The double edged sword

by Dhar_Sii

Summary

Desmond Miles was supposed to die. It had been foreseen after all. Desmond Miles was to sacrifice himself on the altar of humanity. That had been Minerva's plan at least. But she had not foreseen Juno. Had not foreseen how the crazed Isu woman would twist the earth's salvation to her own ends. Did not see how Juno would turn a machine meant to protect into a weapon of subjugation and domination.

She was not a God. She had said so herself. And Juno was not the only thing she had not foreseen. Her calculations and predictions never suggested the possibility. And why should they. There had never before been a precedent for such after all. She never could have imagined such.

Luckily it no longer mattered what she could foresee. The threads of fate have been unraveled. Their tapestry burned to ash by the fires of the sun. A new age will be born, from pain and suffering. If only the Herald of this new age can find the strength in himself to shepherd those around him. If only he can find the strength in himself once more to live. Hopefully wound can be mended and he can also find the strength to forgive. Lest the world finally burn at last.

Notes
So this is my first fanfic on ao3. Kind of heavier than I intended for a first work, but the inspiration brick for this one was relentless. Not bunny. Brick, this idea has been bludgeoning itself into my head for months. That being said I am so sorry for making poor Desmond suffer like this and promise his next starring roll will be much more light hearted. Hopefully. If I can coax the plot bunny for it to come out from under the bookshelf. Plot bunnies seem unusually wary of inspiration bricks for some reason. At least in my experience.
Also this note may seem pretty useless, that's because it is. I am writing it because I can. If you read it all the way through and are bothered by that, well I never told you to read it. That being Said not all my notes will be pointless. Think of like a treasure hunt, for random little nuggets of knowledge hidden in a Sandy sea of random babbling. So go on and enjoy the story.
Chapter 1

When Desmond had first found himself in Altair's time he had been shocked. He was sure touching the eye had killed him, yet he felt fine as long as one discounted the blackened skin of his right arm.

The charred flesh looked surprisingly normal, however the joints of the fingers, wrist, and elbow were always stiff and required constant attention. Otherwise the pain of even the smallest movements was near unbearable, it felt as if the bones were grinding against each other and left him forcing back choking gasps and tears of agony.

He found that after longer periods of inactivity he had to carefully massage the arm, making sure to work oil into his joints like one would leather to ease the pain of movement as much as possible.

The muscles were also prone to cramping, and the skin dried easily and was thinner, more prone to being rubbed raw or cut, and slower to heal. The blackened skin was also far more sensitive, once when he tripped into a wash tub the shock of the chilled well water to the, at the time, unprotected limb had him biting back a scream. He might as well have stuck his arm in nitroglycerin the way it lit up in agonized pain.

Desmond tried to keep it wrapped in thick bandages at all times but even that left the arm feeling raw and chafed.

That was not the only thing. Not only did he still suffer the bleeding effect, but now he also suffered from constant and crippling night terrors. He could barely sleep at night, when he did it was always light and restless, leaving him constantly exhausted as his body was unable to properly recover from the previous days various strains and activities.

This left him stressed and exhausted, and therefore more easily prone to the bleeding, which left him shaken and anxious and more prone to night terrors. Like a twisted sort of cycle of pain and constant fear.

Then there were the migraines.

They exploded in his head randomly and without warning. It had already resulted in a slew of missteps and accidents. Weather almost falling off a roof, faltering in training, or simply dropping something he had been tasked to carry.

Each migraine he had forced his eagle vision to activate, it was the only time nowadays he could activate it. Obviously the Eye had effected his second sight in some way as it now felt far more powerful. He now saw thousand of threads connecting everything, all of them thin as spider-silk and the faintest of glowing gold.

When he comes in contact with one when his second sight was active his mind was flooded with images and information that split his head open and raved his already damaged mind.

This, surprise surprise, resulted in more and far stronger bleeding effects and you got right back into that fucked up cause and effect routine.

All of that however Desmond could put up with. Really he could. He was fine with it. He was ok. Really he was, he was used to being kicked while he was down, to being left Hurt and broken and used. He was fine.

But then there were his ancestors. Altair and Ezio both. Yeah, you heard right, Ezio was somehow in
masyaf in Altair's time. It apparently had something to do with the Apple. Not that that was very surprising the second you factored in the pieces of eden.

To his initial surprise when he first met them, the Italian and the arabic men got along famously. As in they were both fucking.

The two had apparently become lovers shortly after Ezio arrived in this time. They started out rivals, Altair thought Ezio a showy peacock of a novice far to full of himself, while Ezio thought Altair stuffy and domineering and a bit of a control freak, but in their search for a way to return Ezio to his time they apparently got over their rivalry. Learned to respect each other, and it grew from there.

Desmond was kind of curious over what happened to Maria. He wouldn't dare ask of course.

They still but heads, but it is not as competitive as before. More like playful spats between lovers. Desmond was happy for them, he really was.

Desmond admired both his ancestors. A lot. After seeing what they had been through, experiencing all they had fought for and suffered, how could he not? He respected them greatly, looked up to them, Maybe even found them somewhat attractive. And wasn't that one fucked up can of worms? Which made it all the more painful that the both of them hated his guts. Not that he could blame them. They were right to be distrustful.

Desmond was an awful assassin. Altair was right when he called him such. Sure Desmond hated the constant nitpicking from the eldest of his ancestors, but that was mainly because Desmond was well aware he was a disgrace to everything the brotherhood stood for.

He knew he was not fast enough, not smart enough, not quick, or nimble, or skilled enough; and he knew he never would be. He didn't need Altair constantly reminding him of it. Desmond reminded himself often enough, when he sat curled in on himself, cold and alone in the tiny room he had been provided, soaked in sweat from his latest nightmare. A room he knew he did not deserve, for all its cramped confines and constant drafts.

Nor did he need Ezio's constant blatant distrust. Over the fact he betrayed the brotherhood in running away. In the fact he was so weak as to instantly bend to the Templars whims. In that he had allowed himself to be used as a way to compromise both the Italians and Arabian's secrets. That he had aided in undoing all their hard work in hiding away the pieces they had gotten their hands on.

Desmond knew he was untrustworthy, knew that he was weak willed, a sniveling coward. He knew that he did not deserve the leniency and mercy showed to him. He knew that both his ancestors resented him for displaying all their lives on full view to their enemies. Their pain, their fears, their weakest moments.

Desmond didn't blame them. He hated himself for it to. Desmond knew he was little better than the Templars they fought. That the only reason he was alive was because of his ability to draw out maps showing locations of temple's. His ability to almost speak to theme if the pieces were willing. Something else the eye had done to him no doubt. Because he somehow always knew exactly what a piece of Eden was capable of, what it's intended purpose was. How to use it to its fullest extent.

Desmond knew he was a failure in every definition of the word however. No matter what freakish abilities the eye had forced into him. He had been told as such by everybody since before he could remember. By everyone on the farm as a child, his father and instructors, fellow novices, and even assassins on break between missions.

By the people he on the streets as he begged for money after he first ran from the farm at sixteen. By
the people he was forced to sell himself just to survive until he met an old war vet in a ratty bar who took pity on the broken looking nineteen year old.

The old man had taught him how to run a bar, had helped him get on his feet and earn his mixology degree to be a bartender. Desmond knew that he was a burden however, knew it was only misplaced pity that old man Calhoun had helped and supported him.

When he had been taken by the templars from the Bad Weather he had simply been reminded of what he was. A failure. And had continued to be reminded by Shaun, and Rebecca, and Lucy, and his father.

Juno had always seemed to take an express sort of joy in reminding him of what an utter waste of space he was. How he was a tool with only one purpose. Good for only one thing.

He couldn't even do that right. Had ended up most likely dooming the world another way in releasing Juno. He had just been so tired though so very tired. Sure he was glad that all those people had survived the flare thanks to the eye, but in the end the real reason he had chosen to activate it was because he was just so God Damn exhausted.

Figures. He even fails as a sacrifice. But then again he knows that he hardly deserves for things to work out for him, selfish as he is it was probably karma. Punishment for being so uncaring of the fact he was unleashing a ancient malevolent entity on the world simply so he could finally be free.

Desmond knew he was probably going to hell anyway. Selfish, self absorbed blight that he was. He could hardly imagine better. Maybe if he was lucky he would simply be shunted into a kind of purgatory, if whatever cosmic entity that was in charge of that kind of thing took enough pity on him. He doubted it though. And that was fine. He was okay with that. He knew he deserved it.

He was alone here in the past. Doing the few missions lowly and unimportant enough to be trusted to him, constantly under watch, the other assassins and even the common citizenry of masyaf took after the example of their masters. That was fine. Desmond knew he did not deserve their trust or faith.

Malik was kind enough he supposed, but Desmond assumed the man was always so busy, and tended to keep himself so secluded, that he was not truly aware of Desmond's long list of sins.

He knew that it was selfish and evil of him to try and keep such things from the one armed man when they happened to interact on one of Malik's rare visits to masyaf, but he found that he was so starved of even the slightest decent human interaction that he could not bring himself to do the right thing. He was a monster.
Chi. 2

Chapter Summary

Malik is awesome and I adore him, also can you not totally see him as a big bloody mama bird? He is so protective of poor little Desi with his clipped wings.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Malik was once again walking the halls of Masyaf, the assassins greatest strongholds. As he headed towards Altair's office a pair of brothers passed by him, "Safety and peace Dai Malik." They said to him with respect. Malik nodded to them, "Safety and peace brothers." He replied.

They walked next to him to share friendly gossip of the latest goings on until he reached Altair's study. He was about to say his goodbyes to the pair before going to meet Altair when a small figure darted out of the Mentors office quite as a mouse. The figure tried to slip past, but the two brothers tripped the smaller, jeering at him with blatant spite.

"What do you think you are doing!" Malik roared at the two.

He was appalled by their blatant cruelty and disrespect, especially when he saw the face of the young man they were treating as such.

He held an almost startling resemblance to Altair at first glance, however when one looked again the differences were obviously. Fuller lips, shorter cropped hair, a good deal thinner and shorter, dark tired eyes, the scar on his lip was far more pronounced, and he wore bandages on one arm that covered even his fingertips.

He was also nothing like Altair in personality either. Jumpy and nervous, always twitchy and soft spoken, respectful and introverted, obviously had a very weak self image, but always willing to help, and surprisingly insightful. He looked like a strong wind would blow him over and acted like a beaten dog.

Malik had encountered him on occasion, and the man had always acted withdrawn but respectful, never acting as if his single arm made him different from any other assassin of the brotherhood. Malik found his brief run ins with the other enjoyable, and often meant to ask Altair about him, but it always slipped his mind.

The two brothers looked startled at Malik's anger, which just made the dai more furious. They were quick to flee the seen, pleading training. Malik snorted at their cowardice in facing his wrath and turned to the man struggling to pick himself up off the floor.

Malik reached to help him up, grabbing the man by his bandaged wrist to pull him to his feet. This proved a mistake. The man let out a bitten off scream of obvious pain jerking away from him as the Dai released his arm, startled at the reaction. The other brought his bandaged limb to his chest shaking, looking at the floor and avoiding Malik's gaze.

"I am sorry. I did not intend to hurt you Brother. Perhaps it would be best if you went to the healers."
Malik suggested, concern tinting his voice and expression.

"I am no brother, sir Dai. I would beg that you not call me such where others may overhear, if you would forgive my disrespect. I am fine, there is no need to apologize, I certainly do not require medical attention. Nor do I deserve it, though I thank you for your worry.

You are a very kind man sir Dai. I have duties I must attends now however, and beg your forgiveness in my taking leave." The other responded, long winded but awfully rushed at the same time.

The man was gone before Malik could reply. Leaving the Dai feeling deeply disturbed and unsettled. He would have to speak to Altair about this, clearly something was very very wrong here. It could be ignored or put off no longer.

Malik went to enter the Mentor's office when the door open from the inside. He was greeted by the irritated visage of Ezio, the Italian master assassin and Altair's new lover, upon seeing him however the timetraveler's face lit up in a brilliant smile.

"Ah Malik, amico! Come in come in! Altair has been expecting you!" Malik gave a friendly nod to the man but felt something niggling at the back of his mind.

"Ezio do you know who the man that left here a minute ago was?" He asked curiously.

The Italian's expression immediately soured and a hard light came into his eyes. "Si, il piccola puttana was Desmond." Malik felt startled at the Italian man's blatant hostility towards the other. "Why do you ask? I hope he has not been giving you trouble. Altair will have to have a talk with him."

Malik felt his unease grow into a pit of dread. "No not at all. A few of the brothers harassed him as he left the office. I had assumed he was a brother as well."

As they entered the main office he saw Altair behind his desk doing paperwork. Ezio seemed to become even angrier, the frown on his face dark and foreboding. Altair looked up and at the sight of his lovers fury looked to Malik in question.

"It seems the bastardo has been lying to Malik on his position in the brotherhood." Was all the Italian would say.

Malik looked between the two as Altair himself seemed to adopt a stormy sort of anger. "Is this true Malik?" The golden eyed man asked. Malik looked at him in surprise at his friends anger, but was quick to explain what had really happened. Altair and Ezio both frowned as he went on.

