that is the amount of time that the average familiar hug is! Three beats. Little more than greeting, think of a light comforting hug. The most familiar contact that Stede has probably seen or experienced. There is still a part of him that is thinking about rules and structure, and pulls away before he wants to because he is worried about "making it weird" (This is also shown by how pursed his lips are, stretching to give the other person as much room as possible). He is giving Ed an out, and if taken our oblivious little blonde friend would probably be worrying if the kiss was a "friendly" one.

But Ed folds closer to him. He puts his other hand on Stede's heart (another grounding gesture), and Stede pushes himself to re-engage. Ed's right hand slides down to hold Stede's back, supportive and romantic, and Stede uses that support to angle himself closer to Ed (if it were exaggerated even a little bit, this would become a dime store novel cover). They shift, and their heart centers are now pointed toward each other. Ed presses into the kiss, deepening it in his newfound surety, and tries to find a better angle for them. Stede unpurses his lips a little bit and his eyelids lose a little tension, relaxing into a more secure connection. His arms move naturally now (I would bet my own that he was reaching to touch Ed in some way, but couldn't reach due to their positioning. Not a metaphor AT ALL.), and they *inhale together* (god I'm a slut for breathwork). They find their angle, they find their pace, and they find the life in it. It has a raw, ragged quality to it, like they are just remembering that they are allowed to breathe.

Then we have everyone's favorite continuity error, but we are just going to pretend that we see Edward move his hand from Stede's heart to cupping his jaw. He is more secure in the kiss, and knows that it is wanted. This is our third grounding gesture, but this one shows stability in the relationship and trust in their partner. If the touch was to have any other value, this positioning could show passion or possessiveness. But Ed's touch is light, barely grazing Stede's skin. It's the touch of worship and adoration, something valued. It's support, a gentle reminder that he is held and loved.

Their last move is Ed tilting his head, adding slightly more pressure to the kiss in addition to a new angle, and then they split. The pressure is a way that we communicate the *ending* of a kiss, which distinguishes it from being broken off. He wants to give Stede that last little bit of reassurance that this is wanted, and the kiss ending is not a rejection.

Throughout, each has their own running theme.

Stede: fumbling, unsure of the moves. He is stuck in his high-society rigidity, and doesn't trust his body to move the way he needs. He is worried about making Edward feel awkward, if they talked about it he would probably say he was worried Ed would think Stede was throwing himself at him. The only time he truly lets himself relax is the last second where Ed gives him that little bit of pressure. It loosens him up enough to be able to give Ed his own last nugget of reassurement.

Ed: knowing all the moves but worried about using them in this new context. We don't hear of any romantic interactions in Ed's past, given his story it is easy to say he probably did not have many romantic connections that lasted past a couple days (life of a pirate and all that). He knows passion, he understands sex and bodies. You can see that in his angling, the positions he helps the two of them into. But there is a distinct feeling of him holding back. His touch is so light, their lips stay pressed together rather than interlocked for all but a couple seconds. He isn't trusting his body to know how to not do *fucking* and do *love* instead.

Closing thoughts: yes it's awkward. It's silly, and it's fumbling, and it's not blistering or backtracked by sexy jazz. It's not meant to be that. It's both of them, jumping off the diving board and hoping there's water in the pool. It's two 13 year olds locking braces. It's a promise. It's a start.