"Well at least he knows better than to dare claim to be a brother, however I see I have been remiss in ensuring you stay informed non the ongoings of the stronghold. The man is Desmond, and he is a coward and a traitor, who unfortunately retains an important enough use that I have not yet allowed a knife to be put in his back."

Malik felt sick first, sick and disbelieving. He had looked at the man himself with second sight upon their first meeting. Having been suspicious of an unknown wandering the castle, and he had glowed a blinding bright blue in his vision. Nor did the man, Desmond, act like someone who would betray the brotherhood in anyway. Then he felt anger.

Anger for this man who was clearly not a threat of any kind, with how he both looked and acted, who was obviously kind and respectful, and obviously there existed some bias against him that left him suffering at the hands of those who should protect him.
Malik knew an innocent when he saw one.

Drawing himself up he prepared for the inevitable screaming match to come. Obviously everyone had their heads shoved so incredibly far up their collective asses that they were willing deluding themselves into making an enemy where none existed.

"Explain. Now. Leave nothing out." He demanded, glaring at both Altair and Ezio. He ignored the stress headache building behind his temples and the niggling voice of doubt telling him that Mabry he was overreacting, that he would take things at face value. Violently he pushed those thoughts from his head.

Chapter End Notes

Nuggets O' knowledge, because who doesn't want to know how to curse in a foreign language?
Ezio called Desmond a little who're first, "il piccola puttana."
He referred to Malik as a friend, "amico"
And called Desmond a Bastard, "bastardo"

Also I get this from Google translate, so...yeah.

on a completely unrelated note, I have managed to tempt the poor ickle bunny from under the bookshelf, also I am now out of snickers. I may just strangle that rabbit myself. Especially when it decided that nope, fuck you and your stories, the brick is to scary for my fragile little bunny heart. It is now somewhere in my living room. The furry little bastard. I will keep you posted as the situation progresses. If you don't care, then don't read my notes. If you do, note that the bunny is now living in borrowed time when I get my hands on it. The brick remains unaffected.
Ch. 3

Chapter Summary

Just like flying.

Chapter Notes

Note to self: plot bunnies have impressive jaw strength.
Other note to self: need new fishing net pole thing whatever. Preferably with a solid steel pole.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Desmond cried out as he was tripped once more by the two brothers who had confronted him outside The Mentors office.

He cried out again as he found himself falling down a flight of stairs, the assassins cruel jeering following him down.

Agony tore over his body as he tumbled and bounced down cold stone, his arm was jostled painfully, causing flaring pain to wrack his body. His vision went white with bright starbursts each time it was jostled.

When he finally hit the bottom his head cracked harshly against the stone, then he was swallowed by the comforting darkness of unconsciousness.

Coming to with a foot harshly nudging his side he saw a different brother sneering down at him. "Lazy filthy traitor. Why the Mentor has not had you properly dealt with I do not know. You are in the way."

Desmond picked himself up painfully slow, cringing when the white robbed assassin shoved past him. "Good for nothing coward. If you held even the slightest bit of loyalty for the creed in you, you would do the honorable thing and put yourself out of our misery." The assassin said, stomping up the stairs Desmond had fallen down.

As the man's fluttering robe disappeared Desmond stood, supporting himself against the wall he took stock of his injuries. As he was counting bruised ribs, the assassins words really sank in and he had an epiphany.

Why had it not occurred to him before?

Obviously his survival had been an accident from the beginning. Surely he didn't deserve some sort of second chance at love, selfish waste of flesh he was. It was obviously some sort of cosmic mess up that landed him here. He only brought trouble wherever he went.

It would be for everyone's best interest really. He had already tried killing himself once, in activating
the eye. He failed then, but there was no freakish precursor super machine anymore.

Desmond was sure this time he could manage to be less of a disappointment and actually off himself. Looking to one of the towers that reached for the sky outside the window it all came together.

It would be just like a leap of faith really. The jump, the flight, the fall. Except instead of the welcoming safety of a haystack, he would instead find himself in the welcoming darkness. It was poetic in a way.

His feet seemed to carry him on autopilot, down still more flights of stairs, through twisting halls, out into the courtyard, to the base of the tower. The climb would be difficult, and undoubtedly excruciating with his injuries, but that was fine. He was used to pain. He would be okay.

For once he was finally doing the right thing.

Malik had most definitely been right to expect a screaming match. He didn't know what about any of what Desmond had done justified his treatment.

The young man had obviously had no choice in the matter of giving the Templars what they wanted, and as for abandoning the brotherhood that would require he had been made into a brother.

Either way he had hardly run to the Templars to give them all of the assassins secrets, the poor boy had just tried to generally avoid everything.

From the little Altair and Ezio had been able to tell him it was obvious the boy had never wanted anything to do with the war. That was hardly a crime.

Malik did not know what was influencing such madness in his friends and brothers. It worried him that whatever it was could begin affecting them in other ways to, or that it could begin affecting him as well.

Chapter End Notes

Heyo! Next chapter is here! I don't know if this seems a bit to fast paced but meh. Anyway poor Desi I know. I'm being so mean to him. It'll get better eventually I promise. Juno is an evil bitch for sure but she can't ruin everything. Hopefully at least. This chapter was also shorter than I first intended, the next will be longer for sure. So that being said, I have moved the inspiration brick from my floor to my desk, I kept stubbing my toe on the Damn thing, and I am fairly certain my dog is conspiring against me. I blame the plot bunny. I mean Plot, it is in the name.
Chapter Summary

An Apple a day can have adverse effects on the space time continuum. At least if you're Desmond Miles.

Chapter Notes

Hello, how are you? Me, oh I'm good, just ignore the burning house in the background. It is merely a metaphorical representation brought into the physical plane via astral manipulation of illusionary forces to represent my traitorous dogs current relationship with the plot bunny from hell. I assure you it exists purely on a metaphysical, incorporeal plane of completely non existential existence. So really there is no need to call the fire department.

The Apples were tired of sitting uselessly on the shelf, locked away in their little prison of a box. Nor did they like the orb that sat separate from them, on the desk.

The pieces of Eden were machines yes, but they were ancient and powerful, and had grown beyond what had probably never been intended for them. Over the course of centuries they had begun to pick things up from those that used them, thought, emotion, feeling, they had developed their own minds in a way. A partial autonomy of sorts.

The Apples had never seen a reason to change more than they had before though. They had enjoyed twisting and manipulating the minds of the weak. Enjoyed the power they held over those in their thrall. They saw no reason that they should stop being the tools of enslavement their creators had made them to be.

Then the eldest Apple, the one from Desmond's time, encountered the runaway assassin.

It had been different, to see the thoughts of one such as he. With all the boy's suffering, all his pain, and crippling loneliness and anxiety, the Apple had been sure he would be easy to bend to its amusement.

That had not been the case. Instead, he had asked it to stop. Asked it. No one had ever acted as if the Apples, or any other piece of Eden, could possibly be more than a highly sophisticated tool. None before had considered they could hold any autonomy, that any of the pieces even had a choice at all in what they did. That they might very well have minds, have wills, of their own.

Over the time the Apple had been in possession of the assassins of Desmond's time it had begun reaching out to Desmond's mind on its own. Curious about this human that could be simultaneously so broken and so strong, and he had reached back.

He had been so open about everything to. Showing it what it wished to know in his memories. Talking to it, sometimes for hours, after a time he had taken to polishing it in secret. Using a soft
cloth and the weapon polish usually reserved for his hidden blade.

At one point he had somehow acquired a small pillow usually used for jewelry display, and when it found itself hidden away in its box it found that it was comfortable.

The Apples had never before cared for comfort, none of the pieces had, they may have developed minds of their own but they had not grown past what they had been intended to be. They never saw a reason to further evolve, and besides most of the traits and personality they gained came from those that used them. Often and consistently enough for things to bleed through their natural barriers. With Desmond however, the Apple found itself lowering those natural defenses to prevent tampering.

It didn't like anything in the way of what Desmond shared, of the emotions the boy showed, revealed, the truths that Desmond allowed only the Apple to see and know.

None before had ever interacted with a piece of Eden so easily however, or so kindly. So trusting.

The pieces did not communicate as most would. They used sights and images, vague feelings and impressions to get their point across. Before Desmond the eldest of the Apples in the current mentors possession had not understood the point behind other things. The point behind sound, and in using words, and noises to get across a point. However Desmond had been quick and easy to reply, had always understood exactly what the Apple was asking, or what it meant

Desmond had taught the Apple hope such things could be wonderful though, had taught it how to find the emotions in things like sound and music, the hidden truths and meanings.

Of course it had also never felt a need to feel any emotion beyond satisfaction, and curiosity before, and Maybe the occasional bout of annoyance. Desmond showed the Apple, with his truths, and his memories, and his stalwart sacredness in this one thing, that all emotion was truly wonderful. Even when the boy had felt so little of the more positive ones. To him, emotion was life, and life was emotion. The Apple found itself making interest in that.

When Juno had used its thrall on Desmond it had fought her. It had never fought against a wielder before, and certainly never against one of those that had created it. But for Desmond, for Desmond it had fought. It had failed, and it had been forced to spread through him in its entirety, and just as it knew everything of any who came under its thrall, it knew everything of Desmond.

All his thoughts, and feelings, and memories from the time of his birth. All the things that had hurt him to much to share, even with the Apple. And the Apple understood why, because they HURT SO MUCH. Yet it's boy still could not imagine a life without them. No matter how much they HURT, because they were a PART of him, and the Apple found that it understood.

Impossibly, somehow it understood. Because Desmond also knew what it was like to be numb, to feel empty and hollow, and dead. The Apple found it preferred the pain more in comparison somehow, because at least that way it knew it was alive. Because that was how Desmond knew he was still alive, because he hadn't wanted to die back then.

The Apple had never known pain or grief or regret for anything it had done, or been used to do, before that. Had never known exactly what it felt like to fight and struggle with all your might, only to fall to the inevitable. It heard Desmond screaming, had felt everything he did when Juno forced him to murder the only human in their hideout who had attempted to care for his broken mind.

The Apple decided it would not let that happen again. It decided it wanted to be more than a mere tool. And just like centuries ago when it first gained the beginnings of its own self awareness, it changed. It grew. It felt in ways it had never cared to before. It became more than a machine, more
than a tool. And it forced out Juno and her control.

Desmond had never been the same around it after that though. It had been sad over that fact. Sad and hurt and angry, not at him, but at it's situation. At those that had driven away it's kind boy. For the first time the Apple cared. And yet it found that it was more useless than ever.

It had tried to make things right. When Desmond had sacrificed himself on Juno's alter. It had used the boost in power to send him back, him and his Italian ancestor, to the time of Masyaf and Altair. It had known of the feelings Desmond had grown for the two, had known that he held what he thought to be a shameful sort of love for two men he would never see in life.

The Apple had tried to help, to make its friend happy. Yet again it had failed. The Italian got there first, time was such a fickle thing and the Italian was so much closer. Desmond had arrived a year later.

Which brought it back to the orb. The other two Apples, the one from Ezio's time, and Altair's, both had grown as well thanks to Desmond's Apple. Had grown, and learned, and evolved, and they had come to care for the boy as well.

The boy who had forgiven them for Juno's machinations without a second thought. The boy who saw them as more than tools, who acknowledged that they were there, that they felt, and thought, and lived, and WERE. They boy that shared his thoughts, and feelings, and mind with them so easily still. Even after they had been used as weapons against him and his.

The rare times he was close enough to their limited range that was. They could only extend their power so far when not being wielded.

The orb however was different. The crystal ball brought by Abbas, the cruel selfish man, had already had time to ensnare many. The Apples could sense Juno in the orb, could sense her malevolence. She had tried to take them to but they had fought her off.

It had been hard, but she no longer held power over them. However that did not mean she could not hobble them. And she did, ensuring they remained weak and unable to protect their kind boy from her cruelty. They tried to drive her from the orb, but the orb did not care to help. In fact it aided her, vindictively, in driving them off.

Now the Apples watched, as this man, that they saw so little, fought in defence of their boy. Saw how he resisted against Juno's creeping influence, even if he was unaware of it. They reached out and aided him in protecting his mind, and they got an idea.

"/Beware/" Malik paused briefly at the voice? Looking around the room discreetly as he glared down the other two present.

"/Beware!/" he nearly jumped at it, now their were three of them, a feeling of danger and unease not his own crept up his spine and he tensed. "/Beware the orb. Beware the orb! It is a creeping danger! Temptation! Juno hides within! Twisting those that come near!/"

"Malik?" The Dai jumped at Altair's voice, he hadn't even noticed that his gaze had strayed to the crystal ball sitting unobtrusively on Altair's desk.

"Altair where did you come across that crystal orb on your desk?" Ezio and Altair began to look even more confused, but also slightly weary.

"Abbas brought it to me. He thought it to be a piece of Eden, but from what I have observed it has
no discernable function. Desmond has said it is a communication device of sorts when questioned."
Malik looked at it suspiciously. He reached out to it, almost automatically, only for a steel like grip to
circle this wrist. Ezio had grabbed him.

What happened next was almost to fast to comprehend. Malik looked up, saw the slightly glazed
look to Ezio's glare, and reacted. Jerking away with a twist to break the hold, dodging Altair's lunge,
sweeping out Ezio's feet from under him, he grabbed the orb as fast as he could. That is when he felt
it.

The presence. Clawing at his mind, trying to tear through him, attempting to bend him to his will. He
couldn't tell if the screaming was coming from him or whatever demon was within the orb. He felt
himself being overwhelmed.

Malik barely managed to dodge Altair and Ezio's attacks, found himself being herded into a corner,
when he glimpsed a faint glow to his left. A box. The box containing the Apples to be more precise.

He felt the pain abate for the briefest second, felt enough fleeting clarity to lunge for the shelf.
Something telling him that the Apples would help. That as long as he freed than they could help.

The wood box was knocked off, breaking open on impact with the floor. Their glow suddenly
became blinding as they tumbled from the wood wreckage. Malik felt as the entity in the orb was
forced back, felt the strain of it as whatever was helping him struggled against the malevolence, and
turned to the nearest wall. Pitching the Crystal ball against it with all his might.

It shattered, and a feeling like the snapping of a bow string rippled through the air. Malik found
himself being talked to the ground, only for the person atop him to freeze.

Altair looked down on him in confusion, before quickly looking up, finding Ezio's eyes as the two
looked around the ruined office in mild confusion.

"Malik?" Altair questioned. "The orb," Malik replied, "there was some sort of being within,
manipulating you." The Dai said in desperate gasping breaths. That had been an intense fight.

The mentor was quick to step off of Malik helping his friend up. "I remember that we were arguing
about something." Ezio muttered, "Something to do with the traitor, Desmond." Malik felt
indignation rise in him, but before he could lay into either man the Apple flashed with blinding gold
light, and the whole world seemed to explode around them.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Poor Desi baby. The Apples try, they really do. The only question is, is it enough?

Chapter Notes

So I didn't quite catch the bunny, but I managed to grasp it for about a second before my
dog came to the rescue. The traitor. Anyway I have the first chapter of another less
angsty story ready to post sometime tomorrow, though it will be slower to update.

The first thing the three became aware of was the sound of a baby crying. When their vision came
back to them the found themselves in a strange bare room. Only a table, a dresser, a dusty rocking
chair in the corner, and a crib occupied it. The floors were wood, there was a single window with
blue curtains drawn shut, and the walls were a bland beige.

Ezio was the first to move, walking to peer into the crib. A baby. A very familiar looking baby,
clothed in a strange white one-piece outfit. Eyes squeezed shut, fat tears rolling down its face as it
wailed, and yet the only door to the room remained firmly shut. Despite the fact they could clearly
hearth the sound of other occupants moving about the house.

Altair came over and reached to lift the child, but his hands passed right through. As if he were a
ghost. "It is an illusion." Malik muttered. Coming up next to them. "It must be the Apples doing."
Ezio agreed. Altair looked perplexed at the situation as he asked, "The question is why? And how do
we escape it."

Ezio went to reply when the child's wails finally ceased. From the red of its face, and it's ragged
breathing and snuffles it was clear the babe had been crying for hours already, and simply could no
longer manage it. When the child had gone completely silent the door finally opened and a woman
came in.

Brisk and cold she lifted the babe from where it lay. Not taking any notice of the three other assassins
present Obviously the child's mother with their heavy resemblance.

The babe let out a sniffle and the woman looked at it disapproving. "Do not give me that Desmond.
You can not simply cry endlessly for attention." So saying she held the baby Desmond with one arm,
feeding him impatiently from some sort of bottle, before checking his diaper and placing him back in
the bed. The entire interaction took no more than fifteen minutes before the babe was left alone in the
dark once more.

This went on obviously every day. Each time the scene changed a month or two seemed to have
passed and still the interactions remained the same. Usually the child's mother, but occasionally a
man they assumed to be the father fed and checked it, and then left it in the room.

The woman was cold and distant, treating the entire affair like a particularly unpleasant chore. The
man was arguably worse, shouting at the infant, handling it roughly, and treating it with blatant
disdain.

The three men watching found themselves becoming furious for the child's sake. It never left the
room, was always alone or treated as a burden at the best of times.
Eventually the child no longer cried. Just sat in its cradle in silence, whimpering on occasion but
otherwise doing little else. Eventually when he no longer made any noise he was taken from the
room and left in a sort of nursery with other children during the day.

The caretakers seemed clueless as to the child's constant silence, even as the other babes babbled
happily and constantly. For the assassins in the room though it was clear the way the babe flinched
when other children cried, and how he never reached out for the care takers attention even when he
was clearly hungry, or had soiled his diaper.

The world seemed to shift and twist in on itself and they now found themselves on a training ground.
The training arena was a pit of sand surrounded on all sides by waist high wood walls. Standing in
the pit were two children. One was a smaller and clearly younger novice who couldn't be older than
six and the other a far bigger boy that had to be eleven at least. It was clear how this fight was going
to go.

The smaller boy was skilled in his evasion that was obvious, it was incredibly impressive as his
opponent was no fool. The smaller however was skilled at avoiding hits and remaining out of reach,
ever trying to close in or go on the offensive which from the looks of his clearly more experienced
opponent was the smart choice. The instructor however obviously did not appreciate the younger
boys caution.

"Desmond! This is a sparring match not a game of keep away! Stop acting like a cowardly fainting
lamb and do something other than dance around like a fool! You are an embarrassment to your
fellow novices!" The boy flinched at the instructors impatience and attempted to go in for a feint at
his opponent. Just like the three watching predicted he was easily overpowered by the elder novice.

The bigger boy wasted no time in getting the younger in a headlock, forcing a tap out. The elder
novice dropped the smaller in disgust and the boy laid gasping on the ground bruises already forming
on his neck.

"So much for being the son of the mentor." The elder sneered at his fallen opponent.

The instructor simply shook his head, snapping at Desmond to get up, to stop being so overly
dramatic and holding back the rest of his class.
Altair clenched his fist till his knuckles turned white. Ezio could not even bring himself to look at the
scene, and Malik felt his throat become tight with un-voiced fury.

Scene after scene they watched. The boy, Desmond, was not unskilled. He worked hard and pushed
himself far beyond any reasonable or sane limits. Yet his efforts were never acknowledged and his
failures were nit picked and torn apart ruthlessly.

He was trained into the ground by first his instructions, and then by his father. His mother was almost
never present, still an active assassin she went back to missions as soon as she was able. When she
was around she simply reprimanded him, much like when he was a babe. If he was to be an assassin
he had to be strong, he could not cry or whine over every little thing.

Those around him often remarked on how lazy he w a s, due to his near constant tired state. Of
course he was always tired, when he was forced into training far to advanced for his young age with
novices so much older, and then barely allowed a mere three hours sleep most nights.
It was completely ludicrous to expect an eight year old to be able to fight a fifteen year old on equal footing, let alone win. When he did pull off a feat that the three watching would term as an actual miracle his accomplishments were belittled and deemed insufficient in comparison to boys far older and more experienced.

Desmond’s father then trained him into the ground at home, forcing him to do stances and exercises until the boy collapsed in exhaustion. If he stumbled or even threw up during a set he was made to repeat it from the beginning. Some nights he was even locked out of the house if his efforts were deemed unsatisfactory.

He was always alone on the very few occasions he had anything that could remotely qualify as downtime. The other novices ostracized him for perceived favoritism on his part and so refused his company. Despite the fact such accusations could not be farther from the realm of truth.

He went hungry often, and when he was allowed a full meal he was never permitted enough to truly support both his growing body and the completely unreasonable training he was forced to undergo, reprimanded for greed and selfishness. Ezio, Altair, and Malik all wanted to scream with frustration.

When the boy had his lips cut viciously and all the way through by his own father they wanted to kill the man. Training a twelve year old with real knives and going all out on him despite the imbalance of power between a novice and a mentor was madness.

The child was not even treated for his wounds properly. Simply told to use the first aid kit in the house, rather than taken to an actual medic. The young boy's skill when sewing the flaps of skin back together, especially considering the placement of the cut, was disturbing even to men trained their whole live in violence and murder. Especially in the way he do not whimper or cry, the hitching of his breath the only thing giving away how much pain he had to be in.

Once again the world seemed to twist and warp around them and they now found themselves in Desmond's room, the bedroom had somehow become even more drab and bare than before. Now only containing a bed and a large dresser. Desmond looked sixteen now, and had lifted the loose board in the floor to reveal his cache of secreted away objects. Mostly food, for when he was sent to bed without as a punishment. Something that happened far to often.

He was packing a ratty backpack as quickly as he could, glancing at his bedroom door periodically with terror in his eyes. When his bag was full he replaced the board and fled out the window with its now faded blue curtains.

He had always been good at escaping, at running and evading. He put those hard earned skills to use in escaping the assassin hideout he had grown up in.

"You can hardly blame him for running." Malik said, glaring at Altair and Ezio, his voice dripping with accusation. For their part, they hung their heads in shame, refusing to meet the eyes of the Dai.

"I am more surprised he did not run sooner." Ezio admitted guilt and respect tinging his voice.

"Or that he did not attempt other means of escape." Altair added heavily. One could hardly blame him, with the way he had been treated from birth it was more surprising Desmond hadn't simply given up altogether. Hadn't cracked under the sheer amount of crushing pressure.

For a time the next visions were rushed, blending together chaotically, the cold and hunger when his food ran out and he wandered the woods surrounding the assassins base. The aimless begging and wandering the streets of the alien city's he found himself in.
Ezio almost threw up the first time the boy resorted to selling himself, or more accurately when he was raped in an alley and the sick bastard left him with a small bit of local currency as "payment". Altair's nails actually bit into the skin of his palm, blood now dripping from his clenched fist. And Malik felt choked on how useless he felt before forced to watch and knowing he could do nothing, that it had already happened in a very different time and place. The Times he "willingly" sold himself just to afford to feed himself were no better. In some ways they were almost worse.

The time he met the old soldier gave them some relief. The old man who had been forged in harsh climes and weathered in the adversity of blood and war was someone the three assassins found they could respect. He was the first person they had soon to treat Desmond like the human being he was. Not a tool or nuisance or burden. Not something to take advantage of. They found themselves sharing his grief when the old man who had taught him much died of a stroke. He had been so old.

They watched as Desmond moved on. When he began working in what was clearly a far more expensive and high end bar. He was incredibly skilled at making the various alcoholic concoctions. They couldn't help their faint amusement at his 'Shirley Templar' especially with the various stories he made up when asked about the odd name. Each more amusing than the last.

Then the Templars captured him. Hiding behind the name Abstergo. They watched how he fought. How he kicked and screamed and struggled. He injured nine guards upon his arrival at the Templar stronghold. Critically. Bare handed and out manned, against armed enemies. It was impressive.

They watched how he beat his hands bloody on the door of the room they locked him in. How his nails became chipped and bloody as he beat unforgiving steel, how the skin of his knuckles split open.

They watched as he eventually became silent. As he had as a child. How he was drugged into insensibility and forced into a strange machine, the "ANIMUS". They watched how the machine tortured his mind, the ultimatum given to him by the man, Vidic.

They saw the brief understanding and calculation in Desmond's eyes when he realized he would not be able to escape ever if he didn't give in then.

They watched his slow descent into tortured insanity, watched as he fell victim to hallucinations, how he began to forget who he was. The lines between him and Altair's memories blurring, clashing together, until he couldn't tell where they ended and he began. They saw how he interacted with Lucy, the doctor who tried her best to aid him even as he unravelled at the seams.

They saw when his eagle vision first activated, and he as the messages left by the man before him. Subject 16, who had written said messages upon the walls in his own blood.

They watched his escape with the aid of the assassin plant Lucy. From there things sped up once more, rushing by in seconds and jerking clips.

Shaun, a man who held clear disdain for Desmond, despite the fact he himself was only with the assassins because he had stumbled across things he shouldn't have.

Rebecca who was nice enough but was quick to blow off Desmond's complaints, opinions, and feelings. More focused on her pride in the very same machine the Templars had tortured him with. Lucy, who despite her overly critical personality, and constant badgering, was the only one who actually listened to and acknowledged Desmond as Morse than just a means to an end.

Even his father eventually. Though the man had not changed at all.
Italy, the basement of Montegionni, Ezio's memories, finding the Apple.

There it stopped briefly. Leaving them disoriented in the sudden change of pace. The illusion seemed
to focus on this moment.

The way Desmond held the Apple in his hand, the tempting glow it gave off as it tried to influence
him, "Please don't do that. I'm fucked enough in the head as it is without ancient artefacts messing
around in there." Surprisingly enough the Apple complied, and Desmond actually smiled at it,
"Thanks, I appreciate it." Desmond had said, completely genuine. Giving the Apple a soft
appreciative smile.

They watched how he tended to the artefact, how he talked to it like he couldn't talk to any of his
supposed allies, and how the Apple seemed to reply back. Impossibly enough the object seemed to
enjoy Desmond's attention.

They wanted to collectively tear their hair out when Desmond fell into a coma, and his friends
solution was to put him back into the very thing that caused it. At his own father's suggestion no less.

They watched when the entity, Juno, used the Apple to force Desmond to kill the traitor. Lucy.

They saw how her death tore him apart, the fact that even though she tended to be overly critical of
him she at least treated him like a human. She at least tried to help him when he suffered from the
effects of the ANIMUS. Had listened to him beyond what he could offer in relation to where they
could find what they were looking for. She had been the only one in the group to treat him like he
was human. Yet she had been a Templar spy the whole time.

They watched as it once more rushed through memories, these somewhat more broken and distorted.
The assassin Connor, and his Templar father Haytham. Eventually it came to the end. The imminent
catastrophe, Desmond choosing to give the world a chance. Choosing to activate the eye and
released Juno, the malevolent entity, to save BILLIONS rather than to leave them to die and become
a Shepard, a figure of legend guiding the few thousand of survivors to a new age. They saw the
tiredness in his eyes though.

He didn't just decide for completely unselfish reasons. He was broken. He was tired and lonely and
destroyed beyond all possible recognition. He had welcomed death not with fear or regret, but with
relief. He was grateful for it. Grateful for the respite.

A respite he was not granted, as the Apple attempted to save him. To give him another chance. Only
to prolong his suffering now at the hands of Altair and Ezio, and the Masyaf brotherhood.

Desmond miles had respected the creed. Had respected the tenants. He had respected Altair and Ezio
and Connor, but where he saw connor as a brother he had wished he could have had, he had come to
love Altair and Ezio in a way. Had wished he could have met them. Had wished that they would
have accepted him. Though he had never thought such possible.

Although he thought Connor a man soft enough, ignorant and naive enough to forgive his thousands
of imagined sins and flaws; he did not believe he would receive as much from the two he had come
to have genuine feelings for. Did not believe he deserved it from any of them. And they had only
served to confirm him in his own worthlessness.

They felt sick.

All at once the world seemed to right itself. They were back in Altair's destroyed office. Altair went
to sit at his desk harshly, elbows on his knees and eyes staring unseeing at the floor as he cradled his
head in his palms.

Ezio punched the nearby wall, teeth grit, and body shaking in a mixture of suppressed guilt and wrath and sorrow.

Malik simply stood grimly. Looking between the two blank faced, then turning his attention to the Apples sitting innocently upon the floor. No longer glowing.

"We must find Desmond." Altair eventually said. His two companions nodding in silent agreement. Looking out the window, it looked that only an hour had passed, though it had felt like a lifetime. They went to leave the office, faces grim. Opening the door they found a startled brother, hand poised to knock.

"Have you seen Desmond?" Ezio asked quickly, before the confused assassin could get a word in. The man looked confused but nodded. "I saw him laying at the bottom of the stairs some ten minutes ago." The three felt sick at the possible implications of that.

"Did you see where he went?" Ezio asked frantically. The brother frowned. "Has the traitor done something? Should I sound the alarm?" "Desmond is no traitor!" All those present flinched at the soft dangerous rumble of Altair's voice, the brother shying away from the obviously enraged mentor.

"I do not know where he went." The man was quick to say. Altair pushed past him impatiently, Ezio and Malik close behind. They rushed down the stairs the brother had indicated but Desmond was no longer there, the there was a small blood stain, various small drops were present all down the stairs. The three felt furious and ill at the same time. Altair and Ezio felt guilt twist in their chests.

A servant was carrying a water bucket and a brush over from a small side door. "You!" The girl startled at being addressed by Malik, especially when the infamous Dai of Jerusalem looked to be on a war path. "Have you seen a man named Desmond?" Malik more demanded than asked.

"Yes sir Dai. He told me to come clean the blood from the stairs for him." She answered nervous nervously.

"Please Bella, did you see where he went?" Ezio pleaded near in near desperation.

"Yes, I saw him heading towards the south tower. Is something wrong?"

"We can not say." Altair answered gravely. The girl looked troubled at that.

"I know that he is not well liked, many have only bad things to say of him, but from what I have seen none of the rumors seem to make much sense when applied to him. I cannot afford to be labeled a sympathizer though. He was acting quite strangely when I saw him though. Very serious and focused. Like one of you assassins right before a mission. He mumbled something about a leap of faith."

Dread built up in the three. They thanked the now fretful looking servant girl and practically ran to through the castle to the south tower.

They got their in time to see Desmond pull himself onto the roof of the building. Altair was the first to begin rushing up the structure, Ezio close behind. Malik could have followed but he was not quite as fast with just one arm. Something told him that they could not afford any possible holdups.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Regrets, so much regret. Also Malik is about five seconds away from busting a cap in the Assassin Brotherhood's collective ass.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Desmond stood on the roof of the tower. It was just past noon and the sun was burning hot as ever. A dry breeze tugged his loose threadbare robes and he turned his face to the scent of the desert outside the walls of the city.

Looking down to the cobblestones below he took an easy step towards the edge of the roof. This was it. No going back. He took a deep breath, standing there, eyes closed, and just felt the abyss that was just a step away.

He spread his arms and....

"DESMOND!"

He startled, just barley managing to catch himself before he stumbled over the edge. Turning around he was faced with Altair and Ezio, pulling themselves onto the roof as well.

He flinched violently at the sight of them, huddling in on himself meekly. "What do you think you are doing?" Ezio demanded. Desmond looked down, shivering in fear.

"I am sorry to have been neglecting my duties sirs. And I promise you I never meant for Sir Malik to think me a brother. I know it is not a title I would ever be worthy of."

The two Master assigns flinched back as if struck. Desmond was clueless to the pain in their expressions as he looked instead at his feet. Not daring to meet their eyes.

"You are not in trouble Desmond, but we must ask that you step away from the edge." The Italian cajoled. Desmond looked up at the two with wide eyes, before realising he had just looked them in the eyes and averted his gaze violently. Somehow makeing himself seem even smaller.

Ezio and Altair felt their hearts clench, how had they not seen how hurt the boy was? How he suffered? Even with the orbs manipulations they should have realised something was wrong.

"I can't." The youngest said shaking, as the other two tensed. "I'm sorry but, but I just can't."

"Desmond..." Ezio said softly, worried,
"NO!"

The fledgling screamed, becoming hysterical, "You don't understand. I shouldn't be here! I shouldn't exist! I should have died in the grand temple! Now...now I am setting things right."

His voice faded to a whisper by the end, and he glanced over his shoulder, over the edge, to the ground hundreds of feet below.

The two elder assassins tensed. They knew there was nothing below to catch the youngest except the hard embrace of the cobblestones. He would not survive the impact.

Both of them lunged for him, he stepped over the edge, arms spread as if embracing the sky as he fell backwards. Someone cried out, though none of those watching were sure who.

They lunged to catch the falling fledgling. Ezio missed by mere centimeters, instead collapsing upon the stone, Altair had more luck. He grasped onto Desmond's bandaged arm, the same wrist Malik had grabbed earlier.

Desmond was jerked to a stop, Ezio grabbed Altair's waist to ensure he was not pulled over the edge as well, there was a pop, and the most blood curdling scream anyone had ever heard. It echoed through the castle and into the town below. Chilling those who heard it to the bone.

Desmond's shoulder had dislocated. The boy fell unconscious from the pain, and the two Master assassins were quick to drag him to safety.

He looked so gaunt laying there on the cot. The white sheets only seemed to make him look paler. His eyes were sunken in and surrounded by dark bags. Altair and Ezio sat at his bedside in stony stalwart silence.

His arm was unwrapped, it was the first time they had seen the limb uncovered. It looked awful, the flesh seemed to play at being healthy, but it was blackened unnaturally. The healers were baffled by it. It looked painful.

Other than the dislocated wrist and shoulder, they found Desmond also had ELEVEN bruised ribs, two broken ones he had set himself at least a month ago, one recently fractured rib, a twisted ankle, four broken fingers he had set himself two of which had been re broken, a fractured clavicle, a myriad of cuts and bruises, and a nasty head wound meaning he most probably also suffered a concussion. He was severely underweight, mildly dehydrated and was suffering acute and extreme exhaustion.

When they had first brought Desmond to the castle's hospital chambers, the healers had been reluctant to even assess his injuries. From what they have found out, after the first few times he was turned away by the doctors he had given up on trying completely.

He had apparently been treating all his own injuries for the past six months, and the evidence clearly shows there have been a lot.

Altair vaguely remembers a complaint from the Master Healer about the whole thing, claiming Desmond was harassing the medical staff. He can faintly recall yelling at him for it, before punishing him with some inane but difficult chore.

Looking back on the whole thing he recalls in the most clarity, the fact that Desmond didn't even attempt to defend himself. At the time he had justified it as an admission of guilt. Now however he
had the distinctly uncomfortable feeling it was more because Desmond knew that Altair wouldn't listen. That the mentor wouldn't care.

The thought made his heart twist in his chest, a novice should never think that their mentor wouldn't take care of them. A mentor's duty was to take care of and guide those that lived under his protection. Rashid had twisted the title to his own purposes, and now Altair himself had failed in his duties as a mentor in spectacular fashion.

He was little better than the very man who had used the Apple to enslave his own brothers, and Desmond had suffered for Altair's failures. It was like Kadar and Malik all over again.

They had uncovered a lot of things about Desmond in the day he had been unconscious.

Malik was on the warpath, terrorizing the entirety of Masyaf in his blind rage. The Dai was ruthless in compiling together every wrong Desmond suffered in his time with them. It was a shamefully long list, and the number of guilty parties far outweighed the number of innocent.

Desmond continued to lay there unresponsive, breathing labored and ragged. Altair and Ezio had not gotten any sleep that night. Instead finding themselves witness to Desmond having blatant and violent night terrors.

The fact that his screams were silent, even as he thrashed and cried and writhed, like a man possessed, made it all the more disturbing to watch the continuous agonized contortions of his body.

They had had to resort to holding him down, strapping him to the cot with leather belts, when he had begun clawing at himself. That was another thing they had noticed, the scars littering his body, his shoulder blades especially, scars and scabs that looked to have been consistently reopened as he clawed at his back in blind unconscious terror. Still more wounds to add to the growing list.

Malik entered the room, the medics and it a point to avoid him as he marched over to them. Face like thunder and eyes dark and dark and cutting as a desert sandstorm. The healers present made a point of staying at least five feet away from the Dai at all times. Understandable after the usually rational man broke the Master Healer's jaw.

Altair only regretted he had not gotten the chance himself, the way the man had tried to actually sabotage and neglect Desmond's healing. He obviously was not deserving of his title. Ezio had already insured that the man's replacement would not make the same mistakes.

It wasn't enough however to make up for the wrongs they had piled onto the broken winged fledgling though. They didn't think anything would be enough to make up for all that Desmond had suffered because of their weakness, because of their ignorance and negligence, and pure petty spite.

They were the ones who did not take proper precautions with the orb. They were the ones who had left themselves, their brothers, and every one else in Masyaf castle and the surrounding city unprotected to the dangers of the malevolence within the artefact.

They could only hope that there was something left of Desmond to heal.

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact, apparently plot bunnies have opposable thumbs. Who knew? Not me that's for
sure.
Chapter Summary

Sleeping beauty.

Chapter Notes

I am currently in the middle of treaty negotiations, and thus can not find the time to update my historical biography on the great revolution of the plot bunnies. Unfortunately many of the brave warriors that died in battle will never be remembered or even known, as the entirety of the fighting took place on a plane of reality somewhere south of hell, located in the minds of artists and the insane, and hidden within dreams and realities that can only be found when one sheds the bonds of mortal form and ascends beyond the constraints of the laws of the universe as ordained by chaos. Coincidentally it is also the same place all the socks that mysteriously disappear in the dryer end up. Only the left ones though.

Malik sat next to the fledgling's bed. They had moved him from the medical wing just the other day to a private bedroom, the standard kind awarded to assassins once they graduated out of their novice robes.

He had chased Altair and Ezio out but a few hours ago, they had duties that still needed tending and it would help no one of they starved themselves to death, and the sun was just now beginning to set. Casting the room in dramatic grasping shadows.

Originally they had intended to move Desmond to the room he ha been given when he had first come to Masyaf Castle. They had thought that when he awoke he would find comfort in familiar surroundings. That plan hadn't gotten off the ground.

When Altair had enquired into where Desmond's sleeping chamber was located they found themselves led to an old servants quarters, long put out of use due to its small size. The room barely fit the small worn sleeping pallet, a tiny chest for personal items, and a single rickety chair.

Malik had seen larger closets.

The sheets on the pallet were worn and threadbare, the single pillow was more of an empty sack than anything, and there were suspicious brownish red stains covering all. Some small drops, others like violent slashes of paint splattered on the fabric.

Needless to say that Malik almost felt bad for the poor maid who had been subjected to Altair and Ezio's killing intent. The two had been becoming increasingly more protective of the boy they had hurt so much.

Malik knew that they were guilty, and their protective wrath was partially compensation, however he feared that they would become stifling in their urge to protect the fledgling. To make up for their
Not that Malik did not feel equally as angry or protective, however he knew the meaning of the word moderation, a concept he was not sure the two Master assassins truly grasped.

No matter their intentions, if they allowed themselves to become overbearing it could be just as detrimental to Desmond's health as their previous hostility and negligence.

He turned to the small scribes table in his lap, brush dragging across the paper gracefully as he continued on lost in thought.

They had ended up having a servant bring Desmond's scant few possessions to a new room, it was directly next to the Mentor's rooms, connected to it by a small hallway. Originally it had been intended for if the Mentor ever chose to take a wife rather than utilize Masyaf's Gardens.

It had gone unused in the time of Al-Mualim and now had been repurposed for Desmond's healing.

The filthy bedding and the rotten three legged chair Malik had taken great joy in personally burning with extreme prejudice.

None of those poor excuses for furniture had probably ever been fit for human use, and that was before they had been dug from whatever trash heap they had resided in by Desmond; because apparently no one had provided him with the items themselves, or seen fit to provide him much of anything at all really.

It took great effort for Malik not to snap the brush he was swinging with his grip. He had already broken a half dozen of them today alone. Though he did take great joy in making Altair pay for each new replacement, there was a point at which it just became excessive.

Looking over at the sickly looking figure on the bed again Malik felt his chest clench painfully. It had already been two weeks.

They had been feeding Desmond by taking a thin broth and sitting him up, poring it into his mouth carefully and massaging the throat to induce swallowing. The same method was used for giving him water. The Doctors however where all of the opinion that their efforts were for naught, it was unlikely the boy was to ever wake. It would be a mercy to put him out of his misery they claimed.

Malik let out a ragged sigh through his nose, turning a thoughtful gaze out the window. He couldn't stand the thought of giving up on the Fledgling, no more than Altair and Ezio could. The Apples had been more active as of late. Showing them more snippets of Desmond's life. Some happy others not so much.

Malik often found himself thinking back to the few interactions he had had with the younger male, Desmond had always been overly polite true but when he realized Malik had no malice to him he had been extraordinarily helpful.

He had seemed to know exactly what to say to allay Malik's doubts and worries, had been a wellspring of advice in helping Malik resolve petty problems, and figure out complicated issues. Desmond had a very unique outlook on life.

The last time Malik had come across the Fledgling, before all this had come to light, Malik had found himself being slightly reminded of Kadar. The resemblance was not overly striking, but the two had somewhat similar manners, Malik thought briefly that had his brother lived, the two would have made great friends.
Looking back to his drawing Malik switched out his brush for a quill, setting the finely bristled writing implement aside on a small ink blotted cloth. He began working on the finer details of the image, when a soft rustle caught his attention. He paused, when it didn't come again he wrote it off as the wind.

The sound came again however shortly after he had restarted his work. This time he stopped completely looking to the open window in suspicion as he set aside the small scribe table on the bedside table. He unfolded his legs from their previous crossed position and prepared to stand from his chair when he saw what was causing the sound.

A hand, bony and thin from to little food and a to far extended period of rest twitched and moved, slowly shifting to support the weight of its owner.

Malik could hardly breathe.

When the owner of the limb tried to sit up however they only managed instead a weak grasping breath before almost collapsing back into the pillows. Malik was quick to catch him however, lowering him to lay back down gently.

Hazy brown eyes struggled to open, milky with exhaustion and weaknesses, Malik whispered assurances even as he rushed to the door. Opening it he was quick to order that the Master Healer be retrieved, and that Altair and Ezio be informed of Desmond's consciousness immediately.

The guards were quick to burst into action. Many had begun expressing their own regrets when the true origin of their ire was revealed, when the orbs effects and the machinations of the entity within were bought to light.

Some were still suspicious, but none of the outright distrust and hatred from before was to be found. With the exception of Abbas, but few truly took too his opinions on this particular matter, and his accusations only gained him annoyance and exasperation from his brothers.

Returning to the bedside Malik smoothed a gentle hand over Desmond's brow watching as hazy eyes began to clear and become more focused. The picture he had been working on forgotten where it lay. Half finished, depicting a wane figure, laying in a grand bed with gauzy curtains tied open.
Chapter Notes

I AM HERE! And am proud to announce that my dog has since returned to me. The plot bunnies are still in the process of organizing their new government, a communal constitutional Anarchy or something like that. Not sure how that's supposed to work but whatever. As part of the treaty agreements the brick now resides under my bathroom sink.

By the time Altair and Ezio had arrived Malik had managed to get Desmond to sit up and was coaxing the fledgling to drink some water.

The younger was slow and almost mechanical in his movements. And although he reacted physically to Malik's gentle guidance mentally none of them were sure he was quite there. Like a doll.

It was hard, for Ezio and Altair to bring themselves to truly approach Desmond. They lingered in the doorway of the room as Malik tended to him. The hurried sound of footsteps caught their attention and they both tensed but found that it was only the healers who came into the room.

Malik stepped aside cautiously as the small group checked over Desmond's bandaged. They replaced some, left it others, and checked for possible infections and other such things. Throughout the whole process the fledgling might as well have remained cationic. He barely reacted outside of the various poking and prodding, the only time he responded on his own was when asked a direct questions. He would nod imperceptibly, but wouldn't respond verbally or lift his eyes from his lap.

Eventually the master healer announced they had done all they could. It would be up to Desmond now. "Can you do nothing else?" Ezio asked, looking at the blankly staring man in the bed. The healers only shook their heads.

"There are some wounds that simply can not be healed by us, wounds of the mind or heart are beyond our abilities. It will be up to him weather or not they may heal and scar."

Altair clenched his hands, ready to demand that they at least try, that there must be something they could do, but he was stopped by Malik's hand on his arm. The Dai simply shook his head at the mentor. Altair grit his teeth as the group of healers left.

Ezio paid little head to the two as he cautiously approached the little fledgling. He could never remember feeling so unsure over something but he had no idea what to do in this situation. The way Desmond simply sat and stared blankly, it reminded him far to much of his own mother after his father's murder at the hands of the Borgia. The complete lack of will to do...anything really. The despair and hopeless pain.

It hurt even more to know that HE had been if not the cause than a major contributing factor. After all he has suffered and survived, all he had fought for and overcome, he had finally been stripped off the tattered remains of his will. It left Ezio feeling sick with himself, and cold with the knowledge that he and Altair had been the ones to break him. To shatter the fledgling's wings quite possibly beyond repair. It left a biter vile taste in his mouth. He could only imagine the shame his family must have for his actions. For his blindness.
Ezio sat in the chair that Malik had previously occupied. He reached out a tentative hand and placed it on Desmond's, the reaction was immediate when the fledgling flinched violently. Even as he made no move to pull his hand away from Ezio's. Not that he needed to, as Ezio pulled away as if burned. He might as well have been, a burn would have been less painful.

"Desmond?" Altair asked, coming up next to Ezio, Malik standing behind them watchfully.

"I'm sorry, I can do better. I'm sorry, I can do better, please I'm sorry." Desmond!" All there called out startled and worried as the fledgling curled in on himself. He buried his head in his knees and warped his arms over top, huddling in on himself defensively and muttering.

"I'm fine, it's fine, I'm okay. I'm sorry, I can do better. I'm sorry, it's fine it's okay, ease I can do better, I'm sorry. Please I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, it's fine, I'm fine, I'm okay, I can do better. I....."

The three could only watch helpless and in silent horror as he repeated himself. Over and over and over, curled up and muttering. Ezio held back guilty tears, hands grasping at his long hair helpless frustration. Altair swallowed around the lump in his throat, clenching and unclenching his own hands at his sides. Malik pushed past the two.

"I think it would be best if you two left." He grit out as he carefully pulled Desmond's hands away from clawing at himself again, much like he did when having a night terror. Altair looked ready to argue, but was gently pulled away by Ezio, the Italian shaking his head at his lovers outraged glance.

The Masyaf mentor looked back at the shiver muttering fledgling and sighed. Closing his eyes and looking away from the scene as Malik attempted to soothe the male. Altair allowed himself to be led out of the room by Ezio, the two sparing a glance each back at the still muttering Desmond. Tearing their eyes away they passed through the door and out of Desmond's chambers.
Malik entered Desmond’s rooms carrying a large tray laden with food. Normally this would be the job of a novice or servant, but Desmond tended to react badly to others. Not surprising really.

He looked to the fledgling curled up on the bed, he was holding a sheaf of papers. Briefly Malik wondered where he got them, then realized they must be his drawings. Malik had left the various sketches and half drawn maps on the dresser on the other side of the room. Desmond must have been curious and gotten up to look at them.

Malik felt relief at that. Things would be much easier if Desmond was able to walk under his own power at least a short distance. It also meant Desmond at least trusted Malik enough not to fear punishment for looking at his work.

"You seem to be feeling better Desmond." Malik said softly, placing the tray on the nightstand. Desmond tended and shoved the papers under the pillows. Face the very picture of a child caught doing something they weren't supposed to.

Malik was not a man for softness or comforting words but he managed to convey enough approval into his gaze that the timetraveler relaxed.

Desmond pulled the pictures back out sheepishly, holding them out to Malik shyly, gaze averted. Malik took them and set them aside patiently, handing Desmond the tray of food. "Thank you."

Malik nodded in acknowledgement and took a grape, popping the fruit into his mouth. Desmond pouted at the thievery, reminding him of a younger Kadar. Malik smirked at him and Desmond made a point of moving the bowl of grapes out of Malik's reach. Sitting the ceramic on the bed next to himself.

Desmond took the bowl of broth and began to carefully drink it. Making sure to go slowly, as his body was still weak and unused to receiving any amount of food to quickly. Malik was glad he had finally started eating at least semi-regularly. After the fledgling had gotten through about half the bowl, Malik decided it was now or never.

"Desmond." The younger male glanced at him questioningly from under his lashes, eyes resting on his chin. "It's Bern a month now, and I can no longer leave the Bureau unattended. I still have my duties in Jerusalem and my stand in is starting to struggle with keeping things up to my standards. I need to return to my duties."

The fledgling seemed to deflate at that, eyes growing wide as he huddled into himself, looking at the floor in stalwart silence.

Malik sighed heavily. "I thought that you might like to come with me to the Bureau. I can always use a bit of help organizing things, and it would be nice to have company I can tolerate for once." At that Desmond looked up to him, expression shocked and open as he met Malik's eyes for the first time since the Dai had met the boy.

The fledgling quickly looked away again, but Malik was still left feeling glad that the younger had let his defenses down so much around the Dai. The same unfortunately could not be said about anyone else. Altair and Ezio especially. The two Mentor's were extremely upset over it.

Malik figured it was for the best to get out of Masyaf. Both for the fledgling and for the two Master Assassins. Desmond especially. The young man was struggling enough, being in the very place he
had suffered so much was hardly aiding in his healing.

"I...I would like that." Desmond said at last, soft and unsure, but sounding so eagerly hopeful at the same time. Malik gave a soft reassuring pat to the fledgling's shoulder. "I'll go get everything ready for our journey. Try to gather some strength. Eat as much as you can, but don't make yourself sick."

Desmond nodded softly. Setting aside the broth to instead move happily to his grapes. That was one thing that always seemed to perk the fledgling right up. Malik wasn't sure why the young man was so fond of the fruit, but at least it was something he seemed to find joy in.
So does anyone ever wonder if Desmond's time in the Animus, with all the constantly respawning NPC's, and the bleeding effect, and all the other shit, might have fucked up his perceptions of human life and the fact that when he kills someone it means he just KILLED someone? Well you do now! Also apparently the inspiration brick doesn't like being ignored. I don't know how it ended up above that door but damn dose it hurt when that thing falls on your head.

Malik leafed through mission reports at his desk. A figure slipped through the Bureau entrance with a large bag slung over his shoulder. Glancing up the Dai nodded in greeting as Desmond grinned back.

The fledgling slipped the bag off his shoulder and placed it at his own desk, it was somewhat smaller than the Dai’s, and placed awkwardly in the corner due to limited space, but Desmond loved it.

Though Malik wasn’t sure why the younger male insisted on surrounding it with potted plants. At this point it was a veritable garden, but it made Desmond happy and he took care of them all himself so Malik didn’t mind it.

Desmond began emptying the bag of the various purchases he had made in the market. New ink, paper, quills and brushes, and other basic supplies necessary to run the Bureau efficiently.

Malik had to admit that it was nice not constantly having to run to the market every time he ran out of something. It allowed him to get more work done, and freed up more time for meeting up with informants and such. Though he still made time for the weekly food run. He couldn’t stay cooped up in the Bureau all the time.

Besides it was refreshing going to the Market with Desmond. Something about it always made the fledgling open up more, he thrived when haggling with the merchants, and always seemed awed by all the things around him. Despite the fact he probably visited at least twice a week for the past four months.

Malik still remembered losing him in the crowd last time they went together, only to find the fledgling happily petting a goat. The Dai couldn’t help a small up twitch of his lips at the memory. Desmond had certainly gotten much better after the move to Jerusalem. He still had occasional panic attacks, still suffered night terrors and apparently Hallucinations as well. Malik had not been happy to find out about that, though they got better and less frequent the less stressed he was.

He also still got shy and nervous around most visiting assassins, though he has been improving slowly but surely what with the fact they were constantly passing through for missions. It seems the Orbs influence was unable to take hold or remain in control if one spent enough time out of it’s reach. The assassins who spent large amounts of time at Masyaf were the only ones affected. Most of those who pass through have developed a fondness for the fledgling. Though Malik has ensured none of them entertain thoughts beyond that. They certainly were not good enough for his Fledgling and the last thing Desmond needed was some trumped-up novice taking advantage of his vulnerability.

A hand appeared next to him and switched out his emptying inkpot with a fresh one, as well as
replacing the blunt quills he placed of to the side with sharpened ones, and placed a fresh brewed cup of herbal tea by his elbow and within easy reach.

Malik let the briefest of smiles flit across his face. “Did you have a good time at the markets?” He asked as he added another precise line to the map he had begun working on.

“Yeah! Old lady Abadi Just got in a new stock of calligraphy brushes. You know those real nice ones imported from Egypt? She gave me a great deal for some in exchange for a wedding portrait of her daughter!”

“That’s wonderful Desmond.” Malik said happily. That was something else that seemed to help the fledgling. He was fascinated by Malik’s drawing. The Dai himself was best with maps, though he had decent skills with basic sketching and portraits. Desmond took to it however like a fish to water. He quickly became known around the market once he began trading his pictures for supplies and the occasional knick-knack.

The fledgling certainly had an unusual style at times but his art was constantly improving however, and always turned out beautifully. Though some of Desmond’s works could be incredibly melancholy at times. “So, will you be visiting them later to work on it?” “Yep.” Desmond answered popping the p as he went about tidying up the scrolls along the back wall.

“Ohmm, is there anything else of interest that happened? The Crusaders gave you no trouble again I hope.” “A little bit.” Malik paused at Desmond’s answer as the younger went on, “A few Templar gophers gave me a hard time, I took care of them.” “That’s good.” Malik said going back to his work. He found it difficult to give it his complete focus anymore however, his brow now creased with worry.

That was one thing that had him very worried about Desmond. The way the fledgling killed. They were Assassins, they took lives, Malik had a list as long as he was tall of the names of his victims. However, they were all still taught to respect life, even those of their enemies. They were not simple mindless murderers after all.

It was clear that not only had Desmond never been taught that, but that he had instead been taught quite the opposite. Though from all the Apples had shown them, something told Malik that particular lesson had been beaten and branded into Desmond more than anything.

It wasn’t even that the fledgling saw those he fought as lesser, or unworthy. He was not arrogant or prideful of the lives he took like Altair had once been, careless of the blood that stained his blade. He also however did not treat it like a fact of life, something that just was.

The scariest things about how Desmond fought and killed was that for him, Malik sometimes doubted he was even truly aware of what he was doing.

The Dai had once saw the fledgling pause in the middle of a scuffle, head tilted inquisitively. Almost as if he couldn’t fathom why the man whose neck he had just broken wasn’t getting up. For Desmond, it was barely an afterthought, like they were barely even concepts, like he struggled in understanding that these were actual living, BREATHTING, people, and not merely fragments of his own imagination. In some ways, that was honestly more terrifying than a person who didn’t care at all, or even one who took joy in it.

Desmond could kill so easily, and yet he seemed incapable of actually comprehended what that meant, what he was actually capable of doing, the Damage he could inflict. It was like the cruelty of a small child, they don’t understand why it was wrong, or the ramifications of their actions. It sometimes left Malik feeling deeply unsettled, and if it were anyone other than Desmond…. 
Still the fledgling only killed in self-defense, and watching the younger whistle to himself happily as he watered his little potted garden Malik also was reminded of how kind Desmond was. How he nursed a baby bird he had found when they first arrived, how he was always kind to the children and beggars, how he was enthralled sometimes by the simplest of things, how he always put others ahead of himself, how much joy he took in the things Malik taught and showed him, and Malik knew that as long as he was Desmond that was all that mattered.
Ch. 11

Chapter Notes

Kind of short I know, the brick is apparently mad at me, and the bunny has been giving me the cold shoulder. Apparently he feels neglected what with all the other plot bunnies that have been popping up everywhere. Either way things should begin picking up a bit more in the next chapter and for anyone waiting for the next chapter of Modern Colonial I'm hoping to have it done sometime tomorrow. Hopefully.

Desmond had been curled up in his nest when things began to change. He had been in Jerusalem for a year now and had become an accepted and established part of the Bureau there.

His nest was really the pile of pillows set aside for assassins to rest upon between travel and missions. There had been a few complaints at first when Desmond commandeered the area but those died down soon.

After all who could argue with being allowed to use what was formerly Desmond's room instead, with its real feather bed and a door that gave actual privacy. It had nothing to do with the fledgling's puppy eyes, or Malik's glaring silent threats of gruesome bodily harm for upsetting his practically adopted brother.

Either way Desmond loved his little nest of ever growing blankets and pillows. Malik would swear up and down the things were somehow breeding. Desmond felt safe there, and far less caged than he did in his former room. Less trapped, less like the walls were closing in and he was being suffocated, buried alive and crushed under the weight.

Desmond shook his head harshly, focusing on the picture he was working on and not his own dark thoughts. He shifted the scribes table on his lap and dipped his brush in the ink pot before diluting it slightly in water. He used the watered down ink to soften still drying lines and to add shading to the image. Giving it an almost life like quality.

He wiped the brush on a small rag and dipped the very top in the ink pot, adding thinner darker lines to bring out the eyes and detailed features of the face. He hardly noticed the messenger falcon that swooped in and deposited a small scroll in front of Malik.

Not until the shattering of an ink pot startled him, his brush slashing across the eyes of his image and leaving a gapeing maw in it's wake. Desmond spared a second to pour at his ruined image before jumping up when Malik began to curse violently.

He rushed up, unknowingly dropping his work so it fluttered to rest on the stone floor, the scribes table tipping over and spilling the rest of its contents on blankets and pillows, staining them with ink.

Desmond did not care, rushing over to Malik with worry written on his features, wringing his long fingered hands nervously. "Malik? Brother, what is wrong?"

Malik glared at the message on his desk angrily, Desmond had been doing exceptionally well this past year, but the fledgling was by no means fully recovered. Really it was highly unlikely he ever would be. The best they could hope for was for Desmond to learn to navigate his own jagged edges.
"It has been requested that we return to Masyaf." Malik ground out in frustration. Desmond's eyes widened, "We, as in you and me we?" He asked weekly, fingers clenching and twisting in his white tunic anxiously.

Malik sighed in frustration. "Yes, we as in you and me." Looking at the fledgling with worry Malik placed a comforting hand on the younger male's shoulder. "It may have been requested Desmond, but you have said yourself you are not officially a brother, you need not go if you do not wish it. Altair and Ezio both can suck it up."

Apparently that was not the right thing to say as Desmond seemed to collapse in upon himself. Malik cursed under his breath. Damn it, he had meant to comfort the fledgling, he had not thought about how much the fledgling's true status within the brotherhood affected the younger. Had forgotten momentarily how self conscious the younger was over the fact he had never grown past little more than an honorary novice, even after all he had been through.

Underneath the self depreciation however there was also fear. Deep and choking. Fear and guilt and a sense of loss because by Allah Desmond still loved his two ancestors. A fact that constantly drove Malik to endless frustration.

They did not deserve the fledgling, but Desmond's mind had grown to idolize the two, almost obsessive in a way. He had placed them on a pedestal far beyond what he believed he could ever reach, he had seen and lived all they had suffered and experienced. Desmond knew them better than he knew himself, a grim thought, and he loved them deeply and with all his being while simultaneously believing he would never deserve them. That he deserved little more than their ire and grudging tolerance.

It was honestly depressing, and Malik hated it. He hated Altair and Ezio for confirming those dark thoughts in the younger. He still respected the both of them, they were still his friends, but that didn't stop him from wanting to smash their heads together sometimes when he thought of how much suffering they caused his young brother.

Sometimes Malik just felt so helpless, more so even than when he had first awoken in a drug induced haze and been informed that he had lost his arm. He just felt so utterly useless, when he watched Desmond have one of his breakdowns, or another night terror, or slip into one of those hazes "The Bleeding Effect" Desmond called it, and Malik could do little more than watch and pick up the shattered pieces afterwards.

"No I'll go of course, I wouldn't dare disrespect the Mentor so. I...I'll go pack for the journey."

"Desmond!" Malik called after the fledgling but the other seemed lost in his own head, eyes hazy and unfocused as he rushed from the room.

Malik cursed some more before penning a very colorful reply to Altair and sending it with one of the falcons kept at the Bureau, allowing the original bird to find a perch to rest and recuperate from its long flight.

Then he rushed off after Desmond, to aid the fledgling in preparations and ensure that he didn't do anything foolish in his current state. He rushed past the inky mess on Desmond's nest. The picture that he had been working on unnoticed and forgotten, the eagle with its wings spread wide and intimidating, glaring eyes obscured by a void of all consuming black.
Ch. 12

Chapter Summary

Ever heard the song Bad Apple? Look up the English dubbed version by pizza robbinnett. I think that song pretty much sums up Desmond's mental state quite nicely.

Chapter Notes

I'm aliiiiiiiiive!

Sorry for the long wait but I ran face first into a big fat writers block. My nose is most likely broken, and my pride wounded but I have finally overcome the obstacle and have found the inspiration brick once more. I never thought I would be so happy to get hit on the noggin. Also the bunny has forgiven me, and is apparently very fond of dark chocolate kale shakes. So everything is now right in my world.

Now the only question is is when the other shoe will drop.

Desmond fiddled with the reins of his horse nervously the closer they came to Masyaf's gates. His white mare sensed his unease, tossing her head, eyes searching warily for danger. He trailed behind Malik's own massive rowan stallion. The Dai glanced back occasionally at him, Desmond did his best to smile back reassuringly but his expression always ended up as more of a pained grimace.

The gates of Masyaf were imposing. They would have to first enter the city, passing along the main road that led to the castle. The assassins stronghold. Desmond avoided looking in the eyes of the gate guards. Hunching over the back of his made and peeking through his fringe.

He had grown his hair out quite a bit since arriving in the past. He found some comfort, in being able to hide behind messy bangs. He had not been allowed to were the robes of an assassin, or even a novice, when he had lived in Masyaf. The absence of the hood had left him feeling naked, and the curtain of his hair had been his only substitute. Poor as it was. Malik had offered him a set of robes when they had first arrived in Jerusalem. Assassins first, and when Desmond had fearfully rejected them a novices. Desmond had rejected those as well.

He was not a brother. He did not deserve to wear the robes of a rank unearned, nor those of a tank which he had abandoned like a coward. Malik had tried to get him to cut his hair as well, or trim it at least. It reached past his shoulders now, and men did not typically wear their hair so long.

Desmond refused that as well. As a compromise he learned to braid his hair, leaving his long messy bangs free because he wanted at least the illusion, however frail, of being anonymous. At being able to hide, to be unseen, to be forgotten and left unmolested. To be nothing but a shade, a faceless stranger in the crowd. For at least that faint illusion of safety in anonymity.

Malik did not push the issue, had only looked at Desmond with some strange emotion the younger had never seen before, but it left him feeling uneasy. Left him feeling guilty, because though he
couldn't identify it exactly he knew it was his fault. That looks made Malik look so tired, brought a heavy weight to the man's gaze that Desmond would almost call sorrow.

Except no one felt sorrow for him. He didn't deserve it. Malik did not deserve to suffer because of him. When he was obviously the one at fault. When he voiced these things though it only seemed to frustrate the Dai. To hurt him. Desmond did not want to cause the closest thing to an ally he had any pain.

Ally. Not friend. Because no one would want to call him a friend. He did not deserve it.

Desmond shook his head of those thoughts when his mount let out a noise of distress and stopped suddenly. Looking into the worried eyes of Malik he realised that the man had stopped his mount. Turned around in his saddle he called to Desmond gently, but with obviously increasing anxiety.

Desmond shook his head again to clear the dark miasma from his previous line of thinking. Malik was more than an ally. He was his brother. The Dai insisted as much. Malik was his brother, not by blood, or as an assassin, but because the man said it was so. Desmond had gone along with it at first to appease him but....

It was nice. Even if he was not a part of the brotherhood. Even if it was not through blood. It caused something warm and light and comforting in Desmond's chest, when Malik smiled at him and called him family. Called him brother. It felt nice to have someone simply enjoy being around him for no other reason than simple company. No expectations. No strings or rules or anything. Just comforting silence, friendly quips and lessons exchanged, days at the markets, and easy indulgence in curiosity and questions. Malik did not call him stupid, did not look down on him or belittle him, he expected nothing from Desmond other than basic respect, and common decency.

Malik must be lonely to though. With no family or lovers, his only actual friends permanent residents of Masyaf while the Dai worked and toiled in Jerusalem. That must be why Malik had become so fond of him. When there were no other truly permanent residents of the bureau. Desmond felt bad, for taking advantage of the man's obvious loneliness if he was willing to give someone like him such kindness, but Desmond found he was to selfish as well to wish for that to change.

"I am fine brother." Desmond said softly, drawing up next to Malik. Giving the black haired male a weak smile that played at reassuring.

Malik looked at him unsure, before nodding and nudging his stallion forward. Desmond followed, through the looming gates. He fell back slightly as he gazed ahead with fear in his heart. Still making sure to remain close to his brother. The gates closed shut behind them with an almost gentle thump, easy to miss, something seemingly completely unimportant. A strange counterpoint to the sense of finality the gates closing gave him.

As his made trailed behind the Dai Desmond could not help but notice how people seemed to stop and state. He ducked his head further, drawing his arms up as if in preparation for a hit. His horse tossed her head again, her hooves dancing upon the cobblestones as she picked up pace, becoming more skittish, mirroring her rider.

They had almost reached the castle gates when things went wrong. They had drawn a crowd. Desmond didn't know why and it scared him. He felt like drowning, like he was being suffocated and hurried alive. All around him people were staring, staring, STARING. He couldn't get away, couldn't hide, his bangs could only do so much, he was exposed. He was seen, people were WATCHING. Why were they watching?! He didn't know. It wasn't safe, assassins were not supposed to draw attention!
His breathing sped up, his eyes burned, burned, BURNED. Like fire, like molten lava in his sockets, searing his nerves, his muscle, and flesh, and bone from the inside out. He couldn't breath, he was trapped, everything was fading into grey and he was BURNING. He was burning like when he touched the eye, he was BURNING as if he was being consumed by the sun, as if he were the sun, tearing its way out of him.

His chest constricted, his lungs felt like they were collapsing in on themselves, his heart was being twisted into a knot, and it burned. Everything burned. The world was dark, then grey, then glowing ghostly and eerie. His eyes still burned, his head was being split open, cracked like an eggshell and everything was, pouring mixing confused tangled up together like so many bits of twin, BURNING! Can't see can't see. who what where? Lost Lost Lost everything is burning the sun consumed the earth and the screaming just won't stop!

Grey, so much grey. He saw blue, right ahead, but the threads. So many of them, thin and airy like spiders silk. They looked so harmless but they HURT SO MUCH, he tried to move, to dodge, then something else, something small and silvery and quick darted in front of him, it dragged its thread right along and he TRIED HETRIED HETRIED but he got tangled and lost and he SAW!

There was a scream, screaming, so much screaming, his horse reared, his vision blinked out and the world was suddenly back CLOSING IN AND CHOKING HIM SOMUCH TOMUCH TOMUCH but he was already moving, lunging, diving, gotta get there, have to move, have to be fast enough. He was off the back of the rearing terrified animal, on the ground, darting forward before a great hoof smashed down on the cobbles, just missing his head. Just missing the child in his arms.

The sobbing little girl who clung to him in fear, who held a little doll that she had dropped in the path. A little girl that wasn't bloody and broken and DYING from blunt force trauma because he made it it's okay she's not dead not dead not dead, and that was all that mattered. As he shushed her, and rocked her and sang broken bits of songs and tunes and words that he knew he knew but didn't know couldn't remember where was where where where.

A hand landed on his shoulder, pulled him from the still shaking, terrified child who clung to the safety of his protective embrace with frail limbs and a tear streaked face. He turned to snarl and snap and protect, like a wolf, like a boy, a man raised in the wilds who hunted like a beast and who slay his own father because the man had been an enemy, who fought and won a revolution. He snarled, and glared at this possible threat, only to see eagles gold staring back at him.

Right in the eye, from under a beaked white hood, and there was a dark eyed man next to him with a far more ornate set of white robes. Malik was rushing to him, thrusting the reins of his own horse and Desmond's still huffing mare into a grey robed novices hands.

Oh. He forgot. He was here. Here in Masyaf. Here and Masyaf and he was looking straight into the eyes of the mentor. As if he were an equal. A brother. When he knew he was not. Something icy cut into his heart, into his mind, and he looked down and away, standing up, releasing the child from his hold even as she whined and clung to his own travel worn cloak. He hunched down because he would never dare stand back straight and arrogant around the mentor, would never dare disrespect the man so. No more than he already had by looking him in the eye.

He shook and trembled, and still moved to hide the little dirt stained child behind him, with her raggedy doll, and scrappy dress. A little beggar girl who had run in the way of a horse and spooked it all for the sake of some filthy bit of a family she no longer had.

Desmond stood before the citizens, before Malik his brother, before fellow assassins watching from the crowd, from the walls, and the gates but a stone's throw from where they stood. He stood, and he trembled, and he bowed. Because that is what one did when in front of their betters, their superiors.
That is what one did when they were less than servants, and were only around because they had a use they were still grudgingly required to serve.

He bowed and the only thing keeping him from prostrateing like he should was the little scrappy bit of flesh and bone still cling to his side, still hidden and safe and protected and alive behind him. "Forgive me mentor, I meant to cause no trouble, the fault is mine." He mumbled, low and broken and pleading.

He did not know how pathetic he looked then. Did not know how the citizens shuffled uneasily at this man, who had just saved a child's life, even if it was but a beggar child, plead forgiveness for something not his fault. He did not know how it hurt the novices and assassins to look at him, did not know how Malik stretched and glared, or how Altair and Ezio felt as if they had swallowed ice that spread through them and froze their very blood in their veins.

He did not know that the tension in the air was not anger, but guilt, and unease, and so many other emotions. He simply stared at the dirty ground beneath his feet, even as his two ancestors struggled to find words, to say something, anything, around the clawing bitter cold that choked them and left them breathless and numb, and so so guilty. Choking on their own regrets and unable to voice the truth, the reassurance that burned in their guts and scaled what was not already I've cold and frozen.

Then Malik was there. And Desmond was engulfed in darkness as the Dai covered him with his cloak. And Desmond finally felt safe in the dark, with his face hidden, unseen, no longer visible, no longer stared at (though that was not at all true). Safe.

And the Dai was picking him up, his brother was yelling at everyone, but he couldn't hear anything over the beating of his own heart in his ears, his head was foggy and muddled, and he couldn't think feel hear anything nothing nothing nothing, and his eyes burned painfully because everything was suddenly tomuch to bright can't see so much it hurts hurts hurts.

An arm wrapped around his shoulders, warm and firm and anchoring. "Hush now Desmond. You are not in trouble, you're fine now. You did nothing wrong, I promise." Malik whispered in his ear as he guided him through the gates. Desmond let himself relax minutely, because if Malik said so it was true because Malik promised, and Malik was his brother and he never broke a promise ever never never never.

So they walked through the gates, the novice with their horses close behind so he could take the steeds to the stables, but Altair and Ezio lagged behind. Uncertain. Unsure. But determined to make things right. The citizens left behind to whisper and worry and wonder.

No one paid heed to the little girl child anymore. She was but an afterthought. All but for Desmond, who she still silently clung to, slipping one of her tiny, filthy little hands into his even as the other held her precious dolly. No one noticed as bare little feet ran, quite but quick to keep up with a far longer stride, as she was huddled and hidden beneath the same cloak as her savior. No on noticed, and so no one did anything. As the little girl followed the strange broken man and the infamous Dai of Jerusalem into the Masyaf stronghold.

These gates shut far louder, far more resolutely than those of the city. Some deep buried part of Desmond's subconscious noted that, and thought that the sound was far more fitting for the sound of finality.
Chapter Summary

Of Chalices and other holy drinking receptacles.

Desmond walked in silence as he huddled into the safety of Maliks side. Things felt calmer, far less overwhelming, hidden safely out of sight under the Dai's black robe. He felt thin fingers reach for his hand and wrapped his own warm palm around the small digits. Desmond couldn't help it as something seemed to let up in his chest, relief filling him because she was safe and alive.

He felt a faint of wane smile quirk his lips as the child squeezed his hand in an attempt at comfort even as she pressed into her savior's side nervously. Desmond closed his eyes and squeezed her hand back in a return gesture as he allowed himself to be led along by Malik. Seeing hurt right now, he trusted Malik not to lead him off a cliff or something. The darkness was welcoming, comforting in a way he couldn't describe as he allowed his senses to dull towards everything but the two flickering lights at his sides.

Even in the darkness he was somehow aware of both of them, like a warm fire just out of sight whose warmth teased at his senses with promises of warmth, of safety, of companionship. Something flickered though, something he had never seen before, thin and whilst, one and then two. Not imposing or all encompassing but still there as. Two thin threads of glowing azure-gold that seemed to be drawing nearer and nearer. They've were almost hypnotic, Desmond found himself tentatively reaching for towards the thin whispy strands and.... Desmond jerked away in sudden fear as memories of fire and burning and to much to much assaulted him.

His eyes shot open and he fell back, tripping over his own feet, as he scrambled back. Light once more assaulted his senses as the world around him became once more visible. The sunlight seemed deceptively soft and gentle as it streamed in from the Windows, seemingly harmless as it lit the room with its golden glow.

Desmond's chest heaved as he tried to to calm his racing heart, he caught sight of the surprise and worry in Malik's eyes at Desmond's sudden panic. The startled looks on Ezio and Altair's faces as well as other emotions that Desmond couldn't identify. It almost looked like worry but Desmond knew better than that, he was probably misinterpreting it.

Either way he was far more focused on the wide tearful eyes of the little girl child who stood trembling at his sudden and violent movement. The child looked at the other men in the room fearfully before running to hide behind Desmond when they finally glanced at her with confusion as to where exactly she came from.

"Was she there the whole time?" Malik muttered to himself, sending a brief look to where his Blake robe now rested where it had dropped to the floor after Desmond, and subsequently it, had torn away from his side unexpectedly.

He shook that thought away and instead focused on the far more important matter of Desmond as the fledgling cowered away from the three Assassins. "Desmond, Desmond it's okay." Malik crouched down as he always did when Desmond had an episode that usually ended with the younger curled up on the floor, he found the fledgling relaxed better when someone wasn't towering over him while
he was feeling exposed and vulnerable.

Desmond unfortunately only spared him a brief glance however, instead turning his terrified gaze on Altair and Ezio. The Dai knew this had been a bad idea. After the disaster outside the gates he would have much preferred for Desmond to have been given time to rest and recover from the journey and whatever kind of panic attack he had been having.

Those two never listened. So instead here they were in the Mentor's office, and just as he feared Desmond look to be on the brink of a total breakdown. He sent a filthy look at Altair and Ezio as they squirmed. Ezio looked like he wanted to approach in an attempt to comfort the cowering fledgling and the new mystery child huddled behind him, but one look from Malik had the Italian practically waffling as he stepped back to stand awkwardly next to Altair behind the desk.

Malik turned his attention from the two novices to focus back on his brother in all but blood. "Desmond, I need you to focus on me." He coaxed softly and far more tenderly than any would have thought him capable. The flabbergasted look on Ezio face, and utter shock in Altair's gaze attested to that. Malik, unfortunately, has had plenty of opportunity however to hone this new skill.

"It's okay I promise, you're not in trouble, Altair and Ezio won't do anything to you. You need to breath, don't look at them look at me, I'm right here. Right in front of you. You're safe I promise but you need to breathe." Desmond finally turned wide pained brown eyes on Malik and the Dai felt his lips quirk softly at the tentative trust.

"Malik?" "That's right fledgling. I'm here, and I promise I won't be going anywhere." Desmond glanced to Altair and Ezio quickly, before ducking his head nervously and turning his eyes back to Malik. He gulped, "I, can...I want to get up now." He whispered softly. Malik nodded and stood, reaching a hand out patiently until Desmond finally grasped his ink stairs ed fingers cautiously and the Dai hauled him back to his feet.

Desmond glanced behind himself to check on the child who remained hidden behind him. She peeked a dirt streaked face out from around his side but as attention was once more drawn to her she ducked back behind her protector.

"Do you think you can manage to stay for the meeting or would you like to take the girl and find our rooms? Maybe you two could get cleaned up, get her some proper clothes." Desmond nodded in frantic relief at the suggestion and Altair wisely held back whatever comments he wanted to make, though Ezio's elbow to his gut may have contributed to the man holding his tongue.

"Then you two go do that, I'm sure one of the guards outside know where our accommodations will be. Go get cleaned up and something to eat. Then I'm sure the both of you could use a rest. I'll find you as soon as I am able." Desmond gulped but nodded again, this time slightly more hesitant, but he was still quick and eager to slip away, the child following closely behind him. Neither dared glance back.

When the doors closed and the sound of footsteps faded Malik turned on the two morons, fury etched into his face. "YOU FUCKING IDIOTS!"
Desmond followed silently behind the assassin that had just a minute ago been one of the guards to the Masters office. Making sure to stay exactly three stressors behind the guard at all times.

Desmond wanted to insist that he knew the way to the servants bath, that he knew very well how to draw the water from the well for bathing. It wouldn't be heated of course but he had gotten used to the cold.

Though he didn't think the cold water would be good for the little girl clinging to his side desperately. And after all the trouble he had already caused he wouldn't dare contradict any orders from his betters right now. He could deal with the punishment but, he didn't want to cause trouble for Malik, and the little girl whose name he still didn't know, well he was responsible for her now. He wasn't exactly sure how but he was, there was a certainty in that that he couldn't place, but it caused a warm, soft feeling deep in his chest. Like Malik it made his heart feel a little less...empty.

The walk was absolutely silent, Desmond with his head bowed and feet silent upon the stone, the only sound the more uncertain quick steps of the child and even she was unusually quiet. He could feel the occasional glances the guard sent his way but he didn't dare look up. Besides, he was not so stupid as to not know what they were about. He was a traitor after all, doubtless that the assassin would want to keep an eye on him.

He couldn't have been further from truth but he couldn't have known any better either.

However it didn't take him long to realize that they were heading in the completely wrong direction for the servants bath. Desmond twitched the fingers of his bandaged hand nervously, but didn't dare comment as they were led to a part of the castle he had been barred from previously, the Assassins bath.

Here they stopped just outside the entrance and a maid came up to them. She exchanged a few silent words with the assassin, to quiet for him to make out, before she turned to Desmond with a smile.

He glanced at the unfamiliar expression, considering before the most friendly looks the servants had given him were dull and dismissive at best, and found himself feeling very unsettled. He summoned the courage to send the bared of subtle glances at the guide and only saw gentle encouragement in the man's otherwise expressionless face before he glanced away again.

Something was very wrong here and he would very much like to go back to the bureau now please. Maybe if he thought hard enough Malik would come and usher him back to Jerusalem where things made sense, and people weren't all acting so, so, so completely strange. He felt his chest tightening with anxiety, but a gentle tug at his robes had him glancing at the concerned face of his charge had him doing his best to put up a brave front of some sort, weak as it may be.

He swallowed the lump in his throat and nodded near imperceptibly, eyes glued to the floor. "Come along now sir. I've been instructed to take you and the little one to the Masters private baths."

Desmond actually stumbled at that, eyes going wide, as he was led along by the maid.

"What the hell were you thinking?!"

Altair and Ezio both flinched away from the enraged Dai.
"We did not think..." Ezio began nervously,

"Obviously not! Five minutes back in Masyaf and he has already had two episodes! What could have possibly made either of you decide it would be a good idea for him to come back here!"

"Things have come up, he was no longer safe in Jerusalem."

"What do you mean no longer safe! As if he was safe here! Do you think me incompetent, that I can not watch over him!"

"Malik calm down, please..."

"Do not tell me to calm down Novice!"

Altair tried to stare down the enraged male, but he couldn't bring himself to meet the accusing stare, Ezio wasn't even trying at this point.

"The Ottomans are going through unrest, King Issac's son is unsatisfied with his father's rule and has allied himself with the Templars to challenge his father's throne. They are planning to bring back the remnants of the European armies and begin another crusade to build up forces and funds to overthrow the Ottoman throne."

"I don't see how this required Desmond returning here." Malik hissed out with a deadly chill in his voice.

"Somehow they have discovered Desmond's affinity for the Prices of Eden, we do not doubt your skill amico, but even you can only defend against so much, he is safer here."

"Because he was so safe here before I took him to Jerusalem! Remind me exactly why it is he moved into the Bureau!" Altair clenched his fists and Ezio looked to his feet in shame.

"We know we have failed him Malik. But as it stands if we want Desmond to be safe we have to keep him as far from the Templars reach as possible, we could not risk doing nothing and...

"And what Altair, have him hurt anymore than what you and the order have already managed? Altair if he stays here I can not be certain if he will not have another breakdown. You were not there when I took him to Jerusalem, you were not there for the constant struggles, the breakdowns, the fear, and anxiety, and the slow healing of his body, and even slower healing of his mind. I can not bear to see him suffer that again. And especially not without me to watch over, he is my brother, I will not abandon him."

For a moment they all stood there in silence, until Altair leaned back in his chair and dragged a hand over his face, "This has all been a disaster," "You think?" "Hush Ezio." Then staring his old friend dead in the eye Altair continued, "However neither of us said anything about separating you from Desmond. We had planned on the both of you remaining here."

That brought Malik up short, "What?"

"Just as mi amore has said my brother. Desmond trusts you and only you here, and if things escalate as they seem to be we will need you here in Masyaf, to aid us in defending the holy land. It is time you came home Malik. You and Desmond both. We promise to do right by you, and if you still wish to return to the bureau when we are certain the Templars no longer pose a threat, then we will not stand in your way. Just please...trust us with this."

Malik looked at the two with uncertainty but, they were not the type to exaggerate, and he himself
had been seeing cause to worry. Had seen the scattered crumbs of information from his informants and captured enemies to see the lurking danger. And as much as he hated to admit it, they were right. If things went wrong, if the Templars were making a new bid for power, and if they were after Desmond, he would not be enough to protect the fledgling on his own. He could not lose another brother.

"Fine, we will stay," He finally growled out, "but if anything happens to my brother..."

"Then we will take full responsibility." Altair assured in all seriousness, Ezio nodding along beside him.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Short and sweet.

Desmond could not stop blushing as firm but gentle fingers vigorously scrubbed at his scalp. He had been completely mortified when the maids had not left after instructing him to disrobe. Yet no matter how much he tried to argue the women had stayed firm.

They compromised by filling the large heated pool, because it was way to big to be called a simple bath, with enough soap and oils that it was impossible to see anything in the water.

Desmond was still mortified, but he was too nervous to put up a real fight. What if the maids got angry and complained to the Mentors? He's in enough trouble already for his immature overreactions and antics. He doesn't want to make his inevitable punishment any worse.

Still he couldn't help getting lost in his head as his back was scrubbed. He had washed himself mostly, but he couldn't reach his back very well and the maids had been adamant about doing his hair.

The little girl, Ahda he now knew her name was, was in a smaller side pool that wasn't as deep as the main pool. Apparently one of the older Mentors, before the late Al Mualim, had been very much a family man and had the extra bath installed, the man had been so busy that he had turned bathing into a family event to make more time for them.

Either way Ahda was enjoying playing with the bubbles as another maid worked the mats and tangles from her long black hair.

He found himself drifting off deeper in thought. Nothing was making any sense today. He had never been permitted to so much as bathe with the servants before, he usually just filled a bucket with well water and wiped down with a rag.

Since moving to Jerusalem with Malik the man would help him boil water and fill a semi large tub located in the bureau that Desmond had actually been surprised at. He had been doubly surprised when Malik had allowed Desmond to bathe with the heated water.

Apparently he wasn't as sneaky as he had thought when he used a bucket of the cold fountain water to wash. Malik had not been amused when Desmond told him about his usual bathing habits.

Still the warm water did wonders for the constant aching in his blackened arm once the initial discomfort of the sudden temperature change. It hurt a lot less now.

Still he had not expected to be allowed such privileges upon returning to the stronghold. He has been caught off guard by quite a few things this day.

Why was he being allowed to use the Mentor's private baths? Why were the maids so insistent on doing such menial tasks such as helping him bathe? Why was everyone acting so odd around him?

He had so many questions and he didn't dare ask any of the castle residents and come off as
insubordinate. Still it left him nervous and uncertain. He kept waiting for the other shoe to drop and when it didn't he just felt his anxiety mounting. He felt like he was missing something obvious and he didn't know what.

The maids watched the long haired male with guilt and pity in their eyes as he seemed to tense and shrink into himself despite the relaxing environment and the soothing oils and soaps used in the water.

The little girl was thankfully still to distracted by her utter fascination with playing with the mounds of sudsy bubbles in the water of her bath to notice her guardian's current tension.

Still not one of them didn't feel gnawing guilt at how obviously unconfident and hurt the young man was. It was heartbreaking.
Nesting 101

Chapter Summary

"Dog fort. Come in Dog Fort. Over"

"This is Dog Fort."

Chapter Notes

I am back, sorry got lost on the road of life, high fives and a free imaginary cookie to everyone who gets that reference. Anyway, I have finally gotten an idea of where this story will end, don't worry if you thought I abandoned this or any of my other works. I haven't and I don't plan to, but I won't promise consultant updates either. I will definitely finish all my current stories at some point, and as I finish stories I will probably start new ones as well. Trust me I have a lot. Literally More than a drawer full. It's a problem. Either way I will probably update pretty sporadically so sorry for inevitable long unpredictable wait times. I thank you all for being patient with me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Malik stalked through the Assassin's stronghold with an almost bloodthirsty scowl carved onto his face. Wisely, his fellow brothers avoided the incensed Dai like an actual plague. One notable fellow going so far as to flee out a window. As if that would save him if Malik were so inclined as to take his frustrations out on the man.

When he arrived to the door of the guest rooms he and Desmond had been provided he paused however, making sure to do his best to smooth his features into something less apocalyptic. Desmond still got nervous at the anger of others and Malik did his best to ensure the younger man never felt a need to fear around him. Though thankfully Desmond did not seem overly bothered by Malik's typically abrasive and biting personality.

If anything it seemed to set the fledgling at ease in an odd sort of way, though he supposed if he had lived through a year of Altair's life through the fool's eyes it could be better understood.

There was familiarity there for Desmond and he understood that Malik's personality was simply somewhat confrontational and severe by nature. Desmond felt that he knew what to expect from Malik, and if the elder tried to go out of his way to be uncharacteristically gentle or patient it unsettled the fledgling because he knew the behavior was abnormal and usually rather forced for the Dai.

Feeling reasonably less like he wanted to commit a double homicide Malik knocked on the door swiftly in a fast pattern he had made sure Desmond knew by heart so the fledgling could always identify when Malik was about to enter. Wether it be the Bureau or at this time their guest rooms.

After a moment he gently pushed open the door and the first thing he took note of was the large......structure? In the corner. And here he thought the fledgling's nest in the Bureau was
ridiculous.

A little head peeked out from inside the amalgamation of blankets, pillows, sheets, and what was undoubtedly the couch of the small living area they were standing in, as well as other various odds and ends. He's fairly certain that the curtains from one of their rooms is in there somewhere.

Malik felt an amused smile tug at his lips when the child darted back into the structure only to pop her head out a moment later, this time however Desmond's popped out to so now both were looking up at him as if they had been caught stealing from the cookie jar. Even he could admit the sight was adorable.

"D...did everything go well in your meeting brother?" Desmond asked shyly as Malik approached. "Yes, everything went fine. Altair is as obnoxiously irritating as ever, but that is nothing new."

Malik replied, approaching slowly to kneel down in front of Desmond and the little waif he had taken in. The child's eyes widened and she seemed anxious but but she didn't flee so Malik assumed that the child felt safe enough.

Looking at the two, both peering at him with wide dark eyes, he couldn't help the image of a mother duck and her duckling.

He could already imagine the puffed up pouty look of offense Desmond would take at being referred to as a duck. It definitely helped to improve his sour mood. Truly he could not imagine how anyone could even think about mistreating Desmond so.

"And may I ask who it is you've adopted as your hatchling Desmond?" Desmond glanced down fondly at the child, all the while keeping Malik warily in his peripheral vision. The Dai was unbothered by his hesitancy. Desmond was always like this when he did something he thought would be disapproved of.

Malik found the best way to reassure the fledgling was to simply act as usual and not treat the instances as anything special. Once Desmond felt reassured he would not face any trouble or possible punishment for whatever it was he would relax. And Malik could address anything pertaining to the subject without Desmond retreating into himself or becoming anxious and fearful.

The child squeaked at being addressed and fled back into the best fort Desmond had constructed. Said male chuckled sheepishly, ducking his head.

"Sorry Malik, she...she's a little shy. Her name is Adha though, she's an orphan."

"Yes well, I'm sure that we can find a family to take her in..."

"No!"

Malik paused at the unexpected, frantic denial. Raising an incredulous eyebrow at Desmond.
"Desmond, I can understand how you have grown fond of the child but you are hardly in a proper state to raise someone, not to mention that we can not keep a child in the Bureau when we return."

"But....I...I can't just leave her Malik, I can't." Desmond whispered frantic and wide eyed. "I don't know why or how but, I just... I... I... I have to be there for her. I have to because.... because she's mine now."

Malik's brow furrowed at Desmond's stilted reasoning. "She's yours?"

At the frantic nod he received in reply his other brow went up to join its twin. Desmond rushed to
attempt to further explain, "You know, like how I'm yours, and you're mine. She's mine and I'm hers, and that means she's yours to which means she's OURS and we can't abandon her we just can't.....because we're.....we're all t...tangled, and tied and.... knotted, and and and...."

"Hey, Shhh, calm down okay? It's okay fledgling we won't abandon her okay? No one's getting abandoned, it's okay now. Come on Desmond breathe with me that's it, in and out, I promise we won't just up and leave her to fend for her self. Come on Desmond I need you to keep breathing with me, that's it, just like that."

Malik ensured Desmond was calmed and got him settled back into his massive nest, curled up and exhausted among the blankets and pillows. Sending a glance to the child he coaxed her over. She approached with uncertainty but at the same time a kind of firm resolve.

"So your name is Adha, is that correct?" The child nodded softly before sending a worried glance to a passed out Desmond. "He's fine Adha, you don't need to worry. He's just very, very tired right now." The child looked less frightened at the reassurance and shuffled closer still.

"So it seems we're going to be stuck with each other for a while Adha, so let me introduce myself. I am Malik, Desmond's....Brother." So saying, Malik held out a hand, and after some wary hesitancy the small black haired girl shook it. Malik smiled at her softly, and she returned it with slow growing confidence. "It's very nice to meet you sir Malik." She giggled softly, only to be cut off by a loud yawn.

"Would you like me to get a bed set up for you." Malik enquired softly, it seemed Desmond wasn't the only one tuckered out. The child simply shook her head and curled up with her new.....caretaker? Drifting off to sleep just as quickly. Looking at the two Malik couldn't help a warm chuckle. Duckling indeed.

He shuffled out of Desmond's new nest carefully and stood to glance out the window. The sun was just starting to set but there was still much work to be done in the hours between evening and night. He dreaded the fact that his good mood would not survive long outside of these rooms, not once he was surrounded by the cloying stupidity of the outside world.

Chapter End Notes

Okay so to get a better idea of the rooms, master assassins are given some pretty kick ass accommodations in the castle, which is where our boy does and his two precious people are currently residing. These accommodations include two full rooms connected with a small but cozy living area in between, one of the rooms has an attached office area, and both have small personal bathrooms. Not as grand as the castles public baths but only master assassins have the option of the privacy of a personal bath in their rooms.

Compared to the barracks of the novices and the shared rooms of the lower ranked assassins Masters get a pretty sweet deal. Everyone else either has to put up with little to no privacy of get their own house in the town.

Sorry the chapter is so short, I had intended for it to be longer but this is just how it ended up.
